Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to those folks who were, and continue to be, impacted in North Carolina and around the world by tactics of reproductive control which eliminate consent, undermine human rights, and cause ongoing harm, persecution, and injustice.


Abstract

Eugenics is largely remembered for coming into disrepute in the post-War period following the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. However, 21st-century scholarship has begun to assess the transformations and proliferations of “eugenics” in the latter 20th century. This has prompted a reconceptualization of the complex relationships of reproductive choice, genetic manipulability, and the progression of modern science and medicine – as well as the historic foundations of these ideas and institutions. This thesis centers on the Human Betterment League of North Carolina (the HBLNC or the League) from 1947 to 1988 across their three periods of work promoting distinct causes: first, sterilization; second, population control; and third, genetics. Drawing on a range of internal documents and public-facing educational materials from the HBLNC archives, this thesis reveals how each period of the League’s work represents a unique historical project of eugenics bound by the overarching goal of “human betterment” via reproductive control. The narrative of the League connects local and global histories, exemplifying how reproduction has been tied to both small-scale and world-spanning projects of development, as well as identifies the critical role that women had within eugenics projects as members of HBLNC leadership. Rather than be completely abandoned at the turn of the 20th century, eugenics aspiration for human “betterment” were reintegrated into the landscapes of increasingly robust and sophisticated tools and ideas about science, medicine, and reproduction.
Acknowledgements

To Dr. Evan Hepler-Smith, for being the first mentor to truly share my avid curiosity and intrigue in the intersections that lie between history and science; for your affirmations, support, and continued belief in my work on this project and beyond; for prioritizing my well-being as a person before my responsibilities as a student; for your ability to clearly articulate and guide those ideas and questions which I have only begun to formulate. I am forever thankful for your wisdom, your perception, and your impact on my life.

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To my family who have encouraged the pursuit of my passion for historical scholarship.

To my sophomore year self who fell in love with history as a rejuvenating source of existential crises that prompts continued reinterpretation and critical examination of the very fabrics of our realities.

I would also like to acknowledge that the land that Duke University occupies is the stolen, ancestral lands of the Shakori, Eno, and Tuscarora peoples. Today, North Carolina recognizes 8 tribes – the Coharie, Lumbee, Meherrin, Ococcechi Saponi, Haliwa Saponi, Waccamaw Siouan, Sappony, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee. Acknowledging these peoples and their tribes is an important reminder of our connections to colonialism and genocide, as well as a step towards honoring the past, present, and future of Native American Nations, communities, and their lands.
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Introduction

On the evening of November 14, 1972, the Human Betterment League of North Carolina (HBLNC or the League) gathered over a catered dinner in recognition of the organization’s anniversary. Twenty-five years earlier, the League had been founded to foster public awareness and government support for increasing the number of eugenic sterilizations in North Carolina in hopes of reducing the number of “mentally deficient” people in the state. In the 1960s, the League had reoriented its work to focus on population control and family planning in North Carolina. At their 25th anniversary celebration, League members congratulated themselves on great successes in these endeavors. Yet the work of human betterment was far from complete; “many problems still remain to be solved which can be accomplished only through the leadership of the citizens of North Carolina.”¹ From the 1970s until its dissolution in 1988, the HBLNC directed their efforts towards promotion of human genetics and genetic counseling for prospective parents.

From their founding in sterilization through to their work on genetics, the League strove to reduce North Carolina’s mentally “deficient.” How and why did an organization originally dedicated to rendering people sterile against their own will become a supporter of individual reproductive decision-making? What, if any, values and hopes persisted across this history? Who was responsible for this work and what impacts did it have in North Carolina and beyond? My thesis narrates the history of the HBLNC from 1947 to 1988, delving into the organization’s work, who shaped the organization’s trajectory, and the role of the League within a larger landscape of concern over population. I argue that the history of the HBLNC shows how eugenic

¹ “Our Seeds Sprouted,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
aspirations for “human betterment” were not abandoned in the mid-20th century but integrated into the values of new forms of science, medicine, politics, and law.

This argument and my thesis bears on ongoing ethical, moral, and political debates about reproductive choice, genetic manipulability, and the progression of modern science and medicine – as well as the historic foundations of these ideas and institutions. My work helps tell the story of the making of the values and attitudes about who ought to be prevented from bearing or raising children, which lives are too costly to the public purse to be permitted to exist, and what it means for a person to be fit or unfit, in North Carolina and beyond. Further, my work underscores the pervasive nature of these attitudes and values, situating the intricate connections between “oppressive” and “liberatory” forms of reproductive control and the motivations behind movements for reproductive access unfolding concurrently.

**History of Eugenics**

In 2016, Diane B. Paul explored many scholars’ important contributions to the history of eugenics, arguing that the fragmentation of the field will likely not be resolved anytime soon.² Paul’s article on eugenics’ historiography points to the tensions around the meaning – which practices, policies, and forms of controlling birth count as eugenics – and timeline of eugenics.³ I contribute my own considerations of these tensions in the conclusion of this thesis. However, as

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a starting point, I find Nathaniel Comfort’s argument regarding the “eugenic impulse” particularly useful. Comfort states:

The eugenic impulse arises whenever the humanitarian desire for happiness and social improvement combines with an emphasis on heredity as the essence of human nature. It is the dream of control, of engineering ourselves, of not leaving our future up to cruel fate. This impulse is noble in spirit but, unleavened by an equal impulse to improve the conditions of life, it is deceptive and ultimately impoverishing.4

One may thus think of eugenics as an ambition of utilizing science and medicine to provide biological solutions to social and economic problems through reproduction. This is the sense in which I refer to eugenics in this thesis.5

In line with the fractured field of the history of eugenics, the histories of eugenics in America may be evaluated separately. British explorer, Francis Galton, first coined “eugenics” to mean “well born” in 1883. Influenced by his cousin Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection, Galton believe selective procreation of society’s elite would enable a better human race. While this improvement of humankind through favorable pairings with increased offspring represented “positive” eugenics, “negative” eugenics aimed to decrease undesirable traits by prohibiting reproduction of those deemed unfit.6 Eugenics officially appeared in American history when a 1896 Connecticut marriage law made it illegal for epileptic or “feeble-minded” people to get married. By the beginning of the 20th century, the scientific study of eugenics took off around the world, attracting scientists, prominent and wealthy citizens, and socialists alike. Well into the

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5 In line with the general during the period covered in this thesis, by “sterilization,” I refer to a permanent, surgical procedure after which the recipient is no longer able to become pregnant or impregnate others. Similarly, “population control” refers to measures and policies that attempt to limit the growth of human populations, often tied to geopolitics and economic development.
6 “Positive” and “negative” eugenics does not reflect value judgements but instead denote strategies of increased or decreased reproduction, respectively.
Progressive Era, popular culture was ridden with Better Babies Contests and political leaders like President Theodore Roosevelt propagated the American eugenics movement.\(^7\)

In 1907, eugenics acquired new force when Indiana passed the world’s first involuntary sterilization law based on eugenics. This law legalized the forced sterilization of those deemed mentally disabled or unfit and within two decades 28 other states in the U.S. followed suit with their own compulsory sterilization laws. North Carolina established its first sterilization law in 1919. This law was later amended in 1929 and allowed for the forcible sterilization of those mentally unfit persons in state institutions, including mental health facilities and prisons. In 1933, the 1929 law was deemed unconstitutional and replaced with another law that provided for “notice, hearing, and the right to appeal” sterilization with the newly created North Carolina Eugenics Board.\(^8\) The new law also extended sterilization to non-institutionalized, mentally unfit.\(^9\) This law remained in effect until 1977, legalizing the sterilization of over 7,600 North Carolina residents “who might produce children who [were] mentally defective” at state or county expense – most of whom were women.\(^10\)

It was not until World War II, that eugenics fell into disrepute because of the association of involuntary sterilization with Nazi Germany and its racial hygiene movements – including the


\(^8\) Julius Paul, “‘...Three Generations of Imbeciles Are Enough...’ State Eugenic Sterilization Laws in American Thought and Practice” (Washington, D.C.: Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, 1965), p. 400-401; The Eugenics Board ultimately decided for or against the sterilization of people based on the evidence provided in their cases and the substance of their appeals, though cases were rarely overturned.

\(^9\) Julius Paul, “‘...Three Generations of Imbeciles Are Enough...’ State Eugenic Sterilization Laws in American Thought and Practice” (Washington, D.C.: Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, 1965), p. 400-401; The Eugenics Board ultimately decided for or against the sterilization of people based on the evidence provided in their cases and the substance of their appeals, though cases were rarely overturned.

\(^10\) “Our Seeds Sprouted,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel Hill.
Holocaust. Eugenics were stigmatized and the “science” of eugenics was dubbed a “pseudoscience” instead. But, as sterilization became socially unfavorable domestically by the 1960s, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the oral contraceptive pill, intrauterine devices reached market, and family planning grew in popularity as a form of reproductive intervention. In the 1970s, abortion was legalized and birth control means became mainstream. Simultaneously, while new reproductive practices emerged, the United States, along with other “developed” nations were increasingly concerned about global population growth – particularly, population growth in “developing” nations of the Global South. With population scare and the Cold War as a backdrop, reproduction became a site for birth control crusaders, governments, and non-profit organizations in the Global North to shape international development and secure state, national, and international objectives in turn.

Then, over the course of the mid-1970s onward, genetics also expanded as an increasingly robust science, aided by the determination of the double-helix structure of DNA, development of the “Modern Synthesis” between Darwin’s theory of natural selection and Mendelian genetics, and the emergence of biotechnologies. In this period, the expansion of genetic science included implications for medicine, giving rise to the subfield of medical genetics. This propelled an growing number of studies to uncover the genetic basis of disease and consensus on the importance of medical genetics to the relevance of genetic counseling, as

12 Though this history will be explored more thoroughly within the chapters, this history cannot be mentioned without the acknowledgement of the extreme and long-lasting physical and epistemological violence that took place towards women of color and poor women in the U.S. and Global South during this period to advance science, medicine, and reproduction. This is also true of many prior scientific and medical experiments since the inception of colonialism.
well as to the future of healthcare and of reproduction. Recent scholarship has increasingly worked across these histories, long treated separately, focusing on the connections among them. I will return to this newer historiography below.

**The Human Betterment League of North Carolina**

The HBLNC was formed in 1947 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina because of “the high rate of mental deficiency in the state.” Harvard geneticist, Clarence C. Gamble, took intellectual interest in the project as a philanthropist and birth control researcher. And North Carolina businessman, James G. Hanes, provided funding due to his interests in using his finances to promote development in Winston-Salem – an industrial city he had helped build through his hosiery mill company.

Gamble first caught wind of the state’s trajectory in “mental deficiency” when his field secretary, Elsie Wulkop, met a North Carolina nurse while on vacation in Florida. The North Carolina nurse told Wulkop about the “appalling number of rejections from illiteracy and mental deficiency” of North Carolinians in the World War II draft – apparently, some 48% in 1944. Gamble sent Wulkop to the state in the late months of 1946 to test the intelligence of children in a “Rural County” with the help of Dr. A. M. Jordan at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The survey results interested Hanes, who funded a comparable study in an unamed “industrial city.” Together, these studies provided evidence that an intervention for improving intelligence testing had an active role in the promotion of eugenics, and of eugenic sterilization particularly. Testing provided seemingly objective evidence for the definitive defining of “fumbleminded” subjects. In fact, varied levels of mental unfitness were often denoted on a spectrum of test scores and social characteristics using terms like “moron,” “imbecile,” and “idiot.” See: Edgar A. Doll, “Idiot, Imbecile, and Moron,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 20, no. 4 (1936): 427–37, p. 428-34; Sallie Tisdale, “Neither Morons nor Imbeciles nor Idiots,” *Harper’s Magazine*, 1990, p. 50; Ajitha Reddy, “The Eugenic Origins of IQ Testing: Implications for Post-Atkins Litigation,” *Depaul Law Review* 57 (2008).

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14 “Our Seeds Sprouted,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel Hill.
15 “Our Seeds Sprouted,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel Hill.
16 “Our Seeds Sprouted,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel Hill.
the “state’s human resources” was necessary. The formation of the HBLNC – a privately funded group aiming to increase the number of eugenic sterilizations via public education – was that intervention.18

The League pursued their founding goal of increased eugenic sterilizations through the development and distribution of hundreds of thousands of pamphlets, letters, and self-assessment questionnaires to reconfigure mailing recipients’ perceptions and acceptance of sterilization. Over their history, the means of educating and interfacing with the public shifted – including the eventual development of films, political lobbying, and newsletters about League work and technological advances in reproduction and genetics. The League also became increasingly interested in the work of other North Carolina-focused groups, national organizations, and organizations with ties to North Carolina grappling with international population questions. Let us return for a moment to the title of this thesis: “Our Seeds Sprouted.” This quote came from the League’s 25th anniversary meeting and effectively summarizes the League’s work: Those seeds planted in eugenics sterilization advocacy were tended to and bloomed across distinct eugenics projects in population control and genetics under the authority of the League and those actors in North Carolina and beyond who they were supported by and helped support. This collaborative, reactive model of work caused the HBLNC’s founding seeds to be fruitful for the next 41 years.

The League’s general organizational hierarchy was consistent over all four decades of their work and ranked as follows: President, Board Members, Executive Director, Executive Secretary/Secretary, General Members. Higher executive positions (President and Board Members) were often filled by high-ranking scientific and welfare personnel – PhDs, MDs, and state officials, and more frequently consisted of men. The Executive Director and Executive

18 “Our Seeds Sprouted,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel Hill.
Secretary/Secretary role was filled exclusively by women. General members were any interested people of the public willing to pay a $5 annual fee to support the League’s work. Membership lists, however, were often comprised of individuals and couples within the health, science, medical, and welfare fields and these folks were frequently associated with North Carolina universities and major cities in the state.

**Reassessing Narratives of Eugenics**

Several scholars offer integral works that are critical to the histories of eugenics and the stakes of re-assessing these narratives. Thus, these works are particularly astute texts for my thesis and within the broader historiography of eugenics.

In *The Science of Human Perfection*, Nathaniel Comfort grapples with the enduring legacy of eugenics, connecting the 21st century medical fixation on genetics to eugenics of the emerging 20th century. Comfort argues throughout his book that the promises of modern medical genetics mimic those of eugenics and suggests that neither medical genetics nor eugenics can be fully understood as separate entities. Rather than mirroring the collective societal improvement that pre-War eugenics emphasized, Comfort argues pursuits of individualized genetic refinement through genetic technologies and medicine exemplify modern-day eugenics. Comfort’s work focuses geographically and temporally on different stories in eugenics history in America. However, through this work, he finds and follows his argument of the “eugenic impulse” (defined earlier in the introduction). I draw from these ideas to analyze the three periods of HBLNC’s focus – from sterilization to genetics– as episodes connected by interwoven threads of an overarching historical arc. Comfort’s work has been integral for helping me question what “eugenics” means and entails, as well as how some of the most prominent eugenicists shaped modern science and medicine. I support Comfort’s claims about the pervasive nature of the
eugenic impulse and extend his arguments through exemplarary evidence of the links between and across shifting eugenics projects.

*The Economization of Life*, authored by Michelle Murphy in 2017, broadens the implications of eugenics beyond the scope of their integration into modern medicine and science. Murphy argues that, ultimately, in the wake of eugenics, new quantitative approaches to calculate the values of certain lives – stratified by race, wealth, nationality, and gender – gave rise to population-level planning and demographic study that prevails today. This work is grounded by a simple yet difficult question, *What is life worth?* Murphy provides a plethora of answers for this question by exploring the rising 20th-century stakes of population level calculations for the sake of national and global economies. Over the course of the second-half of the 20th century entire countries, like Bangladesh, became sites of mass experimentation, averted births became a measure of potential gross domestic product increase per capita, and lives were sorted as worthy vs. unworthy of investment and of living. Murphy’s argument, then, is critical for considering the ongoing stakes of reproductive politics, population control endeavors, and the history of assigning worth and value to reproduction. I add to Murphy’s analysis by situating this global narrative within local contexts and by exploring what role North Carolinians had in this story of global consequence. In particular, I find that certain ideas about the economic value of different lives may also have earlier roots than Murphy suggests.

Johanna Schoen is an authority on the history of eugenics within North Carolina. For her 2005 book *Choice and Coercion*, Schoen was granted unique access to summaries of 7,500 case histories and the papers of the North Carolina Eugenics Board. Her research into North Carolina eugenics situates the state program in both a national and global context and includes analysis of birth control, abortion, and family planning policies alongside sterilization. Schoen demonstrates
the shifting line between the reproductive programs that overwhelmingly targeted poor women and women of color and the reproductive control extended to such populations of women through these endeavors. Schoen argues that, at home and abroad, funding for things like family planning programs proved to be a double-edged sword – offering both unprecedented opportunities, as well as harms for the women subject to them. Schoen presents forms of reproductive control that emerged through and in conjunction with eugenics programs as technology whose use and application was often dictated for, not by, women in North Carolina – especially those most socially and economically disenfranchised. I take up Schoen’s arguments about the often-conflicting dualities of reproductive control, as specifically dictated by the time, application, place, and identity of the women who used them. I also add to Schoen’s work by showing how women were not only on the receiving end of this history, but were also active agents participating in and leading organizations that carried it out – specifically, within the Human Betterment League of North Carolina.

**Existing Scholarship on the Human Betterment League of North Carolina**

Nicolette Hylan’s 2008 thesis “Selling Eugenic Sterilization” was the first scholarship assessing the League. Hylan’s work focuses solely on understanding the League’s work on eugenic sterilization advocacy and its impacts on prolonging North Carolina sterilizations. Her thesis argues that the HBLNC’s literature campaigning overcame the Nazi associations of eugenic sterilization by depicting eugenic sterilization as benevolent and compassionate, as well as by employing scientific discourse to substantiate their claims. Hylan also placed particular focus on Moya Woodside – a medical social worker and researcher funded by Clarence Gamble – as uplifting maternalistic eugenics arguments that complemented those claims made by the HBLNC. The term “maternalistic” refers to motherly expressions of protection. This term has
been especially applied to early to mid-20th century. Here, historians mark the origins of the U.S. Welfare State as embedded within women’s movements that advocated for aid, regulations, and protections of certain groups in society deemed unable to protect or help themselves.

Historically, and in the context of Hylan’s thesis, maternalism harmfully infantilized those peoples targeted for aid by such movements.19

In 2014, Kay Bielak Schaffer wrote her thesis, “‘Human Betterment.’” Similar to Hylan and drawing from Hylan, Schaffer’s work argued that the League was instrumental in rebranding eugenic sterilization, allowing sterilization to persist and be prolonged in Post-War North Carolina. Schaffer also analyzed the maternalism and reasoning of compassion foundational for North Carolina social workers in targeting individuals and families for sterilization. Additionally, Schaffer emphasized sterilization’s longevity and impact in the state – paying particular attention to the State Eugenics Board’s ending in 1977, the concerning lack of public awareness of the state’s eugenic past, and the ongoing advent of “neoeugenics” in America. Like Hylan, Schaffer was grounded by the role that the HBLNC and associated figures played in the first decade of their existence advocating for sterilization in North Carolina.

Sarah V. Wilds was the first scholar to consider HBLNC’s history beyond the 1950s. Her 2019 thesis “‘And the North Carolina Morons Lived | Happily Ever After’” added and expanded understanding of key male figures like Gamble and C. Nash Herndon in the League’s history. Wilds also situated the contexts of North Carolina as a general progressive hub in the South, with respect to the advance of reproductive science and policy. Thus, Wilds proposed that it was the circumstances of North Carolina socially, culturally, and politically that enabled the coalesce of the Human Betterment League and the expansion of the state’s eugenic sterilization program

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through their work. Wilds is the only scholar to consider the broader history of the League’s involvement in population control and genetics, as well as to pay homage to the impressive and surprising longevity of the HBLNC. However, this expansion is brief, neither reckoning with how or why these transitions took place.

**Reframing the Legacy of Eugenics and the League in North Carolina**

I came to this project on eugenics in North Carolina for two main reasons. First, I was born and raised in North Carolina but never learned about eugenics in my home state. Thus, I have a personal geographic tie to the subject matter. Second, due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, my source base was largely limited to those sources I was able to access locally in North Carolina. Like other scholars who have written on the HBLNC, most of the primary sources I draw from in this thesis come from the League’s archives at the University of North Carolina’s Wilson Library. I also include sources from Clarence Gamble’s archives at Harvard’s Countway Library, which were digitized for my purposes.

However, while other work has focused disproportionately on the League’s involvement in sterilization, I study and explain the organization’s ongoing involvement and influence in North Carolina and beyond for its entire existence. Further, I do not merely take at face value the League’s assorted reflections on its own history that denotes three distinct periods – sterilization, population control and genetics – but bring together bodies of evidence to substantiate and analyze these eras. Rather than presenting the three periods of the League’s work as anomalies, I assess why and how these transitions unfolded and who was responsible for driving this change. Further, I suggest that the League’s involvement in sterilization was not its sole involvement in eugenics and that each period of its work represented unique, interconnected eugenics projects.
I make these interventions and contributions by stepping away from a singular focus on the eugenic sterilization narrative arc of the HBLNC and instead closely tracing the substance and impact of HBLNC work and ideology over time. Not only do I situate this history within North Carolina, but I situate how the Cold War, nationalism, interventionism, and global development through reproductive control played out in North Carolina and how local organizations contributed to these developments. Additionally, rather than prioritizing the writings and statements of the League’s male founders and figureheads, I focus on the records of the League’s day-to-day operations and the organization personnel who made it run – a group composed predominantly of women, as I have found. Contrarily, other work on the League has mostly analyzed the group’s public-facing work rather than records like meeting minutes or internal correspondences.

Lastly, in connection to my focus on women and the power and labor of the League, I have been intentional about looking at Gamble’s activities from the perspective of League personnel rather than letting him be the focus of this study or positing him as the ultimate League authority. Though he was crucial in the HBLNC’s formation and history, by looking beyond Gamble, I have found space for assessing the actions of the North Carolina group which came into its own both ideologically and structurally notwithstanding Gamble’s heavy-handed involvement and direction over the first decade of its work.

**Chapter Outline**

Chapter 1 narrates the HBLNC’s history, investigating each period of its work. By analyzing the League’s forms of communication, as well as the information within the League’s public and private correspondences, I connect the seemingly disparate ambitions and work across the HBLNC’s four decades of existence. Further, I substantiate and describe the three periods of
the League’s work: sterilization, population, and genetics. I argue that the transitions from sterilization to population control to genetics were not arbitrary but unique historical episodes of eugenics bound by the overarching goal of human betterment via reproductive manipulation.

Chapter 2 examines women in leadership in the HBLNC and their roles over time. While working on this project, I uncovered that it was women who carried out the bulk of administrative and operational work for the HBLNC, rather than elite male experts who often served as the organization’s face. I argue that it was ultimately the women of the HBLNC who changed the trajectory of the organization time and time again and were able to keep the group alive. I also suggest that there is an important, yet underexplored, role of women in the history of American eugenics. I seek to add to this dialogue about the relationship between women and eugenics, birth control and population control, oppression and freedom in an era typically understood in terms of the emergence of feminism, sexual liberation, and reproductive choice.

Chapter 3 connects the local and global histories of population control and international planning and development, particularly within the middle era of the League’s history where League actors focused on this work. I argue that North Carolina and the HBLNC contributed to making North Carolina an important geopolitical center for population work to unfold and an important group of actors that pioneered this landscape for others who followed suit. Thus, through this work, I lay out how the work and ambitions on a global scale were expressed locally, and how the localized work of North Carolinians and their groups took to the global stage of international politics of human reproduction and economic development.
Chapter 1: Between the State and the Science
The League’s Eugenic Impulse, 1947-1988

On a hot afternoon in early summer, social worker Moya Woodside ventured out to the “unfashionable” portion of an unnamed Southern town. Woodside’s destination was the home of Mrs. Harmon – a frail, shoeless lady in a torn dress. Mrs. Harmon was twenty-eight, troubled with a plethora of medical problems, and weighed only seventy-eight pounds. When she became pregnant for the seventh time, her doctors told her she could never go through with the pregnancy and aborted her fetus. In the process, she was also sterilized. “How do you feel about [having been] sterilized?” Woodside asked Mrs. Harmon, to which Mrs. Harmon replied, “I feel a whole lot better.”20 In 1950, the Human Betterment League of North Carolina (HBLNC) republished and distributed this narrative in Woodside’s article, “Women Who Want to be Sterilized,” from the same year.

Over the course of their history, the HBLNC republished and created dozens of informational literatures, like Woodside’s piece, to distribute to hundreds of mailing list recipients. They also eventually developed two short educational films, advocated to and discussed with policy makers and governmental officials, consulted with medical and scientific experts to inform their work, derived grants for proposed educational workshops, and participated in a wide array of conferences and seminars. In this chapter I analyze select mailings, newsletters, both League films, and a wide assortment of meeting minutes, and Executive Director reports from the HBLNC archives. The work of the HBLNC from their

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founding in 1947 to their disbandment in 1988 can be divided into three periods, each promoting distinct causes: first, sterilization; second, population control; third, genetics.

Drawing on Nathanial Comfort’s analysis, I argue that, notwithstanding their differences, these periods collectively make up a unified project of producing and acting on eugenic impulse within North Carolina. Rather than abandon eugenics as a “pseudo-science” or fever dream of social engineer’s past, the HBLNC and its constituents remained fixated on the goal of decreased mental disability and unfitness by elevating and refining reproduction through the advancing tools of science and medicine across the second half of the 20th century.

**Section I: Reclaiming Eugenics through Sterilization, 1947 to the late 1950s**

“In 1947 sterilization was generally considered by professional workers as the primary means of limiting retardation and mental illness…” stated the republished hand-out from the twenty-fifth anniversary meeting of the League.21 This statement effectively sums up the rationale behind the League’s founding and the ambitions of the first period of their work in North Carolina: Increasing the number of eugenic sterilizations to limit the reproduction of those mentally disabled and unfit peoples. From 1947 until the late 1950s, constituents of the HBLNC chose a variety of scientific, medical, welfare, and moral authorities to amplify these ambitions through their literature publications and distributions. Much of this work reiterated arguments put forward in Eugene Brown’s “Eugenical Sterilization in North Carolina” in 1935 which boasted the sound logic and humanitarian rationale for expanding sterilization in the state as a means of social intervention.22

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21 Our Seeds Sprouted,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

HBLNC literature took the form of single-sided article reprints, booklets with illustrations, three-fold pamphlets with subsections that outlined a variety of information pertaining to sterilization, and letters that updated members on some facet of League work or the group’s need to collect recipient’s membership fees. With nearly every mailing, there was a brief message informing recipients of where to write to join the League if they were not already a member. In their mailing campaigns of educational materials, the HBLNC simultaneously constructed didactic principles surrounding sterilization, selected subsets of the population as important recipients of sterilization propaganda, and established space and avenues for those whose messages they amplified to be legitimized.

**Sterilization As a Tool of Science and Medicine, Not of Genocide**

In the post-War period, Hitler’s connections to eugenics made eugenics distasteful.\(^{23}\) To increase sterilizations in North Carolina, the HBLNC had to first reclaim eugenics and sterilization from their Nazi legacies by legitimizing them as scientific and medical tools, rather than agents of genocide. Moya Woodside’s “Women Who Want to Be Sterilized,” is an exemplary guiding text for understanding the HBLNC’s beginnings.\(^{24}\)

While Woodside acknowledged that sterilization was an integral component of “persecution and punishment in Nazi Germany,” she argued that “any advance of science could be used for good or ill.”\(^{25}\) Thus it was the responsible application of sterilization which rendered it positively constructive in North Carolina. Further, Woodside promoted that North Carolina’s sterilization law was not a means for constructing a master race nor targeting racial or religious

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\(^{24}\) Though not a League member herself, it is noteworthy that Woodside’s research was funded by Clarence Gamble.

\(^{25}\) “Women Who Want to be Sterilized,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel Hill.
minorities. Though race, class, sexual behavior and more factors of identity did foundationally shape sterilization recommendations in North Carolina, Woodside and the League negated the skewed impacts of who was being sterilized. This de-emphasis of race and other aspects of identity may have been influenced by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, founded in 1945, and their work on race in 1950 to dispel racism supported by supposed biological underpinnings.

Woodside’s work enabled the League to identify and draw ideological distance between Nazi Germany and North Carolina. Whereas the Nazi regime had exerted “pseudoscientific ‘experiments,’” the sterilization procedures in North Carolina were sophisticated and safe. Woodside asked “Dr. C., senior surgeon heading the department of obstetrics and gynecology at a famous medical school in the state” how difficult the sterilization operation was. He replied that there was “nothing much to it” and ascertained that out of the several hundred women he had personally sterilized, he never had an operative fatality. The simple nature of the procedure was also supported by Woodside’s suggestions that women wanted to be voluntarily sterilized as an effective form of individual “relief.” This emphasis on simplicity and ease was prevalent in other mailings as well.

28 “Women Who Want to be Sterilized,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel Hill.
29 “Women Who Want to be Sterilized,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel Hill.
30 “Women Who Want to be Sterilized,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel Hill.
Figure 1 displays a checklist in the three-fold pamphlet, “Speaking of Sterilization.” This pamphlet was another mailing distributed by the HBLNC that asked and answered questions like what effects sterilization has or why it is needed, in addition to addressing when sterilization should be used. Woodside gave anecdotal evidence about women who met each of these criteria in “Women Who Want to be Sterilized.” The examples of Mrs. Berrington, Mrs. Thompson, and Mrs. Smathers that Woodside discusses seem to fall under the second category: “Whenever mothers need permanent protection from a pregnancy which would be fatal.”

While Mrs. Berrington – a college graduate, wife to a “leading businessman” and prominent in community clubs – made the decision to be sterilized following her doctor’s advice about the danger of future pregnancies, it is unclear how Mrs. Thompson and Smathers sterilizations proceeded. Nonetheless, both sterilizations were denoted as voluntary by Woodside. Mrs. Thompson, who lived with the “town’s Negro laborers,” was sterilized after giving birth to thirteen children and Mrs. Smathers, who lived in the “poor section” of town, was

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sterilized after her husband was uncooperative with her visiting the clinic for birth control. The
unifying factor for Mrs. Thompson and Mrs. Smathers, beyond their apparent lower
socioeconomic status was that each had many children and inadequate care at their children’s
deliveries rendering no method of pregnancy prevention completely safe because they were “so
damaged internally.”34

Though Woodside identified each case as voluntary and non-eugenic to promote the
liberatory and desirable nature of sterilization, she and the League more generally invoked
“voluntary” and “involuntary” concurrently and avoided strict definitions of these terms. Many
scholars suggest that nearly all sterilization cases performed under the approval of the North
Carolina Eugenics Board should be considered coercive and involuntary.35 So, when Woodside
asked Thompson and Smathers, “Are you pleased you’ve been sterilized?” and “Why was it they
operated on you?” it is unclear whether these were retroactive remarks of relief for an unwilling
“decision.” Nonetheless, through Woodside’s work and voice, the League was able to construe
sterilization as a comprehensive tool desired by a variety of women.

“But what about the other kind of sterilizations?”

The League’s promotion of voluntary sterilization was unlike eugenicists’ ambitions a
generation earlier in the Progressive Era. However, the HBLNC did posit being pro-sterilization
as being pro-humanitarian much as those Progressive Era eugenicists who suggested sterilization
was a beneficent means of protecting innocent children, the “feebleminded,” and poor mothers.36

34 “Women Who Want to be Sterilized,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel Hill.
35 Schoen, Choice and Coercion, p. 76; Karin L. Zipf, Bad Girls at Samarcand: Sexuality and Sterilization in a
* A quote in “Women Who Want to be Sterilized,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel
Hill.
(B.A., Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008); Molly Ladd-Taylor, Fixing the Poor: 
Eugenic Sterilization and Child Welfare in the Twentieth Century (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University 
This ambition was capitulated in the other three instances of when sterilization should be used, according to the checklist in Figure 1: When “lifelong protection from parenthood is needed” and “defenseless children” must be either “shielded from being born to a heritage of insanity or feeblemindedness” or “saved from the suffering and unhappiness of being brought up by an insane or feebleminded parent.”

The League never definitively defined the term “feebleminded,” perhaps as a play into the flexible construction of the term and who could be socially defined as biologically unfit. Nonetheless, is with these remaining instances or – “the other kind of sterilization” – that the HBLNC’s main interests in sterilization lay: Taking reproductive control of the state’s mentally “defective” peoples to shape the quality of North Carolina’s population.

Once more in Woodside’s account, she visited Mrs. McCallum, a feeble-minded woman who lived with her feeble-minded sister, Maisie, in a home “scarcely fit for human habitation.” Social workers had been aware of Mrs. McCallum and her sister for years. Social workers’ investigations into North Carolina families and reports on their fitness was an increasingly common source of identifying who should be eugenically sterilized. Mrs. McCallum was sterilized because she was deemed unable to properly care for her children and Maisie was recommended for sterilization – “easy prey for men who were not too particular about their

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38 For more on the historiography around the word “feebleminded” see James Trent, Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Intellectual Disability in the United States, Inventing the Feeble Mind (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 76-7.

sexual partners” when forced to stay at home because of the overcrowding of North Carolina’s mental institutions.40

Sterilization of women like these sisters was performed so that hereditarily and environmentally, the number of mentally unfit North Carolinians could be reduced through a societally and individually protective act. Woodside and other authorities enlisted by the League shaped the argument that sterilization of the “feeble-minded” was “not punishment but protection.”41 This was a talking point around sterilization that dated back to at least the 1930s, again cited in Brown’s “Eugenic Sterilization in North Carolina.”42 As Sarah Wilds argues in her thesis on the HBLNC, sterilization boasted an argument of progressivism which welded contemporary science and social aspirations, effectively selling a solution that others were willing to get behind.43 Sterilization afforded those mentally inept a life outside of institutions and prevented offspring of sexual predation and rape. Part of the progressive tactic and appeal was achieved by de-emphasizing the permanent, irreversible nature of sterilization and instead focusing on how much could be gained rather than what stood to be lost.

Rationalizing Eugenics to Key Stakeholders

Part of the League’s mission in popularizing eugenics was targeting key stakeholder populations. Woodside plainly stated that her article would appeal to those who lived in comfortable circumstances – happily married “and with children who are wanted…”44 But the HBLNC needed to rationalize eugenics differentially. Though members of the League paid a $5 annual fee to continue receiving mailings, this does not necessarily mean that recipients

40 “Women Who Want to be Sterilized,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel Hill.
41 “Women Who Want to be Sterilized,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel Hill.
42 Brown, Eugenical Sterilization in North Carolina.
44 “Women Who Want to be Sterilized,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel Hill.
intrinsically understood sterilization, perceived their own role within popularizing eugenics aspirations of human betterment through reproductive limitation, or supported the HBLNC’s work across time. By strategically republishing different authorities, the League used their campaigns to motivate nuanced collective action towards its own eugenics’ goals.

For example, in 1950, the HBLNC republished C. Nash Herndon’s speech, “Human Resources from the Viewpoint of Medical Genetics,” presented to the North Carolina Education Association in the city of Boone that year. Herndon was a League co-founder, HBLNC president from 1956 to 1959, and pioneer medical geneticist at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem. He was also instrumental to establishing a eugenics program in Forsyth County (Winston-Salem is the county seat) in 1943 and speculatively the semi-anonymous “Dr. C.” to which Woodside referred.45

In his speech, Herndon began by establishing the idea of genetic determinism, stating that human populations’ limiting values were set by their inherited characteristics.46 Thus, the quality of humanity in North Carolina was a direct result of the genetics that were allowed to propagate through the state’s population. He continued to liken schools and classrooms to resource pools whose progress could be entirely halted by “defective members.”47 This fit squarely with broader concerns the HBLNC helped construct over societal detriment at the hands of the mentally disabled and unfit. Herndon invoked teachers to take an active role in improving the state’s “human stock.” He suggested that they report students with potential hereditary defects and instruct these students to seek medical advice (which would perhaps lead to sterilization), while

46 “Human Resources From the Viewpoint of Medical Genetics,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
47 “Human Resources From the Viewpoint of Medical Genetics,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
simultaneously encouraging those of average or superior capabilities to have families. Through republication of his speech, the League elevated Herndon as a medical geneticist while inciting educators as authorities in the HBLNC’s eugenic sterilization agenda. Teachers could directly intervene in the lives of the unfit before their proliferation as reproductive adults was foreseeably realized.

The HBLNC also appealed to Christian-based, ethical and moral concerns by reprinting an article from minister Charles W. Phillips, “A Moral Basis for Eugenic Sterilization,” in 1955. Phillips drew upon arguments that echoed Woodside’s – about the benevolence and humanity of sterilization. Phillips suggested that like antibiotics used for treating infectious bacterial disease, eugenic sterilization was within the scope of human scientific intervention to handle the problem of mental ineptness. In supporting sterilization, Phillips and the HBLNC proposed that no unwarranted bounds in taking control over what was “natural” were crossed between man and God.

In fact, Phillips proposed that it would be cruel to allow those mentally unfit to procreate, reasoning that it was a sound and healthy mental state which distinguished humans from animals. Though Phillips clearly stated that he did not wish to “eliminate” those mentally unfit who had already been born, this did not necessitate their “unnecessary multiplication.” This offered the Christian reader a logic and call to action that sterilization was an endowment from God which enabled Christian people to make the mentally unfit “as human” as they could, “to protect them

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48 “Human Resources From the Viewpoint of Medical Genetics,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
49 “A Moral Basis for Eugenic Sterilization,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
50 “A Moral Basis for Eugenic Sterilization,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
from animality when they cannot protect themselves,” recapitulating the pro-humanitarianism described earlier.51

And of course, eugenic sterilization could not be carried out without qualified physicians who were willing to perform the procedure. In 1950, Duke-based legal aid, John S. Bradway (LLB), wrote “The Legality of Human Sterilization in North Carolina” – originally published in the North Carolina Medical Journal and directly targeted to physician readers. As a legal preparer of the very North Carolina eugenics law he was discussing, Bradway was primed to help physicians understand the legality of both involuntary and voluntary sterilization, which was often ambiguous.

Bradway made it clear that because of Sections 16 and 17 in North Carolina’s eugenic law, physicians were effectively exempted of liability in involuntary, eugenic sterilization. The only way they could be penalized was in the case of negligence. Thus, within the eugenics program, state physicians could only fear their non-compliance. Through this article, the HBLNC could alleviate physicians’ hesitations to engage in eugenics, normalize sterilization in the medical community, and support de jure legalization of voluntary sterilization to protect physicians completing these procedures de facto.

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From their founding in 1947 through their continued work on sterilization into the late 1950s, the HBLNC was successful in appealing to the expansion of eugenic sterilization in North Carolina. Though it is not clear to what extent the influence of the HBLNC is solely responsible, within a year of beginning their work, sterilization numbers in North Carolina dramatically increased over two-fold and by the early 1950s, the state had the highest per capita sterilization

51 “A Moral Basis for Eugenic Sterilization,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
rate in the country. From my research, it does not appear that other groups were active in advocating for sterilization in North Carolina. Certainly, if they were, HBLNC was the most prominent.

Section II: “An Idea Come of Age:” “This is our challenge”

Since the League’s formation in 1947, concerns over global population growth were emerging in many Western countries. The concerns over global population, namely the population of nations in the Global South, would propel the first United Nation’s conference on world population in 1954 and reach international planning agendas in the mid-1950s. At the same time as, and perhaps partially because of, concerns over population control, reproductive science and technologies were changing the face of reproductive control. Research and testing on the oral birth control pill led to its approval for use in 1960, intra-uterine devices (IUDs) emerged as a non-permanent form of long-term birth prevention, and family planning policies promised rewarding economic returns on investment in strategic reproduction. These progressions were intimately connected – leading to Global North engagement in the reproduction of the Global South as a tactic of population control and development.

Charismatic individuals, such as HBLNC co-founder, Clarence Gamble, often abandoned domestic reproductive concerns for international ones. And the League itself transitioned towards concerns over population control through the locus of family planning – a more palpable

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domestic intervention given that the actual population size of North Carolina was not of real concern. During their work in population control, the HBLNC took on larger-scale projects, like the production of a film, and enmeshed with other organizations of similar aspiration in the state and beyond. Rather than serve as a niche authority, the HBLNC collaborated in network to expand their sphere of influence and the tools they employed. In this period of their work the League’s efforts did not involve as many educational mailings but were instead centered on the production of their first film, attending and contributing to conferences and seminars on reproduction and population control, and discussing options for the HBLNC’s involvement in expanding family planning in the North Carolina.

Re-Aligning with the State

The League began talking internally about population concerns in the mid-1950s, but it was not until the mid-point of the 1960s the League officially transformed its focus. In 1964, conferences between city and county officials and HBLNC leadership fostered the establishment of a family planning clinic in Forsyth County – the seat of Winston-Salem where the League organized and operated out of for most of their history. A year later in 1965, Marion Moser laid out how dramatically the grounds for population policy and control over fertility had changed in recent years in her Executive Director report: The National Institutes of Health had ramped up research in reproductive biology and fertility control, 35 states (mostly in the South) had publicly financed birth control programs, and governmental agencies – local to federal – were gaining unprecedented interest in dealing with both global and domestic problems of birth control.

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54 “Our Seeds Sprouted,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
Moser then laid out the HBLNC’s role: “Governments at various levels can set the pace, but the implementation will be up to the people. Therefore we are faced with an enormous problem in education – of extending the understanding of many people [about population problems]. This is our challenge.”

Thus, Moser proposed that the fulfillment of population control lay in the hands of the people. In 1966, the League’s alignment to fit with the state in addressing population concerns would finally become formalized in a meeting with local and state government officials. This meeting concluded with Moser and League President, Guion Johnson, offering the services of the HBLNC to the ongoing development of North Carolina and its population via family planning programs.

The 1967 Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel news article and reprinted League mailing, “An Idea Come of Age,” detailed the HBLNC’s public-facing transition. Author Chester Davis summarized the HBLNC’s reorientation, stating that the League initially emphasized human quality by concentrating on programs that curb births of the least fit via sterilization, but recently the HBLNC was contributing its voice to “preach…control [of] human numbers lest we breed ourselves out of standing room.”

Davis had covered the HBLNC’s work with admiration since their founding. And in a true “idea come of age,” humankind now possessed “intelligent use” of birth control to control population numbers. One of the most important ways that the HBLNC undertook this mission was by creating a family planning film, titled “Windsong.”

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56 “Report of Executive Secretary November 8, 1965,” Box 2, Folder 68, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
57 “AN EXPANNDED FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
58 “An Idea Come of Age,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
59 “An Idea Come of Age,” Box 2, Folder 77, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
“Windsong”

“Windsong” was conceived in the latter 1960s and finished in 1971. News releases about the film included text directly from the film’s brochure, in which it was described as a “brief educational film…designed to inform the public of family planning services and facilities available in the state to motivate people to use them.”60 The film emphasized that family planning services enabled women’s control of their own destiny by extending control over one’s number and frequency of pregnancies.61

The film welded the authority of medical consultants to evaluate its content, while employing amateur actors who embodied relatable experiences to an imagined general audience. “Windsong” was also decipherable for many audiences because of its use of plain language, “catchy tunes,” and “clever phrases.”62 Notedly, because the film explored an “intimate” topic, the League strove to avoid being “prudish” while also not being “offensive to modesty” – to be “frank without being suggestive.”63 Thus, the League boasted that “Windsong” could be shown to youth and adults alike, in settings from sex education classes to church and civic groups. By 1972, the film reached an estimated viewing audience of over 1 million people.64

Over the span of the 14.5 minutes film, young, White and Black (but not interracial) couples constructed the message that family planning provided women with reproductive choice and subsequently improve their lives in a variety of facets. This included benefits from less economic burden to feeling closer to one’s partner and removed worry from engaging in sexual

60 “Windsong” Brochure, Box 1, Folder 20, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
61 “Windsong” Brochure, Box 1, Folder 20, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
62 “Windsong” Brochure, Box 1, Folder 20, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
63 “Windsong” Brochure, Box 1, Folder 20, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
64 “Our Seeds Sprouted,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
intercourse. Most of the film was dedicated to (heteronormative and gender-normed) reasons why women should invest in family planning rather than the substance of what family planning entailed. Family planning supposedly made marriages happier, enabled a woman to avoid “wrecking” her health, and prevented regrets about one’s marriage. Rather than producing one’s “own personal football team” or becoming a “baby factory,” family planning offered women and their families an interventional choice into the lives they always dreamed of.\textsuperscript{65} The film insisted that a better life was worth planning for alongside imagery of happy families with just two children who were able to “take a good vacation each year.”\textsuperscript{66}

These messages were incited by the film, yet the promotional materials about the film told a different story. While the film paraded individual liberty of choice over one’s own reproduction, the promotional brochure opens with a telling narrative of the overpopulation problem. Under a cornucopia overflowing with babies, the League wrote that “The current rate of population increase constitutes one of the basic problems of the twentieth century…without vigorous action now, humankind is irrevocably committed to some form of a catastrophe in the not too distant future.”\textsuperscript{67} The pamphlet continued to underscore for those young folks in love, for women whose health was degraded from frequent childbirth, and for the man whose concerns were the financial support of his large family, the projections of overpopulation were too far removed to inspire action.

Thus, this film which targeted North Carolinians and the state of North Carolina actually reflected broader anxieties of population control and overpopulation concerns writ large. Family planning was already a prevalent tool for population control internationally. However, to implore


\textsuperscript{66} “Windsong,” Series 4, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.

\textsuperscript{67} “Windsong,” Series 4, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
family planning within the state and engage the larger landscape of population control through reproductive limitation, the film marketed family planning as a matter of individual reproductive freedom for its viewers. This inducted the public of North Carolina into larger international agendas and was perhaps motivated by underlying state economic and welfare concerns, hence the promotion of ideas like affordable family sizes.

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“Windsong” is quite unremarkable cinematographically and contains little scientific or medical knowledge. Nonetheless, it prevailed as a huge success and earned a gold medal for the Health and Social Welfare category at the International Film and TV festival of New York in 1971.68 I believe that the film was met with such reverence because of its ability to dually tap into the perceived liberation of reproductive choice via family planning while serving larger state and international purposes of harnessing population size. 69

Figure 2 In one scene from "Windsong," a woman protests in favor of family planning saying, "Women should have the right to decide their own destiny. I'm for family planning." While the front of her sign reads “Action Now!!” the back says, “PLAN NOW OR PAY LATER.”

68 “Windsong” Brochure, Box 1, Folder 20, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
Figure 2 shows a scene from “Windsong” in which a woman is protesting in favor of family planning and saying, “Women should have the right to decide their own destiny. I’m for family planning.” The woman carries a sign which reads, “Action Now!” on the front and says “PLAN NOW OR PAY LATER” on the back as she walks away. In the context of the film, this woman is pointing towards those families who will “pay” both economically and mentally for the burden not using family planning in their reproductive decisions. However, the woman also invoked the rhetoric of the impending population crisis in which all of humanity would ultimately pay for an abundance of people relying on a dwindling supply of space and resources. This scene exemplifies how the HBLNC integrated international fears into personal ones and toggled between the two in their film, in other work they conducted during this period of their history, and in their promotion of these projects to funders and audiences. In doing so, the League was able to transition from focus on advocating for a tool of permanent reproductive termination, increasingly disavowed and seen as oppressive – sterilization – towards tools for short term reproductive control and choice that were bound to ideas of liberation, freedom, and opportunity – birth control pills, IUDs, and family planning.

Section III: “[H]uman genetics instead of eugenics...there is no great philosophical distinction between them”

The Human Betterment League was interested in population control internally for over 15 years but reflected these interests externally in their advocacy for less than a decade. Following an organizational evaluation in 1972 with community leaders and consultants from medical schools and public agencies, the HBLNC decided to “continue efforts to educate the public in

70 “Windsong” Brochure, Box 1, Folder 20, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
* A quote in “Human Betterment,” Box 1, Folder 3, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
population problems through a concentrated program of genetic counselling.”  

By the early 1970s, the League’s main priority lay with genetics and genetic counseling. This was a transition that perhaps should have long been expected, given the contents of the HBLNC’s May 18, 1960 meeting minutes noted:

As in many fields of science, the progress in the field of genetics has been phenomenal in the last few years. There have been break-throughs that give promise of eventual relief for man’s ills. The science of genetics has been used to great advantages by many of the states…Our state has not emphasized so much research in this field, but is fast developing a program.

Taking genetics and genetic counseling as their new focal points, the League developed another film, conducted political lobbying, submitted grant proposals for instructive workshops, and consulted authorities in genetics to further their purpose.

While eugenics ideas and policies came into disrepute following the second World War, intrigue around human genetics began to grow. Rooted in Gregory Mendel’s 19th century discovery of the laws of inheritance from his pea plant experiments, in the 20th century, genetics developed as a basic science and Mendelian inheritance was tied to a number of disorders, like albinism. In 1948, the American Society of Human Genetics was established, and more and more medical doctors, not just scientists, became invested in human genetics. Particularly, over the 1950s and 1960s, major technological advances championed the “burgeoning of medical genetics.” Further, because of this connection to offspring, genetics programs were often embedded within and of great concern to pediatrics departments. According to David Rimoin

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and Kurt Hirschhorn, “The first tool that the geneticist had for the prevention of genetic disease was genetic counseling.” Genetic counseling emerged in the 1970s alongside Roe v. Wade and simultaneous to the League’s expanding reorientation towards the power of genetics.

**The Role of the Genetic Counselor**

The League never explicitly outlined genetic counselors’ roles in the 1970s. However, several pieces of evidence from their work in the 1980s indicate the roles of genetic counselors that the League intended to promote.

In 1984, the HBLNC republished an article, “Genetic Diseases,” by Henry Kirkman – a long-time constituent of and consultant to the HBLNC, as well as the University of North Carolina School of Medicine chair for the Division of Genetics and Metabolism of the Pediatric Department from 1965 to 1991. To paraphrase Shacar Zuckerman, genetic counselors were responsible for translating scientific possibilities into personal risk calculations based on genetic screening and family histories to help potential parents understand their disposition to having genetically disabled or diseased children. According to Kirkman’s “Genetic Diseases,” these personal risks were followed up with service options: “having additional children, avoiding childbearing, artificial insemination…antenatal diagnosis…and selective abortion, early treatment, and adoption.” Importantly, these service options were also noted to be “non-directive.”

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75 Rimoin and Hirschhorn, “A History of Medical Genetics in Pediatrics.”
79 “Genetic Diseases,” Box 3, Folder 115, in the HBLNC records at Wilson Library Chapel Hill.
Non-directive genetic counselling, in which counselors laid out options but did not attempt to steer patients in a particular direction, was linked to patient autonomy and the rejection of paternalism in medicine by the 1980s. The feasibility of non-directiveness has been questioned by scholars both then and now. Yet, according to historian Diane Paul, eugenicist geneticists were under the impression that civilians only need be given the necessary information and tools to make a rational and favorable decision to reduce the number of unfit births. Thus, in seeking to limit births of certain people suspect to genetic disease, the League focused on human betterment with respect to contemporary concerns over autonomy. By providing access to individual knowledge and a scheme of service choices through genetic counseling, the eugenic impulse of eliminating the unfit could still manifest in more indirect and hands off ways.

Take, for example, the League’s particular excitement about the “Good News from the Legislature” in 1983. Amongst the other legislature that the League supported at the state and national levels to address genetic diseases and defects in the 1980s, this act provided $100,000 for neural tube defect screenings. The League supported non-directive genetic counseling interventions and did not directly advocate for abortion. However, neural tube defects were cited to lead to “stillbirth, infant death, paralysis and mental retardation,” antiabortion groups were against this particular birth defect test, and the legislative bill was noted to be “cost-effective” by

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83 Smith, “Twenty-First Century ‘Eugenics’?: The Enduring Legacy.”
saving money in medical and institutional care. Thus, it seems probable that neural tube defects by screening were likely to lead to selective abortion recommendations from genetic counselors. Given their point of view on savings for preventing unfit lives, the HBLNC took no issue with publicly supporting bills and genetic counseling tactics that led to disproportionate selective abortions of undesirable children.

“Wednesday’s Child”

With the success of their first film, the League undertook another film project to expand understanding of genetics and genetic counseling in the early 1970s. The film, “Wednesday’s Child,” was completed in 1974 and received its name from a nursery’s rhyme in which a child born on Wednesday is full of woe because Wednesdays brought bad luck and trouble. For the League, a “Wednesday’s Child” was one with a genetic birth defect – especially a defect that caused mental disability.

Like “Windsong,” this film utilized local North Carolina actors, healthcare workers, and institutions and had a sizable budget of $45,000 (equivalent to over $300,000 in current value in 2021). Also like its predecessor, the film would go on to win the Gold at the 1975 International Film and TV Festival of New York, alongside winners such as The National Academy of Science and the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. But while their earlier work around sterilization targeted women supposed to be obviously identifiable and their work in family planning situated the goal of family planning on the family unit, “Wednesday’s Child” argued for the dual salience and silence of genetic defects.

86 Accounting for inflation this figure is nearly $350,000 in 2022; “$45,000 in 1969 → 2022 | Inflation Calculator”
87 “Information about Wednesday’s Child,” Box 2, Folder 55, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
Anyone could have a Wednesday’s child – full of woe and sorrow – making genetic counseling a necessary tool for all North Carolinians to engage. Though the film frequently referenced genetic diseases which were aligned with certain ancestries – Eastern European Jewish descendants suggested to be tested for Tay Sachs and Black folks suggested for Sickle Cell Disease testing – the League stated that no racial or ethnic groups were more susceptible to genetic conditions. Unlike their past work, the film did not readily discriminate or determine subsets of the population as “fit” for genetic counseling in the way that certain people were “fit” for sterilization. Hence, the film was created to appeal to a wide audience to expand a broad access for civilians to understand the expanding genetic facet of biology that had bearings on all reproductive decisions. Figure 3 depicts a narrative of a family whose child unexpectedly had a severe birth defect. Subsequently, the couple decided to use genetic counseling to discuss options for preventing such a reproductive outcome from happening again.

Figure 3 The image shows clips from "Wednesday's Child" included in the film brochure. A couple is struggling with their child who has a birth defect (top), the father is regretful and somber about the child’s fate (middle) and the couple seeks out genetic counseling for help (bottom).
In a 1977 grant proposal to the North Carolina Department of Human Resources to fund a genetic education program in the state, the HBLNC reflected on their work. The proposal stated that the HBLNC once adhered to the “prevailing philosophy of protective sterilization as a means of preventing genetic disorders, especially mental retardation” but during the following years, the advances of scientific research changed “public attitudes,” prompting the League to switch gears.88 However, rather than establishing the League’s most recent work in genetics and genetic counseling as something wholly different than its initial focus on eugenic sterilization, in its final period, the HBLNC did not distinguish between the two.

Rather, constituents of the League understood increasing genetic knowledge and counseling as a more capable courier of eugenics. The reason they were attempting to expand and make use of genetic counseling was as a refined tool in preventing “mental retardation,” rather than a result of their reflection on and transition away from earlier advocacy. The League did explicitly use the term “eugenics” in its work following sterilization past the mid-1950s. However, this aligns with other scholars’ ideas that the term needed to be completely abandoned by the 1970s because of its negative connotations.89 This further supports Comfort’s suggestions of an underlying eugenic impulse even in instances where “eugenics” are not denoted.90 Through the advance of human genetics, the League idealized that eugenics, like its human subject, could finally stand to be perfected

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“There is nothing new about an honest desire to improve the heredity of humanity.”

During the League’s final era in work around genetics, Sheldon C. Reed was invited to deliver his speech, “Human Betterment,” at the annual League meeting in 1979. Nathaniel Comfort argues that Reed was an unabashed and complex eugenicist that envisioned patient autonomy as an integral component for fulfilling eugenics’ promises. Reed was a long-term source of inspiration for the League and past president of Minnesota Human Genetics League, whose advocacy for expanding genetics aligned closely with the HBLNC. Reed was also the very father of “genetic counseling” and came up with the term to distinguish the field from previous eugenic practice while intending the practice as a tool of new, refined eugenics, nonetheless. In his speech, Reed plainly stated that, “Indirectly, gatherings of people who promote genetic research…are eugenics societies, regardless of what name they use, and even if they don’t realize it.”

Continuing, Reed said, “Eugenics concepts in the past which failed, did so because of faulty information about genetics and other disciplines.” This sentiment resonates sharply with other logic of the HBLNC and can be encompassed neatly by Comfort’s argument that, “Eugenics had meant many things…The constants in its history were the desire to control our own evolution by reducing suffering and eliminating disease, and the belief that now we finally had the knowledge to do it right.”

In their first period of work, the League cultivated the eugenic impulse via mass mailing campaigns of hundreds and thousands of pieces of literature that advocated for the use of

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*A quote in “Human Betterment,” Box 4, Folder 138, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.


92 “Human Betterment,” Box 4, Folder 138, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.

93 “Human Betterment,” Box 4, Folder 138, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.

sterilization to decrease the state’s mentally “deficient” population. This work was explicitly eugenic by nature of advocating for use of the North Carolina eugenics sterilization law and was directly targeted at those deemed mentally unfit within the state. The League’s sterilization work was achieved by outreach to readership that sought to educate recipients on the benefits of sterilization, who needed to be sterilized, and correcting misconceptions about sterilization procedures.

In their second period of work, the League cultivated the eugenic impulse in perhaps the most indirect ways in the course of their organizational history. While shifting their focus to population control, the League emphasized the continued decrease of mentally unfit North Carolinians through a more liberatory form of reproductive control: family planning. The League produced the film “Windsong,” extensively collaborated with other organizations through conferences and information distribution, and connected to local and state authorities and their hopes for expanded family planning. Through this work the League bidirectionally localized and connected to global endeavors to limit the quantities of reproduction, all while maintaining emphasis on normal versus unfit and undesirable forms of life.

In their final period of work, the League returned to the improved scientific and medical understandings of genetics and heredity as the ultimate herald of eugenics’ promise. The HBLNC again relied on the use of a popular film to extend genetic counseling as a tool for all North Carolinians to engage. Additionally, the League invested in personalized, political lobbying to instate genetics into governmental policy and spending as a key to the future of societies. Aligned with these ideas was the supposition that genetics stood to not only optimize eugenics but to revolutionize science and medicine in whole. Several figures like the League Vice President, Henry Kirkman, and Harold O. Goodman all weighed in to support the notions
that genetics had revolutionized “every part of science from chemistry upward,” every type of physician would need to conceptualize the role that genetics played within their practice, and that public health initiatives should begin focusing on preventative aspects of health via expanded medical genetics centers.95

Though the HBLNC no longer incited eugenics explicitly within their work, it wasn’t necessary. As Reed said in his 1979 speech to the League, the then-present use of “human genetics instead of eugenics may be financially and politically expedient but there is no great philosophical distinction between them” – much as his own coinage of the term “genetic counseling.”96 In the notes on this event and speech, HBLNC Executive Director Marion Moser recounted that the “earliest form of genetic control” was the destruction of imperfect children and prohibiting reproduction was the current means for “social selection,” while in the future it would surely be “possible to reduce the frequency of genes without destroying the fetus.”97

In 1983, at the annual HBLNC meeting, League Life Member Guion Johnson gave thanks “for this assemble of people who are concerned for the well-being of all [God’s] children…as we strive to prevent genetic tragedy, to alleviate suffering, and to improve the quality of life for the human race. Amen.”98 A year later, in 1984, the Human Betterment League of North Carolina changed their title to the Human Genetics League of North Carolina and

96 Human Betterment,” Box 4, Folder 138, in the HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
would remain as such until they disbanded in 1988. Despite their eventual name change, the trajectory of the League’s work across their 41 years in North Carolina may be considered a sort of mirrored mimicry of their own perceptions of the trajectory of eugenics and of humankind: Work, tools, and people that stood to be perfected if only the science were increasingly refined. Though, the means had greatly changed over the four decades of their existence, the League’s dedication to the eugenic impulse was maintained through their dedication to human betterment.

**Conclusion**

Perhaps the most striking feature I found in this history is the degree to which the constituents of the League genuinely believed they were providing a means for the betterment of the state of North Carolina. They were extremely dedicated to the ideas they stood behind and operated to promote in North Carolina, organizing with low working budgets and on the brink of total economic demise multiple times before their actual disband in 1988. As Daniel Kevles argues, “Eugenics is often dismissed as a crank movement energized by pseudoscience, but we need to bear in mind that science is in any day what scientists do and defend. Eugenics fell squarely in the mainstream of scientific and popular culture.”

As I have shown in this chapter, the eugenics appeal for the League grew, rather than diminished, with the development of more advanced, robust, and technologized science and medicine. In each period of their work, the League was constituted by, connected to, and helped to foreground authorities in the fields of science and medicine. Thus, I seek to provide critique of Mark Largent’s argument that scientific and medical professionals had retreated nearly completely from eugenics by 1980. Rather, I find that authorities in the expanding field of

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reproductive control and genetics may have found legitimization of their work, their eugenics rhetoric, and its applicability to the future of humanity through organizations such as the HBLNC.

In chapter 3, I expand on the middle period of the League’s history to understand the dynamics between the local and global history of population control. For now, I turn to chapter 2 to understand who did the work of the HBLNC, what roles women occupied in the history of eugenics, and how the eugenic feminism propelled the League’s transformations across time.


Chapter 2: A Woman’s Work

The Gendered Dynamics of the HBLNC

From the very beginning, it was women who paved the way for the HBLNC’s work. Prior to the fateful 1946 vacation exchange while Elsie Wulkop was on vacation (as described in the Introduction), another charter member of the HBLNC, Alice Gray, was instrumental in removing federal bans on the dispersion of birth control materials through the mail. In 1936, Gray joined forces with Margaret Sanger – a renowned birth control advocate – to make the tactics of mailing campaigns that epitomized the HBLNC’s first decade possible in the first place.

Though other scholarship has examined the League, relatively no attention has been paid to the group’s gendered dynamics in an era of history where women’s rights and access to science, reproductive control, and sexual liberation were on the forefront of American minds. Scholarship that examines such emerging spaces of political, ethical, and economic contention often considers the roles of women in a variety of feminist movements or their advocacy for reproductive access and protections. Other work, such as Schoen’s Choice and Coercion, considers how birth control affected the lives of women with different identities and socioeconomic status. But what about women’s roles within emerging forms of eugenics advocacy in the latter 20th century?

Whereas many other forms of feminism vouched for unconditional, expansive access to reproductive tools for women, the access proposed by HBLNC women in leadership, such as Marion Moser and Kate Garner was conditional on anticipated elimination of the unfit. This complicates the often-rigid divides between the “eugenics” and “feminist” projects of the latter 20th century. Though Moser and Garner took women’s access to reproductive tools as their
objectives, they participated in “eugenic feminism” by tying women’s reproduction to the state.\footnote{I expand on this term “eugenic feminism” later in the chapter.}

In this chapter, I focus primarily on three women in League leadership who span the chronology of the organization’s existence – Jessie Stroup, Marion Moser, and Kate Garner. I argue that the League’s gender dynamics help explain how the organization was successful across so many different periods and types of advocacy. Further, I use this outlook to analyze the intricate connections between seemingly disparate movements of feminism and eugenics that both took reproductive control as the outcome of interest. I argue that it was women’s collaboration within other networks of women and those concerned over women’s reproduction that enabled the shifting foci of the League’s eugenic impulse. Through adherence to a collaborative, reactive model of work, women enabled the League to institute new means for refining North Carolina’s reproduction beyond the expansion of sterilization.

Section I: Relationships of Power

Much as the role of the HBLNC within North Carolina transformed over time, so did the organizational power and influence of women within League leadership. As outlined in the introduction, the general organizational hierarchy was as follows: President, Board Members, Executive Director, Executive Secretary, Secretary, General Members. Higher ranking positions (President and Board Members) were often filled by high-ranking scientific and welfare personnel – PhDs, MDs, and state officials, and more frequently consisted of men. The Executive Director and Executive Secretary/Secretary role was only ever filled by women.

In essence, despite their different executive titles (see Table 1), Jessie Stroup, Marion Moser, and Kate Garner took on very similar responsibilities (to be described in the following
sections) within the HBLNC. From the mid-1950s onward, however, Moser and Garner’s agency and authority in shaping the HBLNC is what ultimately drove transitions in the organization’s focus and platform. Their authority did not represent a teleological development towards agency with the progression of time, but rather reflected key distinctions in relationships of power to other League authorities, as well as each woman’s relationship to scientific and medical expertise.

Table 1 Summary biographical information about Jessie Stroup, Marion Moser, and Kate Garner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Birth Date- Death Date</th>
<th>HBLNC Leadership Roles + Dates</th>
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**A Track Record of Women’s Engagements**

Though I will explore in the following sections how Stroup, Moser, and Garner had varying relationships to power in the HBLNC, there is important evidence across their nuanced biographies that connects their work: Each woman was well-versed in organizing, advocacy, and public education due to prior experience in spaces for women’s engagements.

Most of Stroup’s engagements in organizing for women took place in her birth place of New Mexico before she relocated to North Carolina. In 1917, Stroup was elected the Chairman of the New Mexico Suffrage League. Within a 10-year span following the 1920 ratification of the 19th amendment, Stroup was also Secretary of the Bernalillo County Women’s Auxiliary to the New Mexico Council of Defense, County Chairman of Republic Women – where she formed other clubs to educate women on politics and civics – served on the Girls’ Welfare Board, was
Livingston 53

the Chair of the Literary Division of the Albuquerque Women’s Club and attended the National Women’s Suffrage Convention in Chicago.102

Moser and Garner’s civic engagements were also women centric. Moser’s work is more clearly tied to women through her membership in the America Association of University Women, North Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs, and the Democratic Women.103 Garner’s involvements do not spell out “women” verbatim. She was the Executive Director for the Greensboro Family Life Council, served on the Family Life Council of North Carolina, served on the North Carolina and National Council of Family Relations, and the Guilford County Home Economics Club.104 Garner’s work represents offshoots over concerns tangential to woman’s position in society over the 20th century. This meant organizing around managing the household and involvement in public education on issues facing North Carolina families, from divorce to unemployment to family planning, through local outreach in and around the 1960s, onward.105

Stroup, Moser, and Garner were instrumental in the operational functions of the HBLNC, perhaps because they were well-versed in the demands of doing organizational advocacy. However, this track record of engagements also intrinsically connects Stroup, Moser, and Garner’s work in the HBLNC to the larger landscape of historical lobbying and advocacy around women’s rights and choices that were unfolding at the time.

Women’s organizations have roots in the 19th century as a means for “elevating” the American woman’s ideas and expanding her “own possibilities as a social and intellectual

103 “Obituaries,” Greensboro News and Record, 2015, [https://greensboro.com/obituaries/article_01b0c48b-9c22-53df-8a53-3b8e40e0b5c0.html](https://greensboro.com/obituaries/article_01b0c48b-9c22-53df-8a53-3b8e40e0b5c0.html).
force.”

By the beginning of the 20th-century, over two million women in the U.S. were on board with these ideas and involved in women’s groups. Stroup’s advocacy work reflects some of the earliest concerns of women’s organizing which centered around suffrage, initially launched by “The First Convention Ever Called to Discuss the Civil and Political Rights of Women” held in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. Moser’s work exemplifies the ways women organized around identity groups and established collaborative communities of women. Garner’s own organizing focused on extensions of womanhood, such as family life, that required resource advances and policy protections. Hence, engagement in the HBLNC was perhaps a prong of “women’s” work for women in League leadership, an important consideration to keep in mind throughout the analysis of this chapter.

**Women Doing the Work**

Working under Gamble’s direction, Stroup carried out the League’s mailing program in its founding years and “Many a time she could be seen walking the several blocks from her apartment to the Post Office, carrying a far-too-heavy shopping bag loaded with pamphlets or books for mailing.” Both literally and metaphorically, women who occupied League leadership were the ones who carried out the bulk of tasks in operating the League. Without

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women who did the work, the group may have been much more inactive, had relatively little impact in interfacing with the public, and met its demise much sooner than 1988. Though men in League leadership were present and vocal at meetings, the translation of their ideas into tangible means of informing the North Carolina public was left up to women like Stroup, Moser, and Garner.

As indicated by the anecdote of Stroup’s post office visits, in the first period of the League’s existence, the work that needed to be carried out consisted of printing and mailing propaganda about eugenics sterilization, including but not limited to the examples of literature included in Chapter 1. Over time, correspondences to and from the League lay with the Executive Secretary and later the Executive Director. Other primary tasks that fell to Stroup, Moser, and Garner were those of fund raising, grant writing, membership solicitation, lobbying to political representatives, calling and presiding on meetings, documentation of meeting discussion, reports on the status of the organization internally and within the sociopolitical landscape of North Carolina, and investment in other similarly-oriented organizations.

Overall, the key point is that it was because of the labor of women that the League functioned. While it was typically male experts in science and medicine that were discussed in news pieces about the HBLNC operations, whose articles were published and distributed by the HBLNC, who took to the stage as the main expert actors of and consultants for League films, and who were chosen as keynote speakers for annual League meetings, it was women who made the day-to-day operations of the HBLNC possible. Women in League leadership were ultimately the ones who made the operation run. And increasingly, over time, they were also the ones setting the directions of the League’s efforts.
Jessie Stroup (seen in Figure 4) served as a charter member of the HBLNC, secretary from 1947 to 1956, and as director of the mailing program from 1947 to 1952.\textsuperscript{111} Stroup worked under the direction of Clarence Gamble – a primary source of influence and superintendent over the North Carolina group that he joined forces with James Hanes to create. Albeit that Stroup was the mailing “director,” the directives of the League’s early mailing program around eugenics sterilization lay nearly exclusively with Gamble’s vision for the work. In this capacity, Stroup had almost no authority in setting the League agenda though she bore responsibility for most of its outreach. In her correspondences with Gamble, Stroup was ordered to stand-by and await specific information regarding who was to receive what number of which mailing for any given month.

\textsuperscript{111} “Twentieth Anniversary Banquet,” Box 2, Folder 97, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
Stroup was not a college graduate and held no background in science or medicine. But this presented a particular sort of insight that was nonetheless useful to Gamble’s aspirations: Stroup was able to read and assess the anticipated mailings of the HBLNC in a way that any other lay audience might. Soon after beginning her work with the HBLNC, Stroup wrote to Gamble in 1948, “…as a lay guinea pig, I am delighted with [the mailing’s] clarity and amazed that anyone knowing so much as you do should be able to select exactly the facts an uninformed person needs. No wonder you are a great teacher.” Thus Stroup’s role in setting the agenda was moreso an exercise in helping Gamble refine his own agenda for the North Carolina group.

Dually, Stroup was integral in enabling Gamble’s sphere of impact within the HBLNC. Even as he went on to other endeavors, Stroup acted as a mouthpiece for Gamble within the League. For example, at Board meetings, Stroup raised concerns from Gamble about the organization’s work that he had passed onto her in their personal correspondences. She would then return information to Gamble about the important discussion items at the meeting, along with a copy of the meeting minutes. Stroup was foundational to printing and distribution of over half a million mailings that were sent in the League’s first few years of operation. She was also critically important in maintaining Gamble’s association with the HBLNC despite his being out of state.

Marion Moser’s (seen in Figure 5) engagement in shaping the direction of the HBLNC was much different than Stroup’s. However, foundational Stroup’s role in the early years of the League, Stroup did not make many strides in setting the agenda of the League – only in carrying it out. Moser joined the HBLNC in 1952 and quickly acquired organizational power, voted on by Board Members. In November 1954, she was granted authority to join other organizations at her discretion to represent the HBLNC.\textsuperscript{114} By May 1955, Moser was tasked with handling the “future publicity direction” of the League and named Executive Secretary.\textsuperscript{115} Though it is not entirely clear why Moser was granted these responsibilities through the delegation of the League’s Board, she did hold a degree in Library Science – an important mark of women’s qualification in the post-War period. As women entered scientific work in World War II and were promptly forced to re-enter the domestic sphere when the war ended, positions like “technical librarians”

\textsuperscript{114} “Minutes November 5, 1954; Box 31, Folder 521 in Gamble records at Countway Harvard.
and “science teachers” were boasted as important roles for women in national security and defense in the Cold War.\textsuperscript{116}

A substantial difference between Stroup and Moser and their relationships to power within the HBLNC lay in their dynamics with Gamble. While Stroup was tightly connected to Gamble and maintained advocacy for him within the HBLNC even when Moser took over the Secretary position, Moser was disconnected from Gamble. Rather than operate on Gamble’s directives, Moser enlisted his advice for shaping the League’s work on her own terms and purposes. The 1954 newspaper article that described Gamble as a “consultant” to the HBLNC depicted this shifting relationship accurately.\textsuperscript{117} For example, in 1962, Moser was preparing a seminar presentation where she would represent the League. She enlisted Gamble for help on this project only to ask for statistics and facts that she could include with her content.\textsuperscript{118}

As befit by her executive title and annual income from the League, Moser took initiative and made decisions, reporting back to higher-ranking men in the organization on the Board about her work \textit{after} it had already taken place rather than asking for their permission or guidance on what work she should carry out. Marion’s title as Executive “Secretary” was eventually upgraded to Executive “Director” sometime in the early 1970s, indicating that the full body of the League’s education and advocacy work was under her discretion. This had already been true, however, for well over a decade before the actual transition in title took place. It was also true

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that Moser’s authority in the League is what would most definitively shape the trajectory of the organization’s shifting eugenics platform – from overarching goals to the forms of its work.

Under Moser’s authority and agency in seeking out funding opportunities, coalescing state leaders, and paying close attention to the shifting state of affairs around reproduction, the HBLNC was able to produce its films, realign with the state on its objectives in family planning, and enmesh within larger networks of women’s organizations. Moser enabled an imperative period of transformation, accomplishment, and hope for the future of the HBLNC. In October 1977, the subcommittee on the future of the League stated that its accomplishments “have been as great or greater during the past decade than those of the antecedent two decades.” This was surely thanks to Moser’s work as an organizational glue that held the League together across rotating leaders and membership for over twenty-five years.

Following Moser’s shaping of the League from the mid 1950s until her resignation from the League in 1982, Kate Garner (seen in Figure 6) became the president of the HBLNC in the same year as Moser departed. Garner was not the League’s first woman president, but she did undertake a much more hands-on, involved approach to conducting, delegating, and shaping the League’s work that no past president had – man or woman. Garner’s role and agency in the HBLNC was similar to Moser’s, likely because Garner operated as the Executive Director in addition to being president.

Notably, a stark distinction between Moser and Garner was their types of organizational and institutional connections. While both League transitions towards population control and genetics (as identified in Chapter 1) took place under Moser, it was Garner’s professional connections that seem to have led to the full rectification of what would become the League’s final transition into the “Human Genetics League.” Garner was a retired faculty of Bowman Gray Medical School – yielding close proximities to the emerging field of genetic medicine and male genetic experts like those who had long occupied space in HBLNC leadership. As I
explored in the last section, Stroup, Moser, and Garner were all interconnected with many forms of advocacy through organizational interest groups. However, Garner was the only woman who occupied such a labor-burden position of HBLNC executive leadership – Executive Director – while also welding her own background and engagement within scientific and medical spaces that were generally associated with the figurehead men of the League. Thus, Garner was able to fully assert herself within the emerging space of genetics to be both a critical internal workhorse and external representative of the HBLNC in the 1980s.

One way Garner did this was by readily vocalizing her simultaneous concerns and doubts about the HBLNC alongside her goals for the organization through a newsletter format that featured a “President’s Message” section. Moser wrote “Executive Director Reports” that were often used by higher executives, like Board Members, only. In contrast, Garner derived “President’s Message” correspondences that were shared with the entire membership at Garner’s discretion. In Volume 1, Number 1 of the newsletter, Garner admitted that she “approached the presidency with real trepidation,” but was ultimately won over by the fact the organization was both “respectable” and “greatly needed.”

Through these communications, Garner became the first woman in League leadership to take full heed of what it meant to both do the work of the HBLNC and directly shape the organization through her own expertise, rather than relying on the expertise and intellectual insights of male representatives, like Moser did. As I noted, this did not happen in a chronological, linear march to agency for women in League leadership. Rather, this transformation reflects shifting backgrounds of the women involved with the League’s work. For

120 “The League Newsletter, Volume 1, Number 1,” Box 2, Folder 128, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
Garner, her agency in the organization sometimes meant taking bold positions which directly contradicted the guidance laid out in by League discussions at which men occupied most seats at the metaphorical table.

One example came from Garner’s retrospective disagreement with the subcommittee on the League’s future from 1977. The report from this committee stated that the HBLNC’s strength was its capacity for responding to changing needs given that it was “not wedded to a single cause.” Thus, even as the HBLNC shifted towards genetics there was collective agreement among the subcommittee members that the organization was one that could cast its involvement wide and shift to different areas of interest as it saw fit. Garner, on the other hand, said that the “quality of human life as determined by genetics [was] not being promoted by any other group and, thus, wanted to fill this gap as a one-cause organization focused on human genetics.

By the end of 1983, under Garner’s rule, the League set its new hyper-focus on genetics by amending the constitution and even agreed on a name change, becoming the North Carolina Human Genetics League. The name reflected the League’s calling as the sole voluntary citizen’s group in North Carolina that was “singularly devoted” to human genetics advocacy.

Section II: Broadening Horizons

Even as Moser and Garner formed their own authority over what was a traditionally masculine project of eugenics – the support of forcible cessation of parenthood via sterilization –

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121 “Report of the Subcommittee on the League’s Future,” Box 1, Folder 3, in the HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
these two women upheld a particular sort of eugenic impulse. Drawing from historian Asha Nadkarni’s arguments, I propose Moser and Garner’s work as an example of eugenic feminism. Nadkarni assesses the role that reproduction played in “national progress and women’s rights,” with eugenic feminism centering reproductive practices as central to women’s citizenship within the U.S. and India.¹²⁵ Nadkarni’s argument applies to Moser and Garner’s concerns over North Carolina’s “human resources.” Both women invoked a specific “maternalist feminist investment” in reproduction as the means of progress and improvement in the state, supporting expanded reproductive tools as a means for societal improvement.¹²⁶

**Marion Moser and a Collaborative, Reactive Model of Work**

Moser is one of the most prevailing figures in the League’s archives and was one of the most emblematic in the League’s history. Not only did she bridge the first transformation of the League, but she also helped direct it. This first transformation from sterilization to population control was dually inspired by and made possible through Moser’s intentional enmeshment in spaces where she could monopolize on her connections to women’s organizing and integrate the HBLNC within these spaces and their work.

At the 1953, Board Meeting, “Mrs. Moser reported on her activities:”¹²⁷

She has centered upon personal contacts with officers of civic and educational organizations…She has interviewed state and local officers of the League of Woman Voters, N.C. Federation of Women’s Clubs, Junior Women’s Clubs, American Association of University Women, the Mental Health Assoc., listed our speakers with

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¹²⁶ Asha Nadkarni, *Eugenic Feminism: Reproductive Nationalism in the United States and India* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 8. The term “maternalist” or “maternalism” refers to motherly expressions of protection, often used to describe different forms of advocacy enacted by women to aid in the establishment of regulations or protections for certain groups in society – often those who are deemed unable to protect themselves, and thus, infantilized or characterized as akin to children.

¹²⁷ Board Meeting Minutes, December 11, 1953, Box 1, Folder 15, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
chairmen of program bureaus, wrote personal letters to all local presidents of the League of Women Voters. \textsuperscript{128} These connections directly led to the publication of HBLNC information in the N.C. Clubwoman’s November issue and in a bulletin for the League of Women Voters. \textsuperscript{129} But these connections also had many indirect and longitudinal impacts: They became lines of open communication and confluence for Moser’s entire appointment with the HBLNC. Through Moser, the HBLNC’s sphere of influence grew and their presence within the state was expanded and the objects of reproductive control they advocated for were reimagined.

These points would become clear within the next year, 1954, when Moser was granted authority by the Board of Directors to join other organizations at will. The semi-annual Board Meeting minutes from the May 12, 1954 stated that Moser had “emphasized the effort to get speakers on Eugenic subjects upon the programs of civic, cultural and religious organizations.” \textsuperscript{130} Moser had also attended the N.C. Federation of Women’s Clubs’ state convention to talk with club presidents and officers and display League literature. Moser’s engagements were a direct and highly impactful method for carrying the messages of the HBLNC into new spaces, with a demographic of the population who were directly implicated in the League’s work – women.

Later in 1954, Moser’s impacts were further affirmed. The League’s speakers were again listed with the “Speakers Bureau of the North Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs” but this time, notice about the listing was included in a North Carolina Clubwoman issue, which had a circulation of 17,000 subscribers. \textsuperscript{131} Moser also made arrangements for Dr. Herndon to speak

\textsuperscript{128} Board Meeting Minutes, December 11, 1953, Box 1, Folder 15, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
\textsuperscript{129} Board Meeting Minutes, December 11, 1953, Box 1, Folder 15, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
\textsuperscript{130} Board Meeting Minutes, May 12, 1954, Box 1, Folder 15, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
\textsuperscript{131} Board Meeting Minutes, November 5, 1954, Box 1, Folder 15, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
with the Winston-Salem Junior Woman’s Club in January of 1955 and planned her continued cooperation with other groups.\textsuperscript{132} Certainly, this continued cooperation and investment was Moser’s plan for her work with the HBLNC and motivated the following decades of her work.

These collaboration with other women and organizations in spaces of reproductive control is what expanded the relevance of the League and also seeded Moser’s insights that would transform the League. Moser’s work enabled the HBLNC to sprout and grow. Along with garnering extensive engagement with a plethora of women’s clubs, Moser began attending various conferences near the end of the 1950s. As will be covered more extensively in Chapter 3, a lot of talk around population control and family planning emerged in these conferences and were reported back to the HBLNC by Moser. During the May 18, 1960 meeting, Moser would make her first definitive statement on how the organization should reorient, stating that the “organization may have additional opportunities for service” with the increasing interests in population control.\textsuperscript{133} At once, while reporting on mailing sterilization info, Moser also cultivated how the HBLNC could tend to its work by taking on a new direction. Interspersed discussions about the League’s potential role in mounting concerns around population control, often provoked by Moser, continued with increasing frequency over the early 1960s.

The HBLNC’s official transformation came on November, 1965 when Moser identified that significant advances were being made around population policies and fertility control in her Executive Report.\textsuperscript{134} She ended the report by saying, “I believe that the upsurge in interest in the

\textsuperscript{132} Board Meeting Minutes, November 5, 1954, Box 1, Folder 15, in HBLNC records at Wilsonn Chapel Hill.

\textsuperscript{133} Board Meeting Minutes, May 18, 1960, Box 1, Folder 15, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

\textsuperscript{134} “Report of Executive Secretary, November 8, 1965,” Box 1, Folder 68, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
population problem will offer many opportunities for the work of our League.” 135 Several months later, on March 30, 1966, the HBLNC’s transformation was complete in the public sphere when Moser collaborated with another woman and League President Guion Johnson. Johnson was the League’s second woman president136 and a renowned sociologist of the U.S. South, often barred from the same opportunities that her husband was afforded in his professional career.137

The two-woman duo, Moser and Johnson, met with North Carolina state and county public welfare and health officials on March 30th to establish themselves as an aid to local and state family planning processes, “to discuss a broader role which the League might play, to pinpoint the unique function which the League might perform, and to establish broad guidelines for this performance,” according to Johnson.138 Moser and Johnson proposed that the League could serve a clearing house function to coordinate and synchronize family planning programs throughout North Carolina, continue to expand the League’s educational and promotional program, and develop and distribute appropriate materials.139 The various officials at the meeting agreed that the HBLNC could “digest” all the new information coming out about family planning for health, education, and welfare officials. Further they could “plant[] cultural ideas and standards among low income groups” – with the freedom to demonstrate, experiment, and serve

135 “Report of Executive Secretary, November 8, 1965,” Box 1, Folder 68, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
136 “Presidents,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
137 Sarah Caroline Thuesen, “Taking the Vows of Southern Liberalism: Guion and Guy Johnson and the Evolution of an Intellectual Partnership,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 74, no. 3 (1997): 284–324. Though Guion’s presidency was only a year, she worked with the League in ebbs and flows over the 1960s and 70s and was even named a Life Member of the HBLNC. This is an honor granted to “ex officio members of the Board of Directors in recognition of outstanding service to the Human Betterment League.” “Propose Amendment to the By-Laws of the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc., October 16, 1979,” Box 1, Folder 28, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
139 “An Expanded Family Planning Program,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
in ways that government agencies could not. As the North Carolina eugenics program decreased its sterilization endeavors, the HBLNC could act as a voluntary association for expanding family planning services – especially amongst low-income, welfare recipients.

Moser’s vision of focusing on population came to life under a “changing atmosphere in public opinion concerning the care, treatment, and causation of retardation and mental illness,” making it possible for the HBLNC to expand into the “entire field of conservation of North Carolina’s human resources” via family planning. Family planning services, which often included birth control advice and technologies, were part of emerging demands of feminist movements in the 1960s. However, even as Moser incited the League to shift towards reproductive tools associated with individual knowledge and choice, she upheld eugenic rhetoric of employing reproduction as an avenue for state progress and improvement and addressing the population “problem,” as she had laid out in 1965. Thus, while Moser and Johnson sought to make their organization useful in expanding access to family planning resources, their underlying focus remained on preventing the births of mentally “defective” children. Moser turned towards the tool of family planning as an arm of population control to inform the ways that human betterment could be carried out.

Moser’s earlier connections for broadening League horizons were often avenues for propagating the eugenics of HBLNC men via the sterilization literature that they authored. However, in guiding the league towards population control via family planning, Moser made her own mark on the eugenic impulse underlying the organization’s work: Family planning for

140 An Expanded Family Planning Program,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
142 “Our Seeds Sprouted,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
143 “Our Seeds Sprouted,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in HBLNC record at Wilson Chapel Hill.
Moser was a state investment that shaped favorable procreation and eliminated the proliferation of the unfit. Rather than rely on forcible and oppressive tools like sterilization, human betterment could be achieved via broader access to non-permanent and seemingly benign tools of family planning. These messages were packaged into “Windsong,” as discussed in Chapter 1. The film was funded in large part through Moser’s grant writing and letters of solicitation for money to support the film’s production. The film was ultimately made successful by relying on Moser’s well-established networks for movie rental, purchases, and distribution of the film.

Moser, nor any other singular actor of the HBLNC, can be solely credited with the work – internally or externally – of the group at any given point in time. Yet it is important to note that in my reading and re-reading of League files, Moser held the organization together. She was a foundational change-maker, largely in part because of she reconceptualized the League’s model of work. Moser shifted the public education initiatives of the HBLNC to be a deeply collaborative, connective, and reactive system through her own enmeshment in large networks of women and of groups engaged in reproductive control.

**Bridging the Second Transformation to Genetics**

The second transition of the League was towards genetics and genetic counseling. As noted in Chapter 1, the idea for this transition cropped up in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Meeting notes from this period included statements like: “Dr. Goodman…Being interested in genetics particularly [as a genetics expert, like other male medical and scientific professionals in the League], he felt that the League provide a valuable service in genetic education. Many people are aware of genetics but few feel qualified to act in this area.”144 Thus, this second

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144 Board Meeting Minutes, October 18, 1972, Box 1, Folder 15, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
transformation was not directly incited by Moser’s intellect or ideology but by elite males in HBLNC leadership. However, the League’s success in shifting from their focus on population control to genetics rested on the model of work established and refined by Moser until 1979 – one of personalized outreach, lobbying letters, and collaboration with populations and organizations of interest and who were also engaged in controlling reproduction.

In this second transformation, Guion Johnson, and later Kate Garner, would play key roles. In 1973, Johnson put forward the motion that the League Board of Directors authorize the President, Johnson, and Executive Director, Moser, to “begin planning definitively with Haycox Photoramic, Inc. for the production of a film on genetic counseling.”145 The film, “Wednesday’s Child” was finished in 1974 and pedaled via the tacts of distribution to those in network with the League – as with “Windsong.” Despite the waxing and waning of League membership that ensued over the rest of the decade, Garner emerged as an eager component of the group. Garner first joined the HBLNC in 1979, following collaboration between the Moser and the Greensboro North Carolina Family Life Council, of which Garner was the president. Through Garner’s agency over the HBLNC, as described earlier in this chapter, she became the pivotal player in the League’s work that would fully institute the transition to genetics and genetic counseling.

Like Moser, Garner tried to elevate the League by keeping the organization’s work relevant to an unrealized landscape for genetics in North Carolina – much as population control had been. For example, in a 1987 grant proposal, Garner noted that public information about Alzheimer’s disease was “needed” and that the HBLNC was “better qualified than any other

group to bring attention to the genetic factors involved.” In her work on consolidating the HBLNC into the North Carolina Human Genetics League, Garner’s interests are telling.

In a 1984 letter, Garner wrote to North Carolina Governor Martin to figure out how he was going to foreground the importance of human genetics as a “governmental issue” and ways he would incorporate genetics into his administration. In a sample letter to a “policy maker” in 1985, Garner wrote, “Our ultimate goal is to give every baby born in North Carolina the best possible chance for a happy, productive life.” Again, in a July 1987 letter to North Carolina State Senator Kenneth C. Royall Jr., Garner stated that genetics “affects all persons and future generations more directly than almost anything else” and extended the League’s service to the Senator. And in an undated proposal to North Carolina’s Department of Human Resources, Garner and the League said that they wanted to acquaint county and municipal government officials with “the nature of genetic birth defects as a social problem having adverse impact upon government, the allocation of tax funds and upon society itself.”

In the complicated history of genetic counseling and the attempts made to separate genetic counseling from the eugenics movement (see Chapter 1), Garner’s ideas aligned with anticipated and directed reduction of particular lives through a supposed “non-directive”

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resource. Garner focused on future generations’ suffering and public resources, rather than suggesting genetic counseling services as a model for helping individual parents make their own decisions and put the interests of the counselee and their family “before those of the society and the state.” Again, foregrounding these claims and concerns provides an example of eugenic feminism closely aligned with Moser’s own and of the eugenic feminism that Nadkarni defines in her work. Moser and Garner combined elements of liberation and forced control – intertwining the seemingly feminist push for expansion of reproductive tools with the eugenic impulse of harnessing reproduction for particular social, economic, and political outcomes.

**Section III: Identity, Intent, and Historical Silences**

A 1978 letter of solicitation for funds to current and prospective League members affirmed that the League wanted to continue its focus on genetics via counseling. However, the HBLNC also noted that the “thousands of illegitimate pairs of parents producing unwanted offspring each year” in North Carolina provided evidence that the HBLNC’s goals in educating the public on family planning had not yet been attained. “We need to spread the word and make [family planning] counseling more widely available,” the letter prompted, “Over 50% of these mothers are 17 years of age and younger. Further, unwanted children are often subject to abuse.” Statements like these exemplify the complications in understanding the League’s role in North Carolina, its intentionality, and the ambiguity between an admirable, progressive stance

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152 Letter from League Treasurer and Vice President to Current and Prospective Members, Box 4, Folder 139, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

153 Letter from League Treasurer and Vice President to Current and Prospective Members, Box 4, Folder 139, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
to help others and a paternalistic or maternalistic, self-fulfilling endeavor that created harmful historical silences in the work of the HBLNC.

In these historical silences, why were those “illegitimate pairs of parents producing unwanted offspring” who were more likely to be “subject to abuse” infantilized? For all the collaboration under Moser and Garner’s guide, what evidence lies in the networks that remained unkindled – enabling potentially harmful speculation on the lives of often poor, Black or Brown women that ignored the actual demands and space these women held? It is possible that where I have suggested Moser and Garner engaged in eugenic feminism by tying reproduction to the state actually represents a strategic use of rhetoric on behalf of Moser and Garner and other League authorities to prompt the state into reproductive resource expansion. However, the League’s continued emphasis on defining “normal lives” alongside the “improvement of North Carolina’s human resources” beckons a reckoning of the identities of Moser and Garner, and of the HBLNC more generally.154

The Positions of Moser and Garner

Moser and Garner took heed in shaping the League’s focus towards reproductive services that were associated with degrees of choice and that required an opt-in model for their use. But what were Moser and Garner’s identities and what societal spaces did they occupy? What sorts of women engaged with the HBLNC and how did this play a role in the development of eugenic feminism that I propose aligned with the work of Moser and Garner particularly?

Moser and Garner were college-educated, White women. Moser was a graduate of Greensboro College in 1931 and then obtained a Library Science degree from the University of

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154 Letter from League Treasurer and Vice President to Current and Prospective Members, Box 4, Folder 139, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
North Carolina at Chapel Hill a year later, in 1932.\textsuperscript{155} Garner graduated from Mars Hill Junior College and went on to graduate from Tift College in Georgia in 1952.\textsuperscript{156} In 1959, she received a Master’s of Science in Home Economics at Greensboro College. While I could find no definitive information about their economic statuses, both women were married and employed. Moser was a high school teacher and Garner was a retired faculty of the Bowman Gray School of Medicine.\textsuperscript{157}

While Moser was paid a salary to work with HBLNC in her time as Executive Secretary and then as Executive Director, all other roles in the organization were voluntary. Thus, it seems safe to assume that both women were middle-to-upper class given the small salary for Moser’s extensive work and that Garner took on the role in her retirement as a fully unpaid position. Further, Moser and Garner seem representative of the other women who were involved in the work via comparison to figures like Guion Johnson, Alice Gray, and Jessie Stroup.

As Rebecca Kluchin argues, in the historical period of the 1950s to 1980s, White women often experienced a lack of access to birth control practices while rarely experiencing coercive tactics of reproductive manipulation, unless they were poor or disabled. As a result, many White feminists and White women who engaged in feminism or advocated for expanded reproductive resources did so in a way that framed reproductive rights as a struggle to access health care services.\textsuperscript{158} These groups assumed that overturned restrictions would automatically grant reproductive freedom.\textsuperscript{159} But often they made no mention of being free from coercion. Certainly, Moser nor Garner nor other representatives of the HBLNC ever made a point to emphasize that

\textsuperscript{155} “Obituaries,” 2015.
\textsuperscript{156} “Obituaries,” 1995.
\textsuperscript{159} Kluchin, \textit{Fit to Be Tied}, p. 149
women could opt out. Instead, they only foregrounded that more and more women in the state could and needed to use family planning and genetic counseling resources.

Historian Johanna Schoen situates how racial identity – among other aspects of identity – led to an uneven terrain in North Carolina and across the U.S. in which birth control access and choice emerged. Schoen argues that poor women and Black women in North Carolina particularly were “squeezed” in both directions – dually unable to access voluntary birth control practices they expressed desire and need for, while targeted by involuntary, coercive, and forceful eugenics and birth control programming. These scholars give insight to the unfurling of the HBLNC’s eugenic impulse under the leadership of Moser and Garner. Resultantly, there seem to be two options.

First, Moser and Garner may have organized for access to reproductive tools because they were oblivious to the harmful implications of the need for women to also be free from coercion into using such tools. As noted by Kluchin, women of Moser and Garner’s societal position would rarely have been forced to undergo sterilization or be coerced into reproductive decisions they did not independently make. Remember the example of Mrs. Berrington from Chapter 1. A college graduate and the wife to a leading businessman, Mrs. Berrington was presented with medical advice from her physician when making a decision about sterilization rather than having the physician make this choice for her like other women in Moya Woodside’s article. Thus the HBLNC may have presented Moser and Garner an opportunity to support expanded reproductive tools with scientific and medical evidence and the support of experts in those fields as an extension of their work in and around women’s organizing and family-oriented advocacy groups.

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The second option is that Moser and Garner may have organized for access to reproductive tools because these tools were less tainted societally – unlike sterilization – but were still insidiously targeted at subsets of North Carolina women. Thus, in supporting “liberatory” demands comparable to feminist spaces, Moser and Garner were aware that poor, Black women or women of lower socioeconomic statuses would be most reproductively limited by family planning and genetic counseling – even if the HBLNC’s public-facing work deemphasized race and class. Not only would these services reduce the number of mentally unfit in North Carolina, which Moser and Garner explicitly advocated for, but they would also reduce the number of other types of lives in North Carolina – perhaps an unnamed goal of the League.

A variant of this latter option might also be that Moser and Garner tacitly approved of policies that would disproportionately focus on limiting the reproduction of poor people and people of color, not out of direct prejudice but second-order prejudice that the kids of these populations were perceived as those most likely to be a social and economic drain to the state. When it came to identifying North Carolina’s avoidable costs, historical actors like Moser and Garner focused on diminishing those state-funded programs that supported poor communities and communities of color rather than addressing state-funded programs that benefitted wealthier, White people – such as themselves.

Neither option can be fully supported nor refuted from the evidence I have been able to access. However, looking to anecdotal examples of the kinds of work that Black women were conducting in the space of reproductive resources and advocacy within the same historical periods as Moser and Garner is useful for contextualizing the lack of representation in the League. I assess the role of Black women not only because they have often been the most integral actors in shaping women’s rights throughout history, and especially within the second-

\textbf{Black Women’s Organizing in North Carolina and Beyond}

Black women were at the forefront of expanding women’s options in controlling their own reproduction. But no Black women were involved in the HBLNC – even beyond the end of legal segregation. And though Moser worked diligently and extensively to connect with other organizations in similarly-aligned spaces – particularly with women’s organizations – these networks did not include predominantly Black, women’s groups. Why? In this section, I explore a few examples of some Black women’s experiences organizing for reproductive freedoms in the state and beyond to juxtapose their experiences and engagements with Moser and Garner.

Perhaps one reason that Black women were not involved with the HBLNC is because there was no representation of the intersectional demands and struggles Black women were organizing on at the time. For many Black women, expanded access to tools like birth control, which conflated with their rights as women, could not be extrapolated from an imbedded fight for Black liberation in ongoing struggles for Civil Rights. Lee Faye Mack embodied this in her own organizing. Mack was a well-known community activist since the 1960s in none other than Winston-Salem, North Carolina – the home-base of the HBLNC. Mack co-founded Mothers for Black Liberation and the Winston-Salem Welfare Rights Organization and was one of the first women hired in the Experiment in Self Reliance to organize women in the city.\footnote{“Obituary | Lee Faye Mack,” Russell Funeral Home, Inc., 2019, \url{https://www.russellfuneralservice.com/obituary/lee-faye-mack}.} She was also
embedded in the Winston-Salem Black Panther Party (BPP) chapter since its inception in 1968. Contemporarily and in retrospect, Lee is known as the mother of the BPP.\textsuperscript{163}

However, while BPP men in Winston-Salem recognized the asset that Mack was to their agenda for Black liberation, Black Nationalist men in the BPP often opposed critical aspects of Black women’s gendered struggles. Though the Black community writ large did not have one singular stance on eugenics or birth control in its many forms, opposition of family planning came to dominate the Black Power and freedom movement in the 1960s and 70s, in which male spokespersons were foregrounded.\textsuperscript{164} Tools like family planning and birth control had been linked to foreign aid and depopulation policies by the early 1960s – all of which was happening at the same time as the Civil Rights movement was emerging.\textsuperscript{165} As Planned Parenthood chapters expanded and more Black women took advantage of increasing access to birth control options, men within the Black Power movement framed birth control and family planning as part of a broader genocidal conspiracy against Black Americans.\textsuperscript{166} These notions were revamped again by expanding access to legalized abortion in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{167}

Mack’s organizing as a Black woman, a Black mother, and a Black person each reared demands that often conflicted.\textsuperscript{168} As a result, her intersectional identity and advocacy seems a far stretch from the work being done by the HBLNC. However, even when Black women engaged with predominantly White spaces, White women often tried to overshadow, silence, and take

\textsuperscript{165} Ross, “African-American Women and Abortion: A Neglected History,” p. 280
\textsuperscript{168} Worthington, “Black Panther Women,” “Winston-Salem.”
Livingston 79

credit for Black women’s demands, ideas, and work. Here, the history of the largest U.S.
feminist group, the National Organization for Women (NOW), provides an important example,
showing how trends of racism and classism in feminist spaces emerged and prevailed.

NOW was formed in 1966 in New York, co-founded by White feminist Betty Friedan, along with Civil Rights activists Pauli Murray – a queer, non-binary person of Black, White, Native American, and Irish descent – and Aileen Hernandez, a Black woman. From its inception, NOW was technically an integrated space. But Murray left their leading role in NOW because they did not believe the organization appropriately addressed the issues of Black and working-class women. By the 1980s, NOW formed a Women of Color Programs (WOCP) in response to accusations of racism and classism in their organization and the broader feminist movement.

Loretta Ross, a Black feminist and advocate for reproductive rights, was hired as the Director for WOCP. Ross asked NOW to provide funds for a national reproductive rights conference she helped organize for women of color. This conference was dedicated to discussing how women of color could impact a feminist reproductive rights movement that “often neglected their needs and demands.” Ross’ request came on the condition that White women in NOW’s leadership positions fund the conference but remain behind the scenes by only sending women of color representatives – that they put up their money, but not get the “spotlight.” Nonetheless,

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173 Nelson, “‘All This That Has Happened to Me Shouldn’t Happen to Nobody Else,’” p. 137.
174 Nelson, “‘All This That Has Happened to Me Shouldn’t Happen to Nobody Else,’” p. 137.
the President of NOW, a White woman, was scheduled to give a keynote address at the conference, in which she diverged entirely from the advice she solicited from Ross. Instead of foregrounding the fight against racism within and outside of the feminist movement, echoing stories of past sterilization abuse, and the need for women to control their own bodies, the President targeted women of color from the rhetoric of “What you people need to do is…” Thus, even in those spaces of “integrated” feminist work, racial and class divides and discrimination prevailed.

**Eugenic Feminism**

Historiographical work around the idea of “eugenic feminism” mostly ties the term to the early 20th century. Though there is no precise timeline, “eugenic feminism” is rarely an idea that is associated with prevalence beyond the mid-20th century. This may be due to the fact that there is a similar trajectory of the prevalence of the term “eugenics,” which has no singular definition and no strict time period but is largely relegated to the pre-War period. However, work like Nathaniel Comfort’s *The Science of Human Perfection* and Judith Daar’s *The New Eugenics* explore the legacies, continuations, and re-instatement of eugenics goals and thinking. This scholarship represents important historical intervention in the history of eugenics. There are even fewer conceptions of the intricate connections between the history of eugenics and of feminism and consideration of the women who took part in “eugenics” work, however.

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175 Nelson, ““All This That Has Happened to Me Shouldn’t Happen to Nobody Else,”” p. 138.
One pertinent woman in history who exemplifies eugenic feminism is Margaret Sanger. Sanger is perhaps the most prominent White feminist associated with the American birth control movement. However, Sanger built alliances with eugenicists to strengthen funding and support for expanding access to various forms of reproductive control. Additionally, Sanger made use of eugenics rhetoric of improving American reproduction and arguments in support of population control via birth control as a way to garner legislative support for birth control policies and tools. In historical work, however, it should not only be women who are studied for alignment with a eugenic feminist model of advocacy for women’s rights.

Take for example, Wallace Kuralt – head of the Mecklenburg County public welfare program from 1945 to 1972 and a vocal participant in Moser and Johnson’s 1966 family planning transition meeting. As birth control research advanced, family planning often occupied the role sterilization once filled in North Carolina. Under Wallace, Mecklenburg County, which once sterilized three times more people than any other in North Carolina, opened family planning clinics to serve the women who would have once been sterilized under their earlier programming – disabled, poor, and often Black or Brown women. Though Kuralt was a proponent of expanded services to increase women’s access to birth control and to control their own reproduction, he prioritized economic and social costs when proposing family planning to politicians. Further, he is historicized as having been integral in women’s reproductive rights through expanded birth control access, much as Sanger also is.

178 Schoen, Choice and Coercion, p. 3.
Like Kuralt and Sanger, Moser and Garner posited expanding family planning, birth control, and genetic counseling measures access as contingent on state, social, and economic improvement, contributing to the eugenic and coercive nature of these programs. I have argued that Moser and Garner did not advocate for explicit control of women’s reproduction in the way that the League once advocated for “use” of the sterilization law. However, the attachment of expanded state reproductive resources to social and economic concerns led to a continued controlling of certain women’s reproduction rather than extending these women their own reproductive control, as Johanna Schoen argues. Moser and Garner’s concerns for women were not responsive to marginalized women’s needs or desires for reproductive resources and the choice to interact or not with these services. As a result, Moser and Garner contributed to the harms and violence that disproportionately impacted Black women in North Carolina.

Though the HBLNC’s archives are void of explicit racism, early male authorities connected to the League were closely associated with racist ideals and funding in the early years of the organization from 1947 to the mid-1950s. Before being connected to the HBLNC, Gamble argued, “The mass of Negroes, particularly in the South, still breed carelessly and disastrously, with the result that the increase among Negroes, even more than among whites, is from that portion of the population least intelligent and fit, and least able to rear children properly.”

These ideas fit squarely with the racism of most White, male eugenicists at the time and are representative of the earlier, more explicitly racialized ideals tied to eugenics belief. C. Nash Herndon, president of the American Eugenics Society and founder for the Department of Medical Genetics at the Bowman Gray School of Medicine, was the League’s third president from 1955-1959 and had been involved with the organization since its inception as an influential

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Board Member. In 1950-1951, he accepted well over $1,000,000 in current value from a philanthropist with a record of paying for research that attempt to prove White people as superior to Black.\textsuperscript{183} The money was to be used for sterilization work in Forsyth County – of which Winston-Salem was the county seat with a 45.1% Black population in 1940.\textsuperscript{184}

It is not fair to assume that because of these men’s interests in racialized policy and research that the latter women of the League held similar ideals. However, from my research, the HBLNC and Moser and Garner did not seek Black women’s representation in their group. Even as the organization continued its operation in the period following public integration, the League remained segregated. This was paired with the high racial tensions in Winston-Salem. Winston-Salem had a large Black population as an urban Southern city in the early to mid-20th century.\textsuperscript{185} Though North Carolina and the city of Winston-Salem are often hailed in collective memory as progressive hubs in the South, Ashley Carter argues that Winston-Salem’s seeming racial harmony in the era of Civil Rights obscures the strong presence of organizations based on race and the racial extremes in the fight for civil rights that percolated in the city into the 1980s.\textsuperscript{186}

**Conclusion**

While doing archival research for this thesis, I was overwhelmed with the operational roles that women in HBLNC leadership played. When questioning how the League prevailed across 41 years and made two seemingly disconnected transitions in the orientation of their work, I found that the answer lay in the work and agency of women. This chapter assesses the


gendered dynamics of the HBLNC’s history, utilizing Jessie Stroup, Marion Moser, and Kate Garner. Further, I assess how Moser and Garner were foundational in broadening the horizons and re-shaping the trajectory of the HBLNC through a new model of collaboration and reaction to parallel, interconnected organizations and work. Lastly, I contextualize Moser and Garner within a broader landscape of reproductive control advocacy.

With expanded agency and authority, Moser and Garner were responsible for the shifts from sterilization to population control to genetics. However, Moser and Garner participated in eugenic feminism – in which concerns over women’s access to reproductive tools was contingent on their connection to state social and economic concerns. In Chapter 3, I more fully consider the stakes of reproduction in North Carolina and internationally, investigating how and why local and global concerns targeted reproduction to intervene for the future of humankind.
Chapter 3: “Our own back yard is extremely important”*

The Future of North Carolina and The Future of the World

On November 5th, 1964, Marion Moser noted that the national and world-wide publicity on population problems and control were deeply impacting public opinion. “I find a “great deal of interest on this subject throughout the state,” Moser said.187 Due to Moser’s extensive collaboration and connection with other North Carolina groups, she was surely one of the best informed people in North Carolina to make such a statement. By 1964, population control was at the top of the docket of many international agendas and the HBLNC began considering the impact that their organization could have via population control from the mid-1950s to 1960s.

Following the second World War, eugenicists’ concern with race betterment and squandering the number of “unfit” was supplanted by concerns over an impending, detrimental population explosion.188 Though I have argued throughout this thesis that particular historical episodes of eugenics prevailed across the latter half of the 20th-century, the emerging fixation with population presents an interesting clash wherein population quality concerns shared space with emerging anxieties over population quantity. This transition was largely thanks to the efforts put forth by private agencies and foundations to legitimize population control as a means

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* This quote was included in “Minutes, May 10, 1965,” Box 1, Folder 15, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.


for securing Western control over the Global South – from resources to political power. Thus, on many (but not all) fronts, population control was an policy grandly applied to the “underdeveloped” world. With the help of cultural outlets like newspapers, novels, and nonfiction paperbacks such as Henry Osborn’s *Our Plundered Planet*, and through networks of government and research officials, the fear of global population (largely the population size of countries outside of the U.S. and Western Europe) took the world by storm.

These concerns over population quantities did not entirely align with the League’s mission to address population quality. Further, organizing for and advocating around eugenic sterilization of the “feeble-minded” and mentally disabled may seem far removed from concerns over limited global resources and an expanding world population thanks to the advance of science, technology, and medicine over the first-half of the 20th century. Was population size even a concern for North Carolinians at all? Why would Moser and other actors of the HBLNC choose to take heed of population “problems” and control, transforming their goals and even re-writing parts of their constitution as a result?

I argue that the seemingly disjunct era in the HBLNC’s history where the group focused on population control via family planning exposes local manifestations of global narratives, anxieties, and goals over harnessing women’s reproduction to secure social, political, and...

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economic goals. Analyzing this reorientation for the League helps assess the transitions from eugenicists’ concerns over human *quality* to population control activists’ concerns over human *quantity*, and the interwoven relationship between the two. The conjunct local and global histories in this chapter highlight intricate entanglements between reproduction, international development economics and politics, and objectives for the future of the world between the Global North and Global South. Further, this chapter explores how North Carolina was an important locus for international population control through the work of the Carolina Population Center – thanks in part to the emphasis of population that was continually integrated into the state’s ideological environment by the HBLNC since 1947.

**Section I: The Local and Global Roles of North Carolina Actors**

In 1958, the Human Betterment League sent a representative to the North Carolina Conference for Social Service in Raleigh, dubbed “New Frontiers in a New Age.” 191 It is apt to analogize the actors of the HBLNC to pioneers on the “new frontier” of population policy: The organization was, and its constituents considered themselves to be, leaders in efforts in the state on this front. If the actors of the HBLNC had redeemed sterilization from its Nazi legacies and sparked “a decided increase in the number of sterilizations performed,” as discussed in Chapter 1, then they could also push the bounds for reproductive policy and control in a new era of anxiety and fear pertaining to the quantity of human lives around the globe. 192 Though North Carolina’s population size did not prevail as a tangible issue for the HBLNC, the concerns of HBLNC actors, like Marion Moser, exemplified a direct response to the expanding global “frontier” of population policies, anxieties, and goals.

The Contexts of Work in Population Control

An important backdrop of the HBLNC’s work was the use of Western knowledge and technologies to address international welfare for the sake of democratic politics within the Cold War. There were three main tenants of aid provided to regions of the Global South in order to promote these objectives. One option, food aid, was to divert surplus food from regions with abundant calories to those with food shortages. The second option, biotechnology, was to provide tools that enabled impoverished regions to better produce their own crops, inspiring Green Revolutions. The last option was to harness reproductive control of areas of the world with high birth regions to slow population increase. This third option provided an opportunity for the HBLNC and related organizations to recognize connections and associate themselves with global development, since reproductive control was their stock in trade.

Mark Collins, in his dissertation, proposes that investment in international reproduction was an investment in nationalism and security for the United States as reproduction became a site for U.S. containment against potential Nuclear War and the expansion of Communism following World War II. And Aiko Takeuchi-Demirci argues, the expansion of controlling births globally during the Cold War period facilitated U.S. expansionism and imperialism, marking a period in which politics of the reproductive body became a means to achieve international agendas and promote anti-Communism. Rather than situating the issues of expanding population and resultant gaps in monetary and material resources as a problem to be dealt with through redistributive means, reproductive solutions like family planning, intrauterine

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devices (IUDs), and sterilizations in the Global South turned to reducing people rather than reducing inequities. The stance of tackling the economic denominator – population – rather than addressing the numerator – distribution of wealth and resources – veered away from policy that was perceived as too Communist for comfort in Cold War America.

The overarching guise of population concern and control, and the policies and goals of regulating fertility and childbirth around the globe, bound together many world-shaping forces and had deep rooted histories. Considering the weight that Cold War imaginaries bore in the popular culture, it is even plausible to speculate whether such lengths of international planning and U.S. interventionism would have been achieved without this political and military backdrop. Development through reproductive control was largely bound to “development” as a “catchphrase” that signified progress and modernity and consisted of aid that aligned with projects as ideological tools for conquering hearts and minds around the world.

**Clarence Gamble Abroad**

As previously established in this thesis, Clarence Gamble was a key authority in co-founding and catalyzing North Carolina actors to form the HBLNC. This endeavor was just one of Gamble’s many projects in the United States, largely centered around the U.S. South. However, for as long as Gamble had worked in and around reproductive control measures domestically, he also engaged in reproductive control on the international stage. Over the 1930s,

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196 Many ideas around the cause for concern over population size are rooted in Thomas Malthus’ arguments about the connections between population size and societal disorder in his famous 1798 writing, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Malthus warned that as human populations increased, unless restricted by mankind itself, the forces of disease, famine, war, or calamity would be the ultimate leavening agents of population growth. This sparked Malthusian thinking, which, much like Darwin’s theory of natural selection or Galton’s ideas about eugenics, had incredibly long-lasting ramifications and reintegration for a variety of academics and thinkers. Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. Geoffrey Gilbert, Oxford World’s Classics (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

40s, and 50s, Gamble led projects of birth control experimentation, contraceptive distribution, and sterilization in Japan, Puerto Rico, and beyond.

In 1957, a year that marked a noted step away from the HBLNC for him, Gamble founded the Pathfinder Fund to engage in “worldwide fieldwork in family planning.”\textsuperscript{198} This move came as Gamble was wealthy enough to divert his resources away from other international organizations he worked with that did not fully grant him the authority he sought. Instead, he funneled the money into a program of his own funding, design, and hopes. Historian Raúl López provides a notable case of Gamble’s work in Peru to address population control. This case exemplifies Gamble’s style of international reproductive manipulation, what the foundations of population control entailed, how population \textit{quantity} emerged as a site of Western concern, and how this site could be acted on through reproductive control via Western interventionism.

In Peru, Gamble quickly dispersed birth control information and tools such as IUDs, as quickly as possible, to as many women as possible. López dubs Gamble’s mechanism of intervention “high-handed boldness.”\textsuperscript{199} Gamble’s style of “rapid intervention” was “indicative of both the anxiety that population growth in the developing world produced [and] the lengths to which bold and charismatic individuals with means would go to do something about it.”\textsuperscript{200} The concerns of Gamble and akin contemporaries did not lie in the well-being or quality of life of those receiving birth control methods, as the name family planning may suggest. Rather, these birth control crusaders often neglected the long-term health outcomes and safety of the women impacted by their plans for the objectives of opposing rapid population expansion in “developing” regions. Further, López explains how endeavors like Gamble’s de-legitimized

\textsuperscript{199} López, “Gambling on the Protestants,” p. 345.
already-established state agencies which held deeper understandings of cultural contexts and potential concerns for Peruvian women receiving reproductive advice and technologies.

Gamble’s Pathfinder Fund had on-the-ground involvements in many other locations outside of Peru, but the anecdote of Peru is exemplary. Scientists knew at the time that the mortality rates from IUDs in the “Third World” were much higher than “in the West” and that the infertility sometimes caused by IUDs – along with a plethora of other very painful side effects and risks – could lead to severe social repercussions of “ostracisms, abandonment, and ultimately destitution” in Peruvian society.201 Yet, individuals like Gamble and the non-profit organizations (NGO) they spear-headed were absolved from longitudinal care for and responsibility towards the women whose lives they impacted. As Gamble moved quickly into new regions of the world, he could disregard the long-term consequences of his actions. These consequences have been even more far-reaching and long-lasting, serving key roles in prevalent, deep-seated mistrust of NGOs, international, and governmental health agencies in many regions of the world today.202

In 1965, the year of his final departure from the HBLNC and a year before his death, Gamble made a bold statement:

Through the Pathfinder Fund, with which I am working, we are sending initial supplies for the intrauterine method in many parts of the world. Thus far we have received reports, to include in our statistical series, from 142 doctors in 52 countries.203 Their patients are still few, about 10,500, but we believe these physicians will form centers from which the use of the method can extend to many doctors and many families.204

203 The countries in which the Pathfinder Fund was working and involved at this point seem to have been mostly located in Central and Latin America, as well as various regions of the Asian continent.
Gamble, and many other crusaders acting on behalf of international population control through birth control expansion, held fast to an ambitious objective to span the globe with reproductive control methods to limit reproduction in the Global South. Within these objectives, countries that researchers like Gamble ventured to often became testing grounds for reproductive tools that became hallmark to the U.S. sexual revolution and birth control expansion of the 1960s.

The exported knowledge of population control’s reproductive tools had to be refined and proven safe amongst the (mostly) women on whom they had been used and the women who made use of them in countries like Gamble’s Peru. As López indicates in his article, the “safety” of reproductive tools was either narrowly defined, only achieved through learning from harm by using countries as testing sites, or some combination of the two. I would like to note here that though my thesis is not centered on such stories, there is rich historical work around the relationships between those women in the Global South who were targeted for reproductive control and the birth control campaigns and crusaders who carried out such programs. Women in the Global South were not passive victims, nor were they simply subjected to reproductive manipulation, but rather they often took agency in either contesting such interventions or making use of these birth control tools despite the intentions underlying their opportunities to use them.205

**HBLNC at Home**

Over the course of the 1950s, the League took note of what Gamble was working on. In November 1954, Moser noted in the League’s minutes, “Dr. Gamble told of his recent trip

around the world. He said that the sterilization program in India and Japan had gained popularity and is receiving official recognition.”206 Even as sterilization would fade from use in most of the U.S., it was a method of birth control – often coercive, forced, or incentivized – that was exported to the global arena. Gamble continued giving updates on such programs, perhaps considering them to be of particular interest to the North Carolinians still primarily focused on the state eugenic law at that time. In 1959, Gamble wrote to Moser to ask her if she had “heard of the use of sterilization by the States of Madras and Kerala in India,” noting that because these states realized the “threat of overpopulation,” sterilization was free for parents of three or more – with an added incentive of 25 rupees.207 Certainly, the local sterilization work of the HBLNC had found new manifestations in international agendas and the members of the League may have felt motivated by their connection to such work.

Since at least the early 50s, the HBLNC tuned in to the building concerns around population and its weight on international agendas. In her November 5, 1954 report, Moser noted that the world was becoming aware of the overpopulation problem as evidenced by the United Nations World Population Conference where more than 500 experts from 68 countries gathered.208 The conference consisted of talks on fertility trends, population distributions and migration, economic and social development, and more.209 At that point, as the first conference of its kind, the event was limited to the exchange of ideas and experience, and “no conclusions or

policy recommendations were adopted.” Nonetheless, “it was apparent that there is a great need for ‘effective and universally accepted means of population control,’” Moser quoted. Though Moser did not contextualize the population problem to North Carolina particularly, as a leader of the North Carolina Human Betterment League, she began enmeshing international planning aspirations with her organization’s own.

Four years later, on May 13, 1958, Moser attended the “New Frontiers” conference from the beginning of this section, where former HBLNC Board Member, Gordon Blackwell, MD, spoke about the world’s increasing population as the first of “great changes taking place around the globe.” The U.S. population size alone seemed to be increasing at twice the speed as it previously had – retrospectively, thanks to the Baby Boomers following WWII. By 1960, Moser hoped that the HBLNC could have an exhibit at the World Affairs Conference to be held in Chapel Hill the following year. According to the Daily Tar Heel, this conference was the 11th of its type and was to discuss, “World Economic Development – Challenge and Opportunity” and was seemingly geared towards issues over population quantity, with talks like

211 “Report – Mrs. Moser, November 5, 1954,” Box 2, Folder 68, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill. It is unclear what Moser was quoting from since no indication is made in the meeting minutes. It is also unclear how Moser found out about the United Nation’s Conference and reported back on it to the HBLNC. It seems probable that through her own work or collaboration with other family planning and population-oriented groups, she encountered a summary report of the conference proceedings or was able to communicate with a representative who actually attended the week-long event. According to the summary proceedings, Professor Robert Dinkel in Greensboro, North Carolina, Dr. Charles Horace Hamilton in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Professor Joseph Spengler in Durham, North Carolina were all involved in the conference. See: Proceedings: summary report.
“Too Many People? Contemporary Population Problems.” By 1962, the President of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America and the World Population Emergency Campaign addressed the HBLNC at their annual meeting.

By 1965, when Gamble departed from the North Carolina League, the HBLNC was left not only with the insight of Gamble’s work, but the emerging ideas and authorities around population at home in the U.S. and in North Carolina to which they had become particularly attuned through Moser’s leadership. In her executive report for the year 1965, Moser noted that significant advances in population policy had taken place in the last few months alone: The Supreme Court nullified Connecticut’s anti-birth control law, New York State Legislature removed the ban on disseminating birth control information and devices, and the Office of Economic Opportunity had “made some small beginnings in anti-poverty grants for birth-control services.” Further, for the first time in history, Congress held hearings on a bill that would give federal agencies responsibilities in population fields and would set up agencies in federal departments charged with dealing with world population problems and domestic ones.

Simultaneously, the issue of world population was becoming more and more localized. Dr. Charles E. Flowers who “had just returned from a trip around the world, visiting many

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216 I was not able to find Guttmacher’s speech to the HBLNC, however a newspaper article about his address to the League was published in the Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel. This report indicated that Guttmacher had retired from his post as Director of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at New York’s Mount Sinai Hospital, taking up the Presidency for Planned Parenthood “to foster constructive action on the population crisis.” It seems reasonable to assume that the top authority of a world-leading group in population concerns ventured to North Carolina for no other reason than to discuss the population “crisis” at hand following their invite for him to be their annual keynote speaker; “Betterment League to Meet Wednesday,” Box 31, Folder 525 in Clarence Gamble papers, 1920-1970s (inclusive), 1920-1966 (bulk). H MS c23. Harvard Medical Library, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, Mass.
218 “Report of Executive Secretary, November 1, 1960,” Box 2, Folder 68, in the HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
countries and conferring with government officials and professional people” spoke at the May 10, 1965 League meeting.\textsuperscript{219} Flowers discussed “his deep concern” and “dismay” at what he saw on his journey, but he also provided words of encouragement, saying that there was “much being accomplished, sometimes in unexpected places” – “Our own back yard is extremely important.”\textsuperscript{220} The local actors of the HBLNC sought representation in the endeavors like Flowers described. Within the same meeting minutes, the HBLNC agreed that they would send a representative to the next annual Planned Parenthood Association meeting in New York.\textsuperscript{221}

This confluence of the global being made local and local actors seeking a hand in a global threat ultimately seems to have given rise to the group’s official transition towards family planning initiatives in North Carolina in 1966 as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Thus, Marion Moser and Guion Johnson’s efforts to set a ten-point agenda with state and county health and welfare officials on the topic of family planning, as a subset of population policy, in March 1966, was directly informed by contexts of near and far population control anxieties.

In this same year, League President Guion Johnson laid out the ultimate objective for the League: “This organization must go forward or discontinue.”\textsuperscript{222} Population control was the future. However, rather than abandon their initial and persistent endeavors in concerns over mental disabilities, the League saw this move as a possibility to expande its programming in the “conservation of North Carolina’s human resources.”\textsuperscript{223} Though the HBLNC was one of the first

\textsuperscript{219} “Minutes, May 10, 1965,” Box 1, Folder 15, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
\textsuperscript{220} “Minutes, May 10, 1965,” Box 1, Folder 15, in HBLNC records at Wilson at Chapel Hill.
\textsuperscript{221} “Minutes, November 7, 1966,” Box 1, Folder 15, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
\textsuperscript{222} “Our Seeds Sprouted,” Box 1, Folder 45b, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; In addition to setting up the expansion of the HBLNC’s scope, this statement invokes notions made by environmentalists, highlighting the movement’s connections to population control.
organizations in North Carolina to fully turn its attention to population control by attempting to lead a clearing house, state-wide coalesce of family planning organization and services in 1966, a new group emerged as an even bigger contender in the arena of population concerns: The Carolina Population Center (CPC).

The Carolina Population Center

The CPC was founded in 1966 as an interdisciplinary research center housed by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNCCH). In 1964, UNCCH Chancellor, Paul Sharp, invited Moye Freymann, PhD, to Chapel Hill to discuss the establishment of a population program at the college. At the time, Freymann was working under the Ford Foundation’s population program in India, having joined foundation staff in New Delhi in 1957.224 The Ford Foundation, created by Edsel and Henry Ford, was one of most expansive philanthropic groups that engaged in population programs and their funding in this period. Freymann had years of experience on the front lines in population planning, making him a versed expert to recruit to UNCCH. In the same year, Sharp appointed 11 faculty from an array of academic fields to form an interdisciplinary committee with the goal of developing a population center at the university.

It seems likely that Sharp set out on the mission of building the CPC because population was a salient area of academic and popular interest at the time. North Carolina had also emerged as a forerunner in population concerns, with leaders in population working throughout the state.

In the CPC’s 1966 brochure, the CPC is posited as the perfect culmination of an idealized university, state population, and state leadership. The university was noted to be “ideally situated for purposes of population research,” being part of the Research Triangle, close in proximity to federal research agencies and with abundant access to material and financial resources.\footnote{Carolina Population Center, “Population Program,” 1966, \url{https://www.cpc.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/history_1966_Population_Program_brochure.pdf}.} The state population was noted as having “widely diverse cultural and economic characteristics” to make population studies robust and contributive to the field.\footnote{Carolina Population Center, “Population Program.”} Hence, North Carolina was presented as an expansive laboratory for population research. Further, the CPC ascertained that North Carolina was a “pioneer in the health and welfare field” as the nation’s first state to offer family planning via tax-supported, public health facilities at a point in time when “such a step required considerable courage and foresight.”\footnote{Carolina Population Center, “Population Program.”}

Over the course of 1964 and 1965, Freymann helped Sharp’s committee secure funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and to ultimately prepare a proposal to the Ford Foundation that was sufficient to support the new center. Freymann left the Ford Foundation in 1966, having been appointed CPC director, and became the “principal architect” for the CPC.\footnote{Hewa and Stapleton, \textit{Globalization, Philanthropy, and Civil Society}, p. 135} He also joined UNCCH faculty as a Professor of Health Administration. Freymann pushed the CPC to work with the University, the state of North Carolina, and with other countries to improve population health.\footnote{“History of CPC,” Carolina Population Center, accessed January 29, 2022, \url{https://www.cpc.unc.edu/about/history-of-cpc/}.} At the time, population health was defined through improved understandings of a wide range of fields including anthropology, biostatistics, economics, epidemiology, genetics, health education, maternal and child health,
reproductive biology, sociology, demography, and other areas of study. Essentially, via the support of vigorous and diverse research on the scale of population analysis, the CPC hoped to improve humankind with the knowledge, insights, and trends it uncovered.

Though I will discuss later in this section how Freymann and the CPC’s ambitions took to the global arena, in their early years the CPC began locally. A year after their founding, on April 17, 1967, the CPC joined forces with other North Carolinians, designating themselves as “a Group of Persons Interest in Problems of Population and the Family,” to write to the Governor of North Carolina. This coalition proposed the establishment of a commission and an associated nonprofit corporation on population and family, stating, “The people of North Carolina have been American pioneers in the fields of health, education and welfare. During the past century, substantial advances have been made in the overall level of living of North Carolina’s people.”

The proposal continued, saying that, “Despite these advances, however, many problems remain.” This situation, the group proposed, demanded a “mechanism” that would “(1) identify more clearly the problems of population and the family in the State of North Carolina (2) educate the public and the private and official groups about the nature of such problems (3) consider and recommend appropriate policies and programs; and (4) assist in mobilizing and coordinating the efforts of concerned individuals and organizations in the state, so as to achieve the highest possible quality of population and of family living.”

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230 Carolina Population Center, “Population Program.”
233 “A PROPOSAL TO The Honorable Dan K. Moore Governor of North Carolina,” Box 259, Folder 14, in J.B. Matthew Records at Rubenstein Duke.
234 “A PROPOSAL TO The Honorable Dan K. Moore Governor of North Carolina,” Box 259, Folder 14, in J.B. Matthew Records at Rubenstein Duke.
commission for the Governor, the proposal continued, “This is a serious matter; it is to the quality of life itself that we address ourselves.”

The CPC’s plan was reminiscent of the HBLNC’s own ambitions for family planning within the state of North Carolina as discussed with county and state officials a year earlier. In fact, in May of 1967, a month after the commission proposal was sent to Governor Hunt, C. Horace Hamilton of the CPC attended the semi-annual meeting of the HBLNC to discuss their commission proposal with League members. But the CPC’s proposal went beyond organizing North Carolina’s family planning services, as the HBLNC intended. The CPC’s proposal more explicitly named ambitions like improving “the cultural and genetic quality of the population of the state,” along with “adjust[ing] the population to resources and to a rapidly changing technological and social environment,” “strengthen[ing] the family and the home,” and “improving the population and enriching family life in North Carolina.”

The CPC, like the HBLNC, intended to lean into the connects between goals of human caliber and population size. Despite similarities to the HBLNC and their goals to impact North Carolinians, the CPC went on to make their mark on population at a global scale in a way that the HBLNC never would. Simultaneously, the example of the CPC illuminates how local hopes were fueled by global endeavors, how global endeavors would become shaped by local constituents, and what stakes became intertwined in global reproductive policies. Though the CPC started with state

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235 “A PROPOSAL TO The Honorable Dan K. Moore Governor of North Carolina,” Box 259, Folder 14, in J.B. Matthew Records at Rubenstein Duke.
236 “New Commission Plans Discussed By Dr. Hamilton,” Box 259, Folder 14, in J.B. Matthews papers, 1862-1986. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library. Hamilton was also involved with the 1954 United Nations Conference, as noted in footnoted in an earlier footnote in that section. It seems probable that there was a more explicit connection between Hamilton and the League, and that Hamilton made have been the source of intel for the HBLNC in taking notice of what took place at the 1954 UN Conference. Hamilton may even be who Moser quoted in her comments on what took place at the conference. However, I was not able to make a direct connection of Hamilton to the HBLNC through the League files I accessed.
237 “A PROPOSAL TO The Honorable Dan K. Moore Governor of North Carolina,” Box 259, Folder 14, in J.B. Matthew Records at Rubenstein Duke.
actors, over the 1960s and 70s, the CPC became one of the largest centers for training family planning administrators from the Global South. This development may be attributed to Freymann, the Ford Foundation, and the India “project.” This “project,” led by Americans staffed in India through the Ford Foundation, sought to import Western population-based public health into India by exporting Indian officials to Western institutions for training.

Over the course of the following decades, the CPC undertook many more projects with scopes beyond teaching the world about its population problem and “grew to be a major resource for international agencies and programmes in the population and family-planning fields.”

Michelle Murphy provides on example of the CPC’s instruction methods in her book, The Economization of Life. In 1970, the CPC developed one of the world’s first interactive computer games. To be used in South Korea and Taiwan, the computer game was titled, “The Family Planning Administrator Training Game.” A 1972 article in the journal Management Science evaluated the game, giving insight into its purposes and the way it worked. Choosing how to allocate hypothetical funds to different sectors of a theoretical family planning program, player success was determined through mathematical modeling that output a printout with costs and savings based on reproductive rates and prevented births.

Gamers were given the chance to manipulate interrelationships that simulated a hypothetical country. This closely aligns with Jennifer Light’s analysis of “operational games,” which suggests that such simulations “played a pivotal role in spreading the gospel of [American

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238 Harkavy, Curbing Population Growth, p. 135.
social, political, and economic] systems to diverse populations.” In *From Warfare to Welfare*, Light provides evidence for the roots of these sorts of “games,” which were often foundationally inspired by American preparations for war. The game was designed to teach its “players” how to “visualize and to choose wisely” amongst population and economic dynamics. In turn, this instilled confidence that the policies promoted by the CPC’s funders – USAID – would result in idealized outcomes for that nation’s growth. In the CPC’s game, the player’s decisions printed out as a count of “averted births” and “cost per averted births.” These figures refer to expenditures and savings calculated on lives unlived. Or, in other words, what could be saved by countries if certain lives were avoided altogether – not brought into existence.

The 1972 review article simply stated the game “is to family planning what the game of chess is to chivalry. One plays the game to gain experience in making decisions in the face of uncertainty and of economic constraints involving the necessity of trade-offs.” Thus, through role-playing via the interface of a computer game, those involved in family planning could learn “effective planning and rational allocation of economic resources of population control programs” before applying these tactics to tangible human lives. The authors of the review argued that family planning administrators were not familiar with making “economic managerial decisions” – a pertinent skill given that the “irrational use of human reproductive power now profoundly influences the welfare of mankind.”

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245 Murphy, *The Economization of Life*, p. 51.
246 Murphy, *The Economization of Life*, p. 51.
247 Murphy, *The Economization of Life*, p. 51.
248 Murphy, *The Economization of Life*, “Averted Birth.”
249 Moreland et al., “The Carolina Population Center Family Planning Administrator Training Game.”
250 Moreland et al., “The Carolina Population Center Family Planning Administrator Training Game.”
251 Moreland et al., “The Carolina Population Center Family Planning Administrator Training Game.”
economic speculation closely aligned with contemporaneous claims made by the HBLNC from previous Chapters, showing the parallel tracks of such projects.

**Section II: The Stakes of Reproductive Policies**

In 1962, Marion Moser had the opportunity to speak at a seminar on “The Church and Planned Parenthood.” At that same seminar, another speaker, Richard Fagley, laid out the stakes of population control:

> The problem of population is the most neglected great social problem in the world today. It is a problem which affects to a grave degree the prospects of the developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America – their hopes for victory over the ancient enemies of poverty, misery, and illiteracy, and the achievement of more decent material conditions for this our earthly pilgrimage.  

From my research, Fagley was not directly involved with the HBLNC. Nonetheless, he was a historical actor connected in time and space to this era of the League’s work, engaged in the same conference as Moser, and is thus worth investigating.

Fagley’s description framed the issue of population as taking place *elsewhere* outside of the U.S., much as philanthropists like Clarence Gamble and the Ford Foundation envisioned. That the “enemies” – poverty, misery, and illiteracy – are described as “ancient” by Fagley helps to construct a seeming divide between the Global North and Global South on the measure of human progress. Those Asian, African, and Latin American countries that Fagley references had been unable to pass even rudimentary mile markers in “advancement,” over which countries like the U.S. had supposedly triumphed, largely due to population-related issues. Fagley’s statements

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252 From my research, Fagley was not directly involved with the HBLNC. Nonetheless, he was a historical actor connected in time and space to this era of the League’s work, engaged in the same conference as Moser, and is thus worth investigating; “The Population-Parenthood Problem in a Global Perspective,” Box 2, Folder 72, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
also points directly to the underlying cornerstone of the Cold War identified earlier in this chapter.

Takeuchi-Demirci and Collins’ ideas about the transfusion of reproduction and agendas geared towards nationalism and imperialism (from earlier in this Chapter) are clearly encompassed by Fagley’s speech: He stated that the problem of the Global North-South divide was “a problem which confronts the whole world” due to the “widening gulf in per capita income between the richer and poorer countries.”

This was “a growing menace to stability, to justice and hence to peace itself.” Fagley’s approach to the widening gap implicates the rationale for wealthy countries like the U.S. and wealthy individuals to involve themselves on the stage of global policy, again inciting U.S. interventionism and underscoring reproduction as a site of political control and lobbying with high stakes and potential high rewards.

_The Costs and Savings of Averted Births_

Part of the local appeal for concern over the population problem in North Carolina was the cause of reducing public expenditures. Before the HBLNC ever began working with state leaders to coalesce the state family planning program in 1966, actors in the organization noted the relationship between expanding population and expanded state support of those in need. Before the figure of averted births began to be calculated for whole countries at a time in international planning in the 1960s, the HBLNC applied the tactics of calculating lives lived versus money saved within their own state population.

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254 “The Population-Parenthood Problem in a Global Perspective,” Box 2, Folder 72, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
Murphy argues that the figure of averted births emerged in the U.S. in the 1960s, but the HBLNC may be considered early proponents of avoiding “devalued or wasteful life” even before the term was named.\(^\text{255}\) League constituents’ ideas about the money that could be saved by avoiding the birth of certain children dated well back into their sterilization advocacy and promotion in the late 1940s and 1950s. These arguments have even more deep historical roots to Eugene Brown’s “Eugenical Sterilization in North Carolina,” referenced in Chapter 1. In this report, Brown cited a study which found that at the end of 1922, the cost of institutional care for one family “had cost the public of Wake County and North Carolina not less than $30,000.” Alternatively, for around $100, both the father and mother of these children could have been sterilized.\(^\text{256}\) Similarly, several decades later, the HBLNC boasted that the North Carolina eugenics law saved “thousands of taxpayer dollars” and emphasized that more than one-half of hospital beds in the state were occupied by those with mental disabilities, costing an annual $2,000,000.\(^\text{257}\) Throughout its founding period of work, the HBLNC referenced costs and savings of avoiding unfit births across their mailings.

In 1964, when the League was on the precipice of shifting their focus to family planning and population issues, a Dr. O’Roark spoke at their annual meeting about family planning services. He stated that a variety of contraceptives and techniques were available and that “any and all who wish to attend” facilities for these services were able.\(^\text{258}\) However, he specifically

\(^{255}\) Murphy, *The Economization of Life*, p. 47.


\(^{258}\) Untitled meeting report, November 5, 1964, Box 2, Folder 68, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
noted that many “referrals” for family planning “come from the Welfare Department and nursing services.”\textsuperscript{259} The specific costs to the “county” that O’Roark mentioned were expenses of “$1500 to $2000 for every illegitimate or indigent child born.”\textsuperscript{260} Thus, he proposed that in addition to family planning being a needed and wanted service for people, there was also an economic advantage to such services.\textsuperscript{261} Though it is not clear how O’Roark comprised the figures of savings that he came up with, these examples from the Human Betterment League exemplify local manifestations of much broader, unfurling trends around averting or preventing the birth of the economically unfavorable that were expanded in the era of population control.

In her book \textit{Building the Population Bomb}, Emily Merchant explores how the “population bomb” craze that was finally “detonated” around the 1960s has a longer history, spanning back to the 1930s and forward into the 1970s and beyond. The figure of averted births was applied globally in this detonation period. As Michelle Murphy argues, U.S. economist Stephen Enke demonstrated that the money spent for each averted birth was “‘100 times more effective’ in raising [gross domestic product] per capita than the same amount spent on ‘productive investments.’”\textsuperscript{262} As indicated earlier in this Chapter, more explicitly, this meant that the optimized way to improve upon “per capita” figures was to decrease the number of capita, rather than to reconfigure the distributions of resources. Hidden in this coded language was the fact that, as Murphy points out, reduced “capita” equated to lives unlived.

Enke’s work was imperative for President Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969) to order foreign aid funds for family planning rather than funds for health, food, or other kinds of aid, as

\textsuperscript{259} Untitled meeting report, November 5, 1964, Box 2, Folder 68, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
\textsuperscript{260} Untitled meeting report, November 5, 1964, Box 2, Folder 68, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
\textsuperscript{261} Untitled meeting report, November 5, 1964, Box 2, Folder 68, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
\textsuperscript{262} Murphy, \textit{The Economization of Life}, p. 47.
well as for “making family planning a funded component of the domestic ‘war on poverty.’”263

Thus the abundance of international family planning programs that developed in this time period were “explicitly and quantitatively orient[ed] toward preventing life” and with the use of the averted birth calculation, these models “were indifferent to women’s intentions as the measure does not distinguish force from choice.”264 Merchant emphasizes these points in her book, reminding me of Gamble’s “high-handed” intervention means: “Family planning programs…and the new contraceptive technologies they disseminated were not designed to meet the needs of individuals or couples but rather to reduce aggregate fertility rates and thereby stimulate economic development.”265

The reduction of births in North Carolina also had intricate ties to international reproduction and aversion in another way, via the experiments that led to contraceptive development. In the early portions of the mid-20th century, as international development progressed, entire countries became testing sites and hubs for birth control methods, public health policies, and more. Michelle Murphy discusses how Bangladesh became the “oldest and largest population lab,” home to over 50 years of experimentation – the most influential international site for U.S. testing family planning, economic development, nutrition, and public health.266 These testing sites afforded Western civilization the ability to use an exploitative model of population-sized experiments which exported costs and labor and allowed for the import of knowledge and material production of tools, like the oral contraceptive pill. Notably, the CPC had described North Carolina in akin ways to such “population labs” as Bangladesh – reflecting parallel envisionment of idealized conditions for population-level research.

263 Murphy, *The Economization of Life*, p. 47.
264 Murphy, *The Economization of Life*, p. 49-50.
266 Murphy, *The Economization of Life*, “Dying, Not Dying, Not Being Born.”
In the 1967 newspaper article, “An Idea Come of Age,” introduced in Chapter 1, reporter Chester Davis discussed how the oral contraceptive birth control pill greatly enhanced prospects for large-scale birth control programs in North Carolina – the first state to include birth control in its public health program.\footnote{“An Idea Come of Age,” Box 2, Folder 97, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.} This pill was made available thanks to “mass experiments in Puerto Rico” which led to the Envoid oral contraceptive that women in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina were taking.\footnote{“An Idea Come of Age,” Box 2, Folder 97, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.} The cost of Envoid, $2 a month per patient for 99 women in Mecklenburg County, paled in comparison to the $20,000 in “taxpayer” money that had been “saved” in the first 13 months of the county’s birth control program for this group of women.

It is unclear whether the fiscal savings, such as those in Mecklenburg County, were always the primary motivations for employing birth control programming. Perhaps these figures provided justification for programs that had underlying, non-fiscal motivations, both intentional and subconscious. I have largely emphasized the perceived economic stakes of averted and prevented births in this section due to the weight this held in North Carolina and particularly for the HBLNC. However, it is important to note the larger implications of social, cultural, political, and national risks associated with birth rates and population size. In choosing to pursue development in many regions of the “underdeveloped” Global South, the calculation of averted births inarguably resulted in placing values on particular forms of human life over others. These calculations could not be relinquished to an “abstract purity of a mathematical symbol,” much as the experts involved in calculating such figures intended them to be.\footnote{Murphy, The Economization of Life, p. 47-48.} Figures, like preventing
the birth in an average “less developed country” being “about 2-6 times the output per head” could not be objective.\footnote{270}

In North Carolina, family planning was often perceived as problematic and insidious for communities of color. In Chapter 2, I asserted that Black women were often interested in access to contraceptives while Black nationalist men vehemently opposed such resources. Not to be mistaken, family planning and reproductive resources existed within complex ideological and physical landscapes. Wherein Black women sought access to such tools, they also opposed unequal geographic insertion of birth control and family planning clinics within predominantly Black and poor communities as a means of limiting their birth rates disproportionately. Calculations made on life in the abstract mapped onto life in inequitable and uneven ways. This often led to the direct targeting of women of color and poor women in the state, as Welfare recipients became the main folks recommended to the State Eugenics Board in the 1960s and family planning services were often seeded in communities of color and poor neighborhoods, whether desired there or not and often in contention with the very women who sought and fought for access to such services on their own terms and autonomy.\footnote{271}

*Contingent on Population: “War, famine, and…disease”*

Davis’ 1967 newspaper article certainly drove home the economic concerns of population: “The economic cost we pay because of our inability to check the run-away birth rates has not been totaled.”\footnote{272} However, Davis suggested that there were even more immediate and distressing implications of the “problem of sheer numbers.”\footnote{273} In essence, population would

\footnote{270} Murphy, *The Economization of Life*, p. 47-48.
\footnote{271} See Chapter 2.
\footnote{* A quote in “An Idea Come of Age,” Box 2, Folder 97, in the Human Betterment League of North Carolina, Inc. Records #4519, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.}
\footnote{272} “An Idea Come of Age,” Box 2, Folder 97, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
\footnote{273} “An Idea Come of Age,” Box 2, Folder 97, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
determine how much there was to eat, the quality of the standard of living, and the “degree and rapidity which we foul our government with our own wastes.”

Again, Davis’ claim here mimics environmentalist claims that had begun emerging in concert, and often in direct connection, with population policy and concerns of wasted natural resources and demolished soils on which humanity was built (as noted in an earlier footnote).

While I have shown in this chapter that many of anxieties for North Carolina, like those of HBLNC members, were resultant of an interplay between growing international issues and local action, Davis’ ideas suggest that there was a more unifying essence to the population problem in whole. He stated clearly that humankind had “reached the crossroads Malthus predicted for us. Either we check the world’s birth rate immediately and substantially or it will be done for us by what [Malthus] described as the three ultimate population controls: War (probably nuclear), famine, and epidemic disease.”

Though reproduction had become effectively laden with economic burdens, the stakes of reproduction and of population control were even more severe than tangible, predictable monetary costs. Reproduction was being bound to the future of human civilization and its ultimate success or total demise and destruction.

The beginnings of the HBLNC itself were largely connected with one of the elements that Malthus, and Davis, designated as an “ultimate population control:” War. In the case of North Carolina, this meant that the state was poised to lose in the population-check of war if the state enabled the proliferation of unfit civilians. If an imagined future war did unfold, North Carolina as a locale would be unable to counteract this this population control due to the degeneracy of their fighting stock.

The League reflected on this idea in a 1960s press release, in which they

274 “An Idea Come of Age,” Box 2, Folder 97, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
275 “An Idea Come of Age,” Box 2, Folder 97, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
recounted their organizational history. They wrote, “The high rejection rate of young men in North Carolina by Selective Service during [World War II] for mental illness or mental retardation attracted the attention and around the interest of Dr. Clarence J. Gamble…to investigate possible reasons for the relatively high incidence of rejections of North Carolina draftees for mental causes.” Though the World War II rejection rate cannot be considered Gamble’s sole interest in the state, the HBLNC did indeed originate from stakeholder concerns over the prevalence of mental impairment in the state. War had exposed “disturbing conditions already prevalent,” but largely obscured, in North Carolina’s population.

War as an element of world politics interconnected with reproduction would become a point of interest in the years ahead for some League members. In 1952, the Human Betterment Foundation sent the North Carolina League a newsletter titled “Sterilization and World Peace.” In the mailing, it stated that sterilization could be a “supplement to temporary forms of birth control…an important instrument in the prevention of future wars” for “No nation will continue to be peaceful if the expansion of its population is uncontrolled.” These sentiments readily echoed Malthusian arguments of centuries past. This piece of evidence not only highlights the mounting “bomb” of the population problem that Merchant explores, but yet again introduced a global trend before local state actors as a point of immediate concern. The sterilization project towards which the HBLNC was then working so diligently in North Carolina had international implications that helped shape population control policies.

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278 Untitled and undated press release, Box 259, Folder 14, in J.B. Matthews records at Rubenstein Duke.

Two years after the “Sterilization and World Peace” publication, an unknown member of the HBLNC wrote to League Secretary Jessie Stroup. They said, “Good to know that Mr. Richard Gamble is doing field work for his father [Clarence Gamble] in the Far East. The final victory may be delayed 50, even 100 years. When it comes, will we not have removed the principal cause of war?” This letter-writer believed that by undertaking population field work in the non-Western world, such charismatic actors as Clarence Gamble were pre-emptively winning an imagined future global war. This war was contingent on if population could be constricted and detonated before time ran out.

Thomas Robertson explores a similar concept or “feed ‘em or fight ‘em” in Chapter 4 of *The Malthusian Moment*. Conceptually, if the U.S. did not provide food aid to impoverished and rapidly expanding countries, this would present a source of future international war against the restless and discontent millions of people without any hope. Similarly, the unknown HBLNC member suggested that a similar outcome could be achieved by reproductive control rather than through provisions of food. It is important to note that the economics of population control also had much to do with ideas about war and political unrest. As Thomas Shapiro writes, since population growth was perceived to constantly erode economic growth and because overpopulation “was said to exacerbate social unrest,” “diminishing the number of potentially dissatisfied people could minimize the possibilities of political instability.”


Both perceived and actualized war, famine, and disease outside of the U.S. as a contingency of population often provided the rhetoric behind Western interventionism. As Fagley would elaborate in his speech at “The Church and Planned Parenthood” seminar, “The less developed countries with clearest need for population regulation are more ready to be helped than the Western powers are ready as yet to help.” Development incited economic growth and the bringing of modernity to the uncivilized world. It was up to Western countries, like the United States, to take charge in avoiding the crises of population by assisting the “less developed.” Fagley also stated that these countries traditionally had both high birth and high death rates – a combination that provided a harsh “balance of nature” which was ridden with “suffering and tragedy for the families involved.” Thus, to both protect the global future and to alleviate the “less developed,” population control measures provided the means by which to achieve these ambitions.

**Section III: Scaling Back and Refocusing on Genetic Quality**

Though the HBLNC was engaged in components of population quantity in and around the 1960s, concerns about human quality remained. There was often an interplay between these foci implicitly. Matters of quality could be amplified through quantity control via racial, ethnic, and national targeting of those perceived to be less fit or whose population expansion posed a threat to the Global North because of Communism or political and economic elements. Thus, the emerging and expansive powers of reproductive control methods allowed for the targeting of

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283 “The Population-Parenthood Problem in a Global Perspective,” Box 2, Folder 72, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
entire populations and the development of population control plans that re-envisioned the scale at which certain lives and certain societies could be deemed unfit or undesirable.

It is also important to note here that the HBLNC and allied organizations’ focus on population and the family in North Carolina seems to have contributed both indirectly and directly to the state’s long-lasting domestic sterilization program in myriad ways. Though the HBLNC shifted its focus away from sterilization during the period of this chapter, the insistent focus on politicizing population in the state likely helped motivate the continuation of the population-oriented program of involuntary sterilization that would last until the 1970s in North Carolina.

The League’s transition to population control – albeit short-lived – is an imperative part of their history, of the history of North Carolina, and of the globe. Near the end of their endeavors in population control via family planning, the HBLNC was clear to stake out the role that they had played in the state: “The Human Betterment League has pioneered in educating the public in family planning and population problems and control in North Carolina, and this must continue.”286 The organization even went so far as changing their certificate of incorporation in 1973 to reflect the more recent history of the League’s work. Alongside their persistent goals to examine “mental illness and retardation” and explore “measures to conserve the human resources of the state,” the group now included that they organized to study “population trends and methods of control” and educate the public in “population problems and control” alongside education in family planning and genetic counseling.287

286 Letter from Hanes to Human Betterment League members, 1972, Box 4, Folder 133, in HBLNC records at Wilson Chapel Hill.
By the 1970s, as genetic science advanced and moved into the mainstream of medical and research science, this repositioned HBLNC concerns to what could be achieved through more micro level human quality concerns. In 1972, the HBLNC was ready to revisit their true underpinnings as an organization: Safeguarding the future of North Carolinians by limiting the genetic and environmental transmission of undesirable and debilitating traits. The League hoped to move from a program focused on quantity back to the issue of human quality, with the aid of more precise scientific knowledge and reproductive technology than two decades prior. Nonetheless, the League’s work in population control played a crucial role in the development and consequences of the League’s long-term agenda, providing new urgency, new stakes, and a new arena for the organization’s longstanding mission. This work represents confluence between eugenics and population control. Eugenicists within the HBLNC mobilized global agendas connecting reproduction and international development, helped establish North Carolina as a political and intellectual base for global population concerns, and shaped international fears into an important motivation for bettering their home state.

**Conclusion**

The Human Betterment League’s shift in focus to population control in the 1960s exposes local manifestations of broader national and global anxieties and ambitions. Evidence from League actors and historical actors connected to the group and its work provide insights to the ways in which reproductive policies and population control became tied to the future of North Carolina and the future of the world. Weighting reproduction with economic, political, and sociocultural implications took place on a plethora of levels from the micro- to the macro- and many groups of concerned individuals from the 1950s to the 1970s joined in on the discourse. In this chapter, I have sought to understand the seemingly misfitting portion of the League’s
history, as discussed in Chapter 1, and better contextualize the global construction of the population “bomb” to situate the importance and inspiration of this transition for the League, as identified in Chapter 2. This chapter also provides larger implications for the connections between the history of eugenics and population control, as well as the international political history of the U.S. around the globe more broadly in the first-half of the latter-20th century.
Conclusion

The Human Betterment League of North Carolina was founded in 1947 to promote eugenic sterilization in North Carolina and persisted as an education and advocacy organization until 1988. Over these 41 years, the League moved beyond eugenic sterilization to other interests, first population control, and later genetics. Thus, the League’s history consists of three distinct eugenic projects, all of which were united by and grounded in the organization’s aspirations to control reproduction to achieve “human betterment.” The League’s advocacy and tactics moved from involuntary and coercive tools of reproductive manipulation – sterilization – towards tools associated with liberatory reproductive decisions – family planning and genetic counseling. Yet, the HBLNC remained intent on decreasing mental “deficiency” in North Carolina and tied personal reproductive decisions to the future of the state and of the world.

Women in League leadership were the ones who made the organization function and who shifted the trajectory of its eugenic impulse. Women like Marion Moser and Kate Garner achieved this through networks of organizations – especially other women-led efforts – and experts conducting similarly aligned work. The League’s history, particularly its engagement in population control in the 1960s, also elucidates how the group contributed to establishing a political landscape in North Carolina of concern about population, helping to make the state a promising home base for organizations whose work reached far beyond North Carolina itself, such as the Carolina Population Center.

Though the contents of this thesis are anchored in the specific history of this North Carolina organization, this story also demonstrates the integration of eugenic aspirations into the foundations of many scientific endeavors – from birth control research and expansion to genetics and genetic counseling. Further, it exemplifies the role that some women had in the history of
eugenics and demonstrates the connections between advocacy for expanded access to reproductive health resources and choice-denying reproductive interventions. Lastly, this history is a local manifestation of the global agendas set during the height of American population concerns which explores the two-way interplay between local actors and the international politics of economic development. In whole, the HBLNC exemplifies how the pervasive impacts of eugenics are foundationally engrained in contemporary institutions, development, and reproductive stakes. This underscores the tensions of the making and shaping of who is deemed fit for parenthood, which lives are permitted as the public good and which lives must be controlled for the public good, and the consequences of differential access to reproductive choices and technologies.

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While conducting research for and writing this thesis, I had a specific, working definition of “eugenics” in mind. Nonetheless, time and time again in this thesis, I have returned to one question: At any given point, was the HBLNC’s work eugenics or not? Despite my interest as a historian in tracing the shifting meanings and scope of eugenic thinking rather than enforcing a singular, absolute definition, this question continued to resurface.

If by “eugenics” we mean “breeding out” undesirable traits that would reduce human suffering and address social issues, then I believe the HBLNC’s work is largely eugenic. The League’s work did not entirely center on eliminating tendencies of criminality or social deviance like earlier eugenics campaigns.288 However, the HBLNC did propose that the differential proliferation of certain heredities would eventually eliminate mental illness, prevent ill-reared

children of parents whose homes were environmentally unfit, and provide for economic
improvement of North Carolina and beyond.

If “eugenics” should only be confined to its “positive” mechanisms of encouraged
“breeding” before the passage of the world’s first sterilization law, then I would categorize most
of the HBLNC’s work as non-eugenic. But if “eugenics” is expanded to include the “negative”
tools for bettering humankind through the elimination of parenthood and discouraged
reproduction, then the League’s work is undoubtedly included. In each period of their work, the
League focused on terminating or decreasing different population’s reproduction. In their
sterilization work, this is most readily apparent. But in their work on family planning and genetic
counseling, the League also discouraged those folks with bad genetics or too many children from
proliferating. Some of the League’s advocacy, like Herndon’s encouragement to teachers to
suggest that those “superior” students have children, embodied positive eugenics. Most of the
League’s work, however, did not.

If using the term “eugenics,” do we also mean assertions about the racial differences of
DNA and decreased procreation that discriminately targeted people of color as a tool for White
supremacy? The tenet of eugenics as a racialized practice is deeply rooted in the work of
founding eugenicists and surfaced time and time again across the Progressive period through the
World Wars.289 Eugenics as a mechanism of racial hygiene was the very foundation for the Nazis
in the Holocaust. Early work in and around eugenics often asserted that humankind would be
improved by the elimination of undesirable, inherited traits that could be weeded out through

289 Wendy Kline, Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby
Boom (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2001); Angela Saini, Superior: The Return of Race
Science (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2019).
racialized targeting and insisted that racial differences were found within DNA. Though I argue in my thesis that the HBLNC’s work disproportionately impacted Black women particularly and that the League was a White monolith, most members and the League’s educational tools did not advocate for and against reproduction in explicitly racialized terms. And even within communities of color, the sharpening of one’s own racial group was sometimes an avid goal. For example, Black eugenicists prevailed, often advocating for elite Black folk – those who were talented, educated, and economically well-off – to bear the future of the Black race and of Black liberation.

If this is true, is “eugenics” the enforcement of limitations on reproduction? How forceful does the enforcement have to be? The League’s work on population control aimed to reduce population globally but in very hands-off ways, by providing resources for planning one’s family. And in their work on genetics and genetic counseling, the focus was on getting as many North Carolinians as possible to use such counseling services to make their own choices. Could “eugenics,” then, be considered the expansion of different forms of birth control for different people? What kind of permanence and intention must be attached to a technology or policy to label it eugenic? While Black women in North Carolina advocated for their abilities to access tools for controlling their own reproduction, many Black women in the state also advocated against the geographical placement of birth control clinics within predominantly Black and poor communities. The clinics were often charged as discriminately aiming to reduce the reproduction of women of color while simultaneously, women of color mobilized these tools for their benefit.

Nonetheless, within clinic settings like those for family planning and genetic counseling that the League supported, it is unclear which methods of birth control were recommended for whom and for what reasons. For example, while White women were provided with the self-administered, daily oral contraceptive pill, women of color and poor women were often able to access technologies like the intra-uterine device (IUD) which provided years-long blocking of reproduction and required a physician for insertion and for removal. Was “eugenics” only the permanent removal of the possibility of parenthood or does the elimination of one’s autonomy on more minute and temporary bases also count? The funding of birth control clinics in impoverished areas by eugenicists and in-and-out interventions of those philanthropic birth control researchers, such as Clarence Gamble, often did not include long-term care or follow-up but rapid intervention and disruption to the number of children being produced. Further, the more short-term tools of IUDs often left many women in the Global South infertile.

And what about “eugenics” as the inability to access technologies that support procreation because of identity? Judith Daar provides a compelling analysis of modern assisted reproductive technologies, arguing that the restrictive barriers rooted in class, race, disability, marital status, and economics result in uneven access to the opportunity to reproduce in discriminatory ways.292 In this vein, should these modern technologies be considered “new eugenics,” “eugenics,” or neither? A plethora of scholarship also considers akin questions for recently developed gene technologies like genetic testing and the future of gene editing tools.293

Looming over all these meanings is the one most prevalent in public discourse since World War II: “eugenics” as short-hand for a pseudoscience that violated individual rights and

dignity for a dubious conception of the collective good. My thesis shows that this conception of eugenics assumes away the circumstances which make the historical question of eugenics so tricky: Efforts that fit comfortably alongside eugenics nevertheless enrolled scientists who were qualified, science that seem reputable, and claims of supporting individual autonomy and well-being that seemed plausible – at least contemporaneously.

Perhaps, rather than asking whether particular historical, contemporary, and future activities are or are not eugenics, we should ask different questions that help us better reckon with the uncomfortable resonances amongst activities that manipulate biological reproduction to improve human welfare. Which reproductive technologies are enhanced or limited by identity? How can the choices to both use or not engage with these tools be protected? What is the relationship between biological facts and political mobilization of biology as a form of social intervention?

We need better questions for unpacking the ethics enmeshed in genetic and reproductive tools and technology. The eugenic impulse of the League prevailed because biology and reproduction have emerged as sites of intense investment which promise dividends to the future of humanity – sites of direct involvement with our own evolution and the code of life itself. Impulses like these have prevailed and will continue so long as notions of “human betterment” as a measurable, unequivocal, unitary goal persists. Rather than questioning how we can better the “human” – an ideal individual, at once abstract, general, and subject to change according to the criteria of whoever may hold power – we might alternatively question how we can better our societies, economic systems, political agendas, cultural norms, and environments in ways that support a wide variety of human existence.
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