

No Scrubs: Livestock Breeding, Eugenics, and the State in the Early Twentieth-Century United States

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On June 27, 1925, the citizens of Markle, Indiana, put a bull on trial for crimes against the herd. Approximately 1,200 spectators from Huntington, Uniondale, and the surrounding countryside flooded into Markle for the trial. F. H. Bowers, a local attorney, promised the bull a robust defense, but the jury convicted. Judge Abram Simmons handed down a sentence of death, and, with that, the bull was summarily executed. The funeral oration delivered by a local minister is unrecorded, but the content most likely followed a script furnished for the occasion by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The minister would have reminded the assembled audience of the bull's grievous crime, inseparable from the bull's inferior body and tainted blood. "Let us bury him so deep and seal his tomb so tight that both he and his posterity will be lost to this world forever," implored the USDA's funeral oration.¹

The bull was a scrub. The USDA defined a scrub bull as an inferior bull "of mixed or unknown breeding." In its Better Sires—Better Stock campaign, the USDA designated scrub sires—scrub male animals used for stud—threats to the nation because of their capacities to pass undesirable characteristics to offspring. Between 1919 and 1933, the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) and the USDA organized scrub sire trials in every region of the country as one part of that campaign. The trials, often held at county fairs, drew hundreds

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¹ "1200 View Presentation of Erie Bull at Markle," *Huntington (IN) Press*, June 28, 1925. D. S. Burch, *Outline for Conducting a Scrub Sire Trial* (Washington, 1924), 18.

and sometimes thousands of spectators. In Markle, the county extension agent planned the proceedings to educate spectators about the reproductive threat of scrub bulls. The bull's ordeal capped Better Bull Day in Markle, an event that began with expert lectures on the value of purebred sires and the ceremonial donation of a purebred bull drawn from the private stock of the president of the Erie Railroad. (Markle was a stop on the path of that railway.) Promises of purebred prosperity began the day; the scrub's execution and interment ended it.²

Trials of scrub sires demonstrated how purebred life connected to scrub death. More broadly, the trials and the campaign linked capitalism to the governance of reproduction, populations, and racialized violence. Scrub livestock eradication programs circulated practical knowledge about livestock breeding, but the Better Sires—Better Stock campaign also educated rural publics about the threat posed by the reproduction of eugenically unfit persons and about the capacities of the state to effectively govern the lives of humans and nonhumans. Scrub eradication reveals a link between the history of livestock production and the history of race in the United States: infrastructures of meat making were conduits for eugenic logics and advanced what the historians Barbara Fields and Karen Fields call “racecraft.” Racecraft is the “social alchemy . . . [that] transforms racism into race, disguising collective social practice as inborn individual traits.” According to this definition race is a fantastical, symbolic category inscribed on bodies by material practices. This “alchemy” encompasses direct discourse about those symbolic categories, but it also requires shared assumptions about how forms of life can be clearly delineated, organized, and placed into hierarchy, an ideology the literary theorist Sylvia Wynter terms “the genre” of “Man.” Racecraft also requires social and political institutions capable of administering violence and debility based on those categories. These underlying components—both the broader racial ideology and a racial state—are often formed through discourse and action that may sometimes seem distant from direct commentary on human racial categories.³

This article shows that early twentieth-century Americans crafted race not only through their treatment of humans but also by talking about and acting on livestock animals. Livestock breeding circulated a racial ideology in which the state needed to lard the nation's pure blood and eradicate unfit life, assumptions that sometimes traversed both the boundaries between humans and animals and between livestock breeders and eugenicists. The article declines to chart a straightforward relationship between livestock breeding and racecraft in which one “causes” the other or vice versa. Rather, it demonstrates, as the science and technology scholar Sheila Jasanoff writes, the way that “science and society . . . are *co-produced*, each underwriting the other's existence.” For Jasanoff, representations, identities, discourses, and institutions are always interwoven and, as a result, particular forms of

² “1200 View Presentation of Erie Bull at Markle.” For the definition of a scrub sire and an overview of the Better Sires—Better Stock campaign, see U.S. Department of Agriculture, “*Better Sires—Better Stock*,” *Plan of Nation-Wide Crusade to Improve Quality of Live Stock through Use of Pure-Bred Sires* (Washington, 1920), 6.

³ Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (New York, 2012), 261. On “the genre” of “Man,” see Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3 (Fall 2003), 257–337; and Sylvia Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory and Re-imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Désêtre*: Black Studies toward the Human Project,” in *Not Only the Master's Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (New York, 2006), 107–69. See also Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, N.C., 2014).

knowledge production and technical practice are embedded within but also constitutive of their social, political, and cultural contexts—a back-and-forth exchange she terms “co-production.” Following that line of analysis, I consider livestock breeding and racecraft as interlocking sets of discursive and technical practices coproduced through a shared interest in the ability of life to reproduce value. Livestock breeding provided a rich field for racecraft in the early twentieth century precisely because during this time livestock breeding was intensive and diffuse. Breeding’s capital intensity meant that breeders had substantial material investments in managing the reproduction of valued animals. The diffusion of reproduction meant that millions of people resided on or near farms where animals were bred. Livestock breeding was a popular arena in which millions of Americans could explore the interrelations among inheritance, value, and reproduction. It was a vast laboratory, allowing Americans to experiment with the qualified reproduction of life.⁴

Although this essay focuses on a government program during its active phase from 1919 to 1933, my broader aim is to help historians of the environment, animals, and the food system to consider how human interactions with nonhuman animals shaped American racecraft and strengthened the capacities of the eugenic state. Other recent work in environmental history emphasizes that landscapes and (assumed) “natural” nonhuman entities are, in fact, racialized, carry implicit racial meanings, and circulate in ways that reproduce racial hierarchy. Chronicling the significance of nonhuman animals to human history has been an important contribution of environmental history, but many of the most important works connecting nonhuman animals to racial knowledge come from cultural studies and literary theory. Drawing primarily from literary archives, these works offer powerful evidence of the symbolic centrality of animals to modern conceptions of race. Yet, attention to both the symbolic and the material value of nonhuman animals is necessary to properly attend to the ways they have been central to human racecraft.⁵

⁴ Sheila Jasanoff, “Ordering Knowledge, Ordering Society,” in *States of Knowledge: The Co-production of Science and Social Order*, ed. Sheila Jasanoff (New York, 2004), 13–45, esp. 17. Emphasis in original.

⁵ For environmental histories that argue that landscapes and nonhuman entities are racialized, see Robert D. Bullard, “Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement,” in *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (Boston, 1993), 15–39; Charles W. Mills, “Black Trash,” in *Faces of Environmental Racism: Confronting Issues of Global Justice*, ed. Laura Westra and Bill E. Lawson (Lanham, 2001), 73–92; Elizabeth D. Blum, *Love Canal Revisited: Race, Class, and Gender in Environmental Activism* (Lawrence, 2008); and Carl A. Zimring, *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States* (New York, 2016). Other important works addressing the intersections of environmental history and the history of race include Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945–1980* (Chapel Hill, 1995); Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll, eds., “To Love the Wind and the Rain”: *African Americans and Environmental History* (Pittsburgh, 2006); Eileen McGurty, *Transforming Environmentalism: Warren County, PCBs, and the Origins of Environmental Justice* (New Brunswick, 2007); Mark D. Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver* (Athens, Ga., 2011); Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis, 2014); Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Rethinking the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill, 2014); and Colin Fisher, *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago* (Chapel Hill, 2015). Examples of works drawing from literary archives that demonstrate the symbolic centrality of animals to ideas about race include Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago, 2003); Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minneapolis, 2009); and Colleen Glenney Boggs, *Animalia Americana: Animal Representations and Biopolitical Subjectivity* (New York, 2013). For incisive commentaries on the relationships between critical animal studies and critical race theory, see Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, N.C., 2014); Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, “Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism,” *Feminist Studies*, 39 (Fall 2013), 669–85; and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiracist World* (New York, 2020). On the interwoven symbolic and material value of animals, see Shukin, *Animal Capital*; and Alex Blanchette, *Porkopolis: American Animality, Standardized Life, and the Factory Farm* (Durham, N.C., 2020).

Livestock animals were symbols and metaphors through which people understood differences among humans. However, even when livestock animals were not placed in direct analogy to particular human racial categories, they still functioned as important pedagogic objects for race crafters. Importantly, animals retained obvious material value—as vital commodities, as capital, and as energy sources. Economic speculation is grounded in symbolic and fantastic value: the speculative value of an object is always tied to a fantastic projection of its future worth. The pervasive material presence of livestock animals in early twentieth-century America informed, and enhanced, their symbolic currency as objects capable of carrying racial meanings. Animals were practical, didactic objects that instructed people about the reproduction of value, how to preserve the pure value of life, and how to forestall the reproduction of, and eradicate, wasteful, degenerate, contaminating, and unfit forms of life.

The breeding of domesticated animals had been diffuse and popular in North America since European colonization, but it had not always been intensive. Prior to the Civil War, livestock breeding in the United States was dominated by breeding practices in which farmers exerted minimal control over selection and reproduction. Such “extensive” breeding regimes were necessary in landscapes where, absent fences and barns, animals moved, grazed, and mated freely. In the decades after the Civil War, a national infrastructure in meat and dairy production drove land enclosure, fencing, and animal confinement. With regimented spatial organization, farmers shifted from extensive to intensive livestock breeding, which entailed selecting which animals bred and required closely supervised mating. Popular reception of Darwinism and a growing emphasis on the role of inheritance in biological development meant that breeders scrupulously tracked the lineages of breeding animals, intent on conserving and refining advantageous traits and “pure blood.” Nonhuman life had always functioned as a factor of production, but this system meant that livestock could also function as capital. Livestock breeders conceived of the value of their animals not just in terms of the products of a given animal’s body—be it energy, meat, milk, tallow, hide, or eggs—but also in terms of the speculative value of the forms of life the animal was capable of reproducing. This shift led to the formation of national breed associations in beef, dairy, pork, and poultry, and a robust “pure-breeding” culture by the turn of the century. At conventions, expositions, and fairs, in magazines and newspapers, and on the nation’s millions of farms, breeders pondered how to harness and direct the reproduction of their stock.⁶

⁶ On the role of livestock and animal husbandry in early America, see Allan Greer, “Commons and Enclosure in the Colonization of North America,” *American Historical Review*, 117 (April 2012), 365–86; Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (New York, 2004); R. Douglas Hurt, *American Agriculture: A Brief History* (West Lafayette, 2004); and William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983). On antebellum New England breeding practices and agriculture, see Emily Pawley, “The Point of Perfection: Cattle Portraiture, Bloodlines, and the Meaning of Breeding, 1760–1860,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 36 (Spring 2016), 37–72; and Emily Pawley, *The Nature of the Future: Agriculture, Science, and Capitalism in the Antebellum North* (Chicago, 2020). On the transition from earlier extensive breeding regimes to post-Civil War intensive breeding regimes, see Gabriel N. Rosenberg, “A Race Suicide among the Hogs: The Biopolitics of Pork in the United States, 1865–1930,” *American Quarterly*, 68 (March 2016), 49–73. On shifts in meat and dairy production after the Civil War, see Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Ames, 1963); James W. Whitaker, *Feedlot Empire: Beef Cattle Feeding in Illinois and Iowa, 1840–1900* (Ames, 1975); Wilson J. Warren, *Tied to the Great Packing Machine: The Midwest and Meatpacking* (Iowa City, 2007); Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table: Taste, Technology, Transformation* (Baltimore, 2006); Kristin Hoganson, “Meat in the Middle: Converging Borderlands in the U.S. Midwest, 1865–1900,” *Journal of American History*, 98 (March 2012), 1025–51; and Joshua Specht, “The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the Texas Longhorn: An Evolutionary History,” *Environmental History*, 2 (April 2016), 343–63. On the cattle and hogs in the middle and near West, see William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*

Shared inquiry among breeders and race scientists into questions of value and its reproduction created alliances and practical affinities. These linkages extended the reach of eugenic racecraft in early twentieth-century American life through a burgeoning infrastructure of meat making. Scientific racists and eugenicists often cited livestock breeding as a model for what could be accomplished through the careful governance of reproduction. They argued that the practical accomplishments of livestock breeders proved the underlying validity of universal principles of breeding. The example of livestock breeders, they argued, justified a variety of government policies, including immigration restrictions and compulsory sterilization. Arguments that cited agricultural expertise often invoked the contrast between purebred livestock, exemplifying the scientific management of breeding, and scrubs as an example of the menace of unmanaged breeding and consequent racial degeneracy. The USDA and its allies, in particular, popularly circulated precisely this contrast through the campaign and scrub trials.

Eugenics achieved widespread popularity and political influence in the United States by the 1920s. The USDA and allied livestock breeders contributed to that popularity and extended the popular logics of eugenic racecraft well beyond the purview of the campaign. With the figures of the purebred and the scrub interwoven with popular race science through the campaign, critics in the livestock breeding industry found pure breeding difficult to displace. Pure breeding dovetailed with popular essentialist understandings of race as a hereditary and “real” biological characteristic. Critics of pure breeding argued that breeds had been fantastically concocted in the nineteenth century around arbitrary phenotypical characteristics that offered farmers little insight into the value of the animals in question. That the USDA and so many farmers refused to abandon these fantastic categories suggests that early twentieth-century race science was an intractable foundation for twentieth-century agriculture and a structuring logic of the global food system. Then, as now, the life at stake in governance of reproduction was always more than human, just as the life at stake in capitalist enterprise was always more than animal.

An Economy of Flesh

By 1900, a national livestock infrastructure spanned the North American continent. Rapid agricultural expansion after the Civil War, sustained by the Homestead Act, railroad construction, and the removal and genocide of indigenous populations, put millions of acres of land into cultivation. Even on smaller farms growing staple commodity crops such as wheat and corn, livestock emerged as one of the most efficient and lucrative ways

(New York, 1991); and John C. Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt: A Geographical History of Middle-Western Agriculture* (Bloomington, 1994). On fence laws in the South, see J. Crawford King Jr., “The Closing of the Southern Range: An Exploratory Study,” *Journal of Southern History*, 48 (Feb. 1982), 53–70; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York, 1983); and Shawn Everett Kantor, *Politics and Property Rights: The Closing of the Open Range in the Postbellum South* (Chicago, 1998). On enclosure, more broadly, see Greer, “Commons and Enclosure in the Colonization of North America.” In an extensive breeding regime, reproductive labor is distributed widely among all members of a population; in an intensive breeding regime, reproductive labor is centralized among a small subset of that population. On the increasing role of intensive breeding in late nineteenth-century agriculture and the formation of breed associations in the United States, see Alan Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, *Creating Abundance: Biological Innovation and American Agricultural Development* (New York, 2008); Brendan A. Matz, “Crafting Heredity: The Art and Science of Livestock Breeding in the United States and Germany, 1860–1914” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2011); and “Margaret E. Derry, *Masterminding Nature: The Breeding of Animals, 1750–2010* (Toronto, 2015). On livestock as capital, see Rebecca Woods, *The Herds Shot around the World: Native Breeds and the British Empire, 1800–1900* (Chapel Hill, 2017).

to extract value from land. The nation's different agricultural regions retained specific livestock economies: beef cattle predominated in the High Plains, swine in the Midwest and the corn belt, dairy cattle in New England and around the Great Lakes, and a mix of animals on the farms of the Deep South and the mid-Atlantic. The nation's rails knitted these disparate regions together. A single animal might graze on western grasslands, be fattened on dent corn in Illinois, slaughtered in Chicago's Union Stockyards, transported as a side of beef to New York City, or barreled and bound on a steamer for sale in Europe. While animal substances appeared in markets as discrete products—steaks, bacon, tallow, lard, milk, cheese, hides, and eggs—their productive (and reproductive) processes were interwoven. For example, in the Midwest, dairy farmers sold most male offspring of their cows to be fattened on corn farms. Just as this value chain tightened links between animal flesh and value, railroads and refrigeration also expanded the “milk shed,” the dairying region proximate to a major city that supplied its fresh milk, generating regional, national, and global markets in dairy products. By 1900, livestock agriculture was a vast sector of the national economy, with the nation's livestock accounting for roughly 4.3 percent of the nation's total wealth—more than the total capitalized value of the nation's railroads.⁷

Global markets played an increasingly important role in all livestock production. As the historian Kristin Hoganson contends, animal products connected internal peripheries to commodity chains spanning the American empire and the globe. The economic historians Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode note that live animals, meat, lard, and other animal products were roughly one-fifth of all U.S. merchandise exports to Europe by the late 1870s. Western ranches, livestock farms, and stockyards attracted serious attention and investment—not only from eastern financiers such as Charles Francis Adams Jr. but also from London and Paris. Flush with capital and spurred by newly formed livestock breed associations, American farmers imported tens of thousands of European livestock to improve their herds and increase production in the late nineteenth century. For cattle breeders, improvement was synonymous with breeding in traits such as short horns and higher body-fat percentages and breeding out long horns, long limbs, and muscularity. Similarly, pig breeders bred in stout, heavier European pigs and bred out any swine that resembled the lean, tusked, fierce razorback. In both cases, improved livestock were animals that were better fitted for the tightly regimented spaces of the national meat infrastructure and that quickly and efficiently put on weight.⁸

⁷ Homestead Act of 1862, 12 Stat. 392 (1862). On agricultural expansion after the Civil War and the western cattle economy, see Ariel Ron, *Grassroots Leviathan: Agricultural Reform and the Rural North in the Slaveholding Republic* (Baltimore, 2020), xx; Joshua Specht, *Red Meat Republic: A Hoof-to-Table History of How Beef Changed America* (Princeton, 2019); and John Ryan Fischer, *Cattle Colonialism: An Environmental History of the Conquest of California and Hawai'i* (Chapel Hill, 2015). On the centrality of swine to midwestern agriculture, see Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt*; Brett Mizelle, *Pig* (London, 2011); and J. L. Anderson, *Capitalist Pigs: Pigs, Pork, and Power in America* (Morgantown, 2019). On “milk sheds” and cheese and fluid milk dairying in the Great Lakes region, see Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton, 2008); Kendra Smith-Howard, *Pure and Modern Milk: An Environmental History since 1900* (New York, 2014); and E. Melanie Dupuis, *Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink* (New York, 2002). On livestock in the South since the Civil War, see Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1965–1980* (Lexington, Ky., 1984); Mart A. Stewart, *“What Nature Suffers to Groe”: Life, Labor, and Landscape on the Georgia Coast, 1680–1920* (Athens, Ga., 2002); and Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Urbana, 1986). On the regional intersections of grain, swine, beef, and dairy agriculture in Chicago, see Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*. On the sale of most male offspring of dairy cows, see also Smith-Howard, *Pure and Modern Milk*. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, 1975), 255.

⁸ Hoganson, “Meat in the Middle.” Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, *Arresting Contagion: Science, Policy, and Conflicts over Animal Disease Control* (Cambridge, Mass., 2015), 30–33. On investment in ranches, livestock

The global circulation of animals, meat, and lard created thorny problems for government officials. Recurring epidemics of contagious bovine pleuropneumonia and splenic fever among U.S. cattle spurred Congress to create a federal agency to supervise livestock and meat production in 1884. The Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) was housed in the USDA. President Chester A. Arthur appointed the veterinary scientist Daniel Salomon to head the new agency, reflecting the bureau's primary responsibility for addressing diseases endemic to livestock production.⁹

Although the BAI focused on veterinary medicine and food safety, the agency also researched animal breeding, a task that created institutional connections to the human eugenics movement. Beginning with the passage of the Hatch Act in 1887, scientists working on federally funded agricultural experiments conducted research on genetics, in turn creating strong institutional connections among the USDA, early geneticists, and eugenicists. In 1901 the USDA organized the Division of Animal Husbandry within the bureau to conduct and support research specifically on livestock breeding, inheritance, and genetics. The horse breeder George Rommel headed the division and devoted substantial resources to the improvement of the Morgan horse, a breed of lighter steeds with important military application for the cavalry. Rommel was also an early member of the American Breeders Association, an organization dedicated to the improved breeding of animals, plants, and humans. Rommel served as the organization's secretary until he retired in 1923. In 1914 the organization rechristened itself the American Genetics Association (AGA) and changed the name of its magazine from the *American Breeders Magazine* to the *Journal of Heredity*. The *Journal of Heredity* would continue as the major venue for eugenic scholarship well into the postwar period. It was helmed by successive editors in chief who were also prominent eugenicists, Paul Popenoe and Robert C. Cook (the son of the USDA plant scientist and eugenicist Orator F. Cook). Meanwhile, Rommel's successor as the chief of the Division of Animal Husbandry was E. W. Sheets, who also served on the governing council of the AGA in 1923, while Sewall Wright, the USDA's top animal geneticist, followed Rommel as secretary of the AGA. In 1920, a majority of the governing council of the AGA was directly employed by the USDA, including its president, botanist, plant prospector, and member of the American Eugenics Society (AES), David Fairchild.¹⁰

Eugenicists argued for the technocratic management of human reproduction according to what they deemed scientific principles. Extolling vague concepts of fitness allowed eugenics to appeal to a broad and diverse constituency, and, indeed, some prominent African American and Jewish intellectuals were enthusiastic supporters of eugenics. In

farms, and stockyards, see Noam Maggor, *Brahmin Capitalism: Frontiers of Wealth and Populism in America's First Gilded Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 2017); and Specht, *Red Meat Republic*. On the importation of European livestock, see Olmstead and Rhode, *Creating Abundance*. On the transformation of swine bodies, see Rosenberg, "Race Suicide among the Hogs"; and Anderson, *Capitalist Pigs*.

⁹ Olmstead and Rhode, *Arresting Contagion*, 42–93.

¹⁰ Hatch Act, 24 Stat. 1440 (1887). On the Hatch Act, see Alan I. Marcus, *Agricultural Science and the Quest for Legitimacy: Farmers, Agricultural Colleges, and Experimental Stations, 1870–1890* (Ames, 1985). On connections between breeders and eugenicists, see Barbara A. Kimmelman, "The American Breeders' Association: Genetics and Eugenics in an Agricultural Context, 1903–1913," *Social Studies of Science*, 13 (May 1983), 163–204. On further institutional connections and George Rommel, see Matz, "Crafting Heredity." On the composition of the governing council of the American Genetics Association in 1920, see American Genetics Association masthead at the end of *Journal of Heredity*, 11 (June 1920). On E. W. Sheets and Sewall Wright succeeding Rommel, see American Genetics Association masthead at the end of *ibid.*, 14 (Jan. 1923). On David Fairchild, see Amanda Harris, *Fruits of Eden: David Fairchild and America's Plant Hunters* (Gainesville, 2015).

practice, eugenic concepts of fitness tended to reinforce the racial, class, and national prejudices of elites and lacquer them with a patina of scientism courtesy of Darwinian theory. Eugenicists agreed that the unfit should be prevented from reproducing, even when the particular eugenicists in question disagreed on who was unfit.¹¹

The 1920s was the high-water mark for eugenic policy in the United States. Although ten states had already enacted eugenic sterilization statutes prior to World War I, another twenty-six statutes were passed in the interwar period (several states with existing statutes updated or strengthened theirs). In 1927 the U.S. Supreme Court sustained the constitutionality of Virginia's 1924 eugenic sterilization law in an 8–1 decision in *Buck v. Bell*. In his majority opinion, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes gave the commonsense justification for eugenic sterilization by glibly dismissing the claims of the petitioner, Carrie Buck, with the infamous quip: “Three generations of imbeciles are enough.” Similarly, the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, sometimes called the National Origins Act, drastically limited immigration to the United States from outside northern Europe, and the act's supporters hailed its eugenic benefits. As the historians Alexandra Minna Stern and Margot Canaday show, customs, immigration, and border agents were responsible for excluding unfit persons, which, in turn, meant that immigrants endured intrusive eugenic examinations. In municipal criminal and family courts the idea of reproductive fitness and hereditary criminality played a role in sentencing, and, as a result, the administration of criminal law during this period was often intertwined with eugenic assumptions.¹²

Eugenics was an important component of early twentieth-century racecraft because it licensed the state's capacity to manage racialized reproduction. Eugenic policies certainly targeted racial minorities but also victimized individuals of European descent and, in particular, harmed the rural, white poor (Carrie Buck, for example). The eugenically unfit could broadly include both nonwhite populations and a host of “degenerate” whites that included the poor, criminals, immigrants, the uneducated, people with physical and mental disabilities, homosexuals, and gender nonconforming people. Thus, the concept of eugenic fitness tended to bleed across seemingly distinct concerns about internal white degeneration through “race suicide” and external degeneration through “miscegenation” and “race mixing.” Indeed, the flexibility of eugenic thought helped consolidate the inchoate boundaries of whiteness. Eugenic fitness offered a seemingly objective and scientific justification for racial hierarchy even as it also excluded a variety of white bodies from the concept of fitness. Of course, eugenic policies disproportionately affected African

¹¹ On eugenics, see Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley, 2001); Nancy Ordover, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (Minneapolis, 2003); Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley, 2001); and Paul A. Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell* (Baltimore, 2008). On the appeal of eugenics to African American intellectuals, see Daylanne K. English, *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chapel Hill, 2004); and Kyla Schuller, *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Durham, N.C., 2018). For an example of a Jewish eugenicist, see Max Reichler, *Jewish Eugenics* (New York, 1916). On disagreements within the human eugenics movement and criticisms of eugenics from the scientific community, see Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985).

¹² For an overview of eugenic sterilization laws by state, see Randall Hansen and Desmond King, *Sterilized by the State: Eugenics, Race, and the Population Scare in Twentieth-Century North America* (New York, 2013), 72–101. *Buck v. Bell*, 274 U.S. 200, 273 (1927). On the history of *Buck v. Bell*, see Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles*. Immigration Act of 1924, 43 Stat. 153 (1924). Stern, *Eugenic Nation*; Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, 2009). On immigration, disability, and eugenics, see also Jay Timothy Dolmage, *Disabled upon Arrival: Eugenics, Immigration, and the Construction of Race and Disability* (Columbus, 2018). On hereditary criminality, see Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals* (Urbana, 1997).

Americans, Jews, Central Americans, and East Asians, all of whom bore the brunt of both eugenic sterilization and exclusionary immigration policies long into the postwar period. Moreover, even when eugenic policies targeted traits that bore only indirect relationships to racial categories—such as sexual orientation, left-handedness, or auditory impairment—they created state infrastructures of bodily inspection and intervention that were redirected to more explicitly racialized ends, as the historian and legal scholar Dorothy Roberts shows. Eugenic policies buttressed the capacity of state agents to engage in the racialized management of reproduction and were thus integral to both racecraft and statecraft in the early twentieth century.¹³

As a titan of early twentieth-century statecraft, the USDA was fertile ground for the coproduction of livestock breeding and eugenic racecraft. USDA scientists and experts were at the forefront of inquiries into how to accumulate value by managing the reproduction of living entities—a foundational question of agricultural science. But this question was posed in the most politically powerful federal agency, gripped by modernizing ambitions that were seldom restricted narrowly to technical questions of agricultural production. As scholars of American political development show, the USDA was central to early twentieth-century state building. It outpaced every other federal agency in reach, scope, and administrative capacity until the reorganization of federal power unlocked by World War II. The USDA's seemingly bland educational programs often positioned federal authorities as important experts on matters of sexuality, gender, the body, and race. At the same time, those same authorities administered complex interventions in the national political economy in ways that reinforced their racial and gendered assumptions. Rather than an exceptional outlier, racist implementation of subsidy and loan programs was consistent with the broad racial ideology of the USDA that also manifested in strong working relationships between eugenicists and agricultural experts. The eugenicists in the USDA formed a deep network linking livestock research programs to organizations advocating for the racialized management of human reproduction. Livestock breeding and eugenic racial theory collided in spectacular fashion through the Better Sires—Better Stock campaign's reframing of livestock improvement as the eradication of unfit male animals. The figure of the scrub emerged in both eugenic and livestock breeding discourse to describe unfit life—precisely the kind of life the campaign sought to eradicate from American farms and eugenicists sought to eradicate from American society.¹⁴

¹³ On eugenics and whiteness, see Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (New York, 2016), 135–267. On eugenics, racecraft, and statecraft, see Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York, 1997). On governing the intersections of sexuality and race, see Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York, 1997); Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis, 2003); Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley, 2011); Jessica R. Pliley, *Policing Sexuality: The Mann Act and the Making of the FBI* (Cambridge, Mass., 2014); and Melissa N. Stein, *Measuring Manhood: Race and the Science of Masculinity, 1830–1934* (Minneapolis, 2015).

¹⁴ Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven, 2003). On the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and state building, see Kenneth Finegold and Theda Skocpol, *State and Party in America's New Deal* (Madison, 1995); Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877–1917* (Chicago, 1999); Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862–1928* (Princeton, 2001); and Ron, *Grassroots Leviathan*, xx. On the USDA, race, and gender, see Gabriel N. Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America* (Philadelphia, 2016); and Pete Daniel, *Dispossession: Discrimination against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill, 2013).

“To Wage Eternal Warfare on the Scrub”

The BAI launched the Better Sires—Better Stock campaign officially in October 1919 to fanfare and generous publicity. Announcements of the campaign ran in newspapers around the country, and the glowing publicity quickly established it as one of the most popular BAI programs. Representatives of President Woodrow Wilson pledged to allow only purebred rams among the sheep that grazed the White House lawn. The glowing publicity was cheap. The campaign was funded out of the bureau’s office budget and relied heavily on the CES to implement and supervise the campaign on the ground. BAI experts generated content that was then distributed through the CES. Although Mohler, Rommel, Sheets, and BAI editor Dallas Stockwell Burch authored most of the campaign’s material, they sought input on campaign literature from prominent geneticists and eugenicists.¹⁵

The campaign’s central objective was to educate livestock and dairy farmers about how the efficient reproductive management of livestock contributed to productivity. The campaign launched at a moment of relative prosperity for farmers, but the 1920s proved to be a calamitous decade in American agriculture. During World War I, agricultural commodity prices skyrocketed, driven by price supports from the U.S. government and declining production in Europe. Recognizing agriculture’s value to the war effort, the USDA encouraged farmers to capitalize on the high prices by expanding their operations with debt-financed purchases of land, machinery, and supplies. The collapse of agricultural commodity prices in 1920 launched waves of farm foreclosures. Low prices, high rates of foreclosure, and general turbulence in the agricultural sector persisted over the decade. Increasing production was the USDA’s primary advice to farmers before and after the price collapse. Government efforts to relieve distressed farmers prior to the New Deal were mostly limited to educational programs and the promotion of marketing and production cooperatives. USDA experts hoped these initiatives would encourage more efficient production and farm management practices among smaller farmers, in particular. Ostensibly, farmers could make capital investments in breeding stock to increase production of meat, dairy, eggs, and lard. Accordingly, the BAI aggressively promoted both pure breeding and boar, bull, and cock breeding cooperatives as part of the solution to the ailing agricultural economy. The farm crisis of the 1920s sparked a state response that, in seeking to forestall unfit life from reproducing, intensified the possibilities for the coproduction of eugenic racecraft and meat making.

BAI experts hoped that the increased use of purebred sires would mean fewer scrub sires. The word *scrub* had a large cultural life in the nineteenth-century United States, meaning low or inferior, and farmers sometimes used it to refer to undesirable livestock.

¹⁵ On the Better Sires—Better Stock campaign publicity, see survey in “The Bureau Range Finder,” Oct. 18, 1919, folder 369, box 452, entry 3: “Central Correspondence 1913–1953,” Records of the Bureau of Animal Industry, RG 17 (National Archives, College Park, Md.). For the White House pledge, see “Specific Facts and Figures on Benefits Following Use of Better Sires,” 1920, folder 369, box 456, *ibid.* On the campaign’s budget, see J. R. Mohler, “Memorandum to the Secretary,” Feb. 13, 1920, Animal Breeding folder, box 725, *ibid.*; “Better Sires—Better Stock’ Campaign,” *USDA Service and Regulatory Announcements* (Washington, 1919), 102; and *Testimony on the 1922 Agricultural Appropriations Bill* (Washington, 1921), 180. For examples of input from geneticists and eugenicists, see George Rommel, “Memorandum to Messrs. Bell, Marshall, Sheets, Lamon, Russel, and Wright,” Feb. 21, 1920, folder 369, box 452, entry 3: “Central Correspondence 1913–1953,” Records of the Bureau of Animal Industry. D. S. Burch also published in the *Journal of Heredity* on the benefits of the campaign and solicited support for it from readers of the journal. See D. S. Burch, “Heredity and Economical Production of Food,” *Journal of Heredity*, 11 (Jan. 1920), 7–11.

In the late nineteenth century, however, the appellation “scrub sire” drew hereditary distinctions related to purebred culture. For pure breeders, breed was part phenotype and part registered lineage. The USDA, land-grant colleges, fair associations, breeding societies, and agricultural press debated and regulated breed characteristics, adjusting definitions as evolving contexts required. In the United States, national breed associations first emerged after the Civil War, beginning with the American Berkshires Association in 1875. Through national associations, breeders tracked lineage and potentially valuable “better blood” through the widespread use of pedigrees and standard herd books. Where lineage was clear and the animal’s body fit, farmers and breeders could pay a fee to register an animal as purebred in a breed herd book. Where it was not, farmers classed the animal as “grade,” “crossbred,” or “scrub.” The USDA defined crossbreds as “the progeny of purebred parents of different breeds,” while a grade was the result of the paring of purebred with any animal that was not purebred. A scrub, however, was

an animal of mixed or unknown breeding without definite type or markings. Such terms as native, mongrel, razorback, dunghill, pineywoods, cayuse, broncho, and mustang are somewhat synonymous with “scrub,” although many of the animals described by these terms have a certain fixity of type, even though they present no evidence of systemic improved breeding.

Scrubs indicated ungoverned reproduction. Whatever phenotypical conformity such animals displayed was evidence not of improvement but of regression and degeneration toward feral, undomesticated, and “native” animals.¹⁶

This definition of “scrub” reflected how the transformation of the American livestock industry required new legal and political institutions to manage animal bodies and reproduction. As the campaign’s frequent confluences of scrubs and “native” animals indicated, the BAI assumed that indigenous societies practiced only open-range management and extensive breeding in contrast to the European tradition of “improved” and “civilized” intensive breeding. Rangier animals thrived on long drives, but, by 1920, most American ranges had been closed for decades or longer. Targets of the campaign were not ranchers engineering cattle drives over hundreds of miles; they were mostly landed white farmers in the Midwest, the South, and the East who raised livestock alongside staple crops or for dairying, and, to a lesser extent, western cattlemen who drove their grass-fed herds only to nearby railheads. Rangy “native” animals were obsolete in such a context. Toughness and fierceness might be virtues on the range, but those characteristics were biological anachronisms fitted for nomadic existence on the periphery of civilization. (Along these lines, Mohler complained to the Department of the Interior about the pervasive use of inferior sires on tribal reservations.) That the animals in question had been originally introduced by European colonizers was ignored, since “razorbacks” and “longhorns” had ostensibly degenerated under the lax reproductive governance of the frontier’s notoriously racially mixed populations. Regardless, campaign material usually characterized “native blood[ed]” animals as, at best, a starting

¹⁶ On the farm crisis of the 1920s, see Hurt, *American Agriculture*, 221–86; and R. Douglas Hurt, *The Problems of Plenty: The American Farmer in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 2002), 41–66. On the USDA’s responses and advice to farmers before the New Deal, see Rosenberg, *4-H Harvest*; Paul K. Conkin, *A Revolution Down on the Farm: The Transformation of American Agriculture since 1929* (Lexington, Ky., 2009), 51–76; and David E. Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal: American Farm Policy from Hoover to Roosevelt, 1928–1933* (Chapel Hill, 1991). For the “better blood” quotation, see “Economy in Beef Production Comes from Better Blood,” *USDA Weekly Newsletter*, Dec. 3, 1919, p. 1.

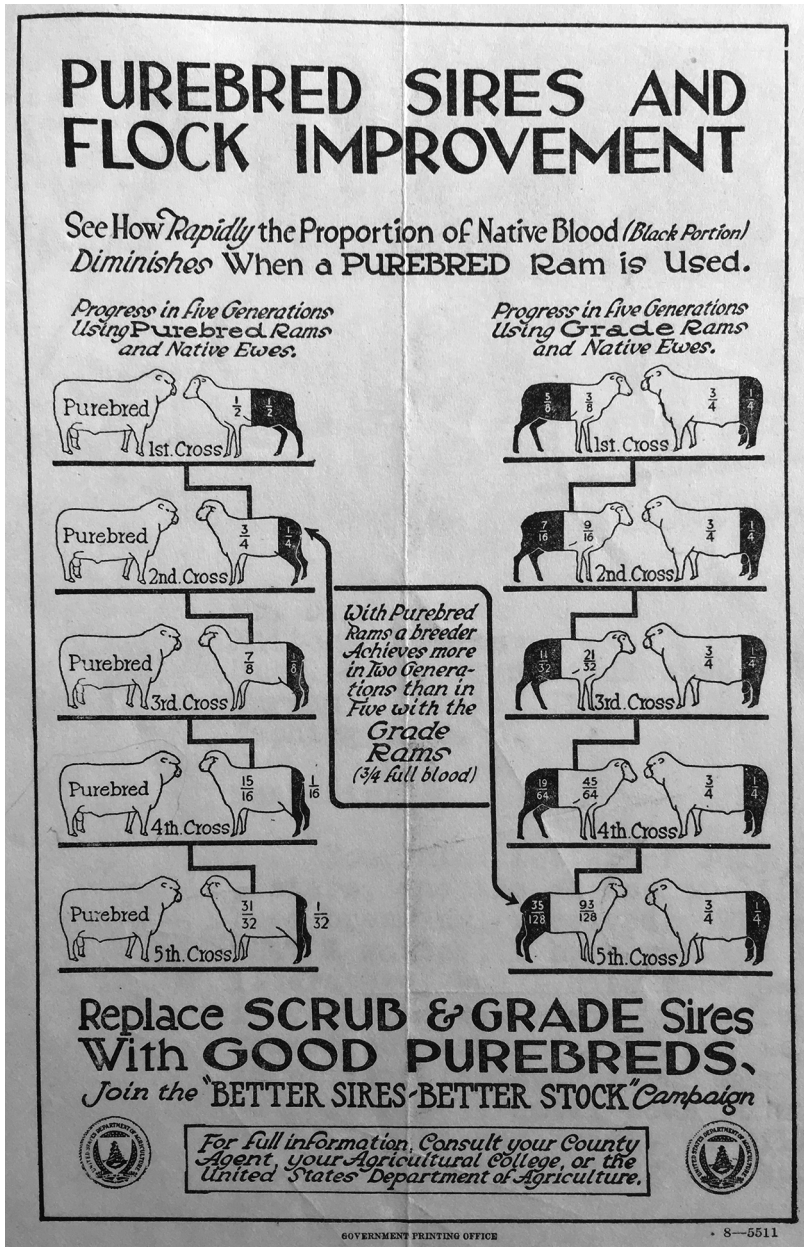


Figure 1. This U.S. Department of Agriculture poster from the 1920s Better Stock—Better Sires campaign illustrates how the campaign’s architects believed that pure breeding could improve herds by diminishing the proportion of “native” blood over successive generations. *Courtesy National Archives, College Park, Maryland.*

point that could be improved with the introduction of the purer “blood” of European cattle and pigs (see figure 1).¹⁷

¹⁷ For the scrub definition, see U.S. Department of Agriculture, “*Better Sires—Better Stock*,” 5–6. The definitions offered by the USDA in this circular found broader circulation through newspapers as smaller articles usually titled “What Is Breeding?” For identical examples, see “What Is Breeding?,” *National Stockman and Farmer*, Sept.

The campaign's educational efforts were joined with other more coercive state mechanisms designed to encourage purebred livestock breeding and to cull "native" and "scrub" animals. By the 1920s, a number of states—including Wyoming, Oregon, Colorado, Utah, and West Virginia—passed laws, commonly known as scrub sire laws, that fined owners for permitting scrub bulls to range freely or for publicly studding an inferior sire. (Many midwestern states had similar stallion laws for horses, requiring certification by a state board before a stallion could be publicly studded.) In addition, since the late nineteenth century, state and federal courts had awarded damages to the owners of dames impregnated by free-ranging scrub and grade sires, legal developments that encouraged farmers to dispose of scrub bulls and boars to better manage the liability associated with faulty fences or gates.¹⁸

Given increased government and juridical focus on the reproductive threat of both scrub animals and eugenically unfit persons, the expansion of the appellation "scrub" from animals to men was inevitable. Indeed, numerous commenters in the American agricultural press and in rural cultural spaces borrowed the term from its livestock context to describe undesirable humans or, conversely, illustrated the case for pure breeding by reference to the eugenically unfit. In 1908 the *Farmers' Review* published an article blasting "the scrub shepherd" as "the greatest obstacle to the sheep breeding industry." A 1919 article in *Ohio Farmer* wondered "why this commotion on the part of scrub men regarding scrub cattle? . . . Let us first unscrub the men and women . . . and, secondly, the cattle and oxen." Or, as the *Chicago Livestock World* glibly put it, "yes, indeed, the country has lots of scrub cattle, but more scrub men." A 1921 article in *Prairie Farmer* humorously illustrated the point with a cartoon juxtaposing a pair of "scrub" and "husky" hired men with a pair of scrub and purebred cows (see figure 2). "Hogs and cattle," the article explained, were "the hired men of the feedlot." The prominent psychologist Henry Goddard, author of the famed Kallikak eugenic family study, was even more explicit. "The cattle raiser knows he must have the right breed of stock to begin with or he will fail," opined Goddard in 1923. "A scrub breed never produced a prize winner, no matter what fine environment was given it. If you are a 'scrub breed,' the sooner you find it out the better. . . . A lot of useless energy would be saved if the 'scrubs' only realized their limitations."¹⁹

27, 1919, p. 713; and "What Is Breeding?," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 7, 1922, p. 4. On the global circulation of intensive breeding and the complicated politics of breed "nativity" in Anglo-settler colonial societies, see Woods, *Herd Shot around the World*. For the conflation of "native" animals with scrub and inferior stock, see "Diversified Farming Wins under Southern Conditions," *USDA Weekly Newsletter*, June 11, 1919, p. 12; "Cattle Tick on the Run in 22 Oklahoma Counties—Council of Defense Indorses," *ibid.*, Sept. 4, 1918, p. 16; and "South Makes Great Strides toward Growing Own Food," *ibid.*, Jan. 22, 1919, p. 12. J. R. Mohler, "Memorandum for Assistant Secretary Pugsley," April 7, 1923, Animal Breeding folder, box 964, entry 17: "General Correspondence of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, 1906–1970," Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, RG 16 (National Archives); "Activities in Which the Bureau of Animal Industry, U.S. Department of Agriculture Works with the Department of the Interior," May 14, 1913, *ibid.* Pablo Mitchell, *Coyote Nation: Sexuality, Race, and Conquest in Modernizing New Mexico, 1880–1920* (Chicago, 2005); Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*; and Pablo Mitchell, *West of Sex: Making Mexican America, 1900–1930* (Chicago, 2012). For the "native blood" quotation, see U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Purebred Sires and Herd Improvement* poster, n.d., Animal Breeding folder, box 964, entry 17: "General Correspondence of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, 1906–1970," Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture.

¹⁸ On sire laws, see correspondence in folder 369, box 452, entry 3: "Central Correspondence 1913–1953," Records of the Bureau of Animal Industry; and correspondence in folder 456, box 456, *ibid.* On stallion laws, see Merritt Wesley Harper, *Management and Breeding of Horses* (New York, 1913), 430–39.

¹⁹ "The Scrub Shepherd," *Farmers' Review*, June 20, 1908, p. 8. "The Parable of the Scrub," *Ohio Farmer*, July 5, 1919, p. 3. Untitled news item, *Chicago Livestock World*, June 11, 1912, p. 2. "Going, Going, Gone!," *Prairie*

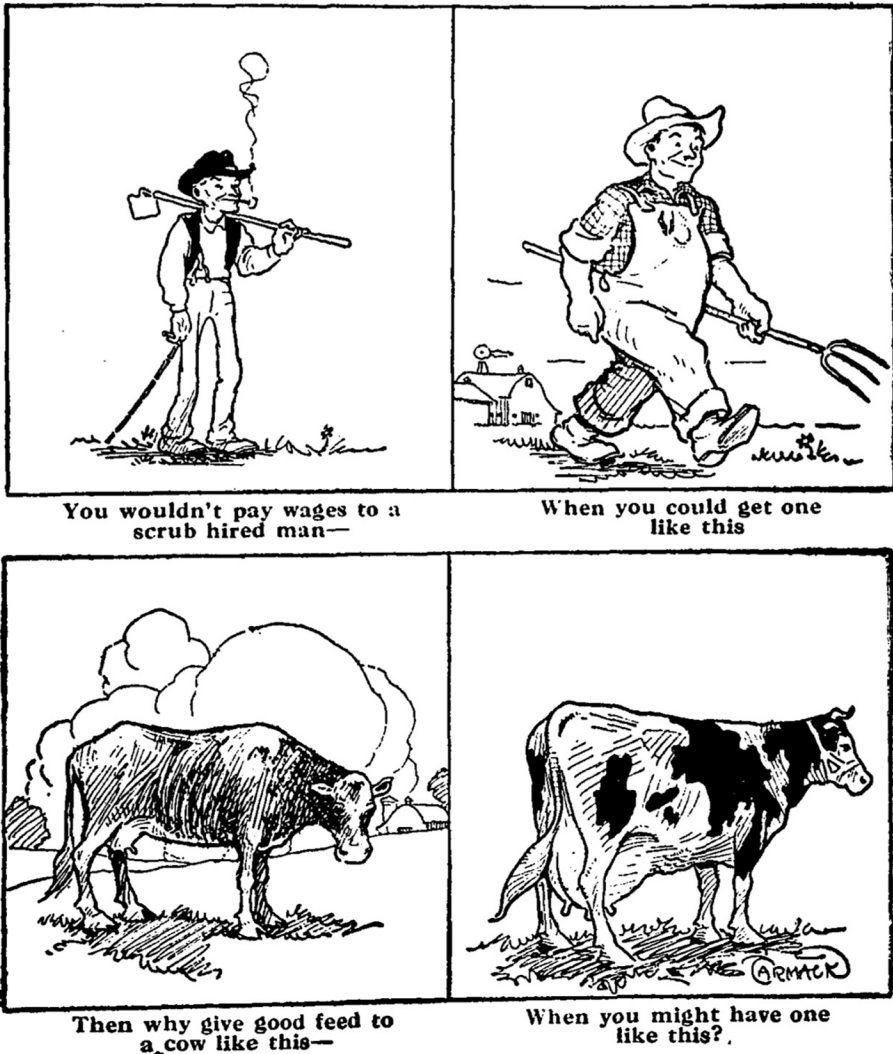


Figure 2. This cartoon comparison from a 1921 issue of *Prairie Farmer* shows how the concepts of “scrub” and “purebred” shaped how agricultural audiences thought about the fitness of both livestock and humans. Reprinted from “Going, Going, Gone!,” *Prairie Farmer*, Sept. 17, 1921, p. 5.

Ongoing exchanges between livestock breeders and eugenicists were common. Historians such as Barbara Kimmelman, Laura Lovett, and Colin R. Johnson show that eugenicists grounded their authority in agricultural expertise and frequently lauded the USDA success. In the first issue of the *Journal of Heredity*, Charles B. Davenport praised “our best plant and animal breeders” and suggested that conscientious readers should obtain from the Eugenic Records Office (ERO) at Cold Springs Harbor “blank family records . . . pedigrees” to complete and return. The ERO compiled a vast archive of the pedigrees. In

Farmer, Sept. 17, 1921, p. 5. Henry Goddard quoted in “Born a ‘Scrub’ You Are Hopeless,” *Urbana (IL) Daily Courier*, March 14, 1923, p. 6.

1927 D. S. Burch wrote to the ERO superintendent Harry Laughlin to ask what lessons from human pedigrees should inform the campaign. Laughlin replied with encouragement: “There is a closer relation between the registration of domestic animals and the analysis of human pedigrees than most people realize.” Laughlin, after all, had already validated the campaign’s “pure sire method” in a 1920 article about human racial categories, titled “Race Assimilation by the Pure Sire Method,” published in the *Journal of Heredity*. Similarly, Nevada agriculture extension agent Joseph W. Wilson planned to use “heredisscopes, which are sold by the American Genetic Association, in connection with a talk on purebred sires.” When Wilson wrote to the BAI for information on livestock genetics, C. D. Lowe responded with a lengthy excerpt from *The Basis of Breeding*, by AES president Leon F. Whitney, discussing dominant and recessive traits ranging from “Jewish facial types” and “musical ability” in humans to “milk yield” and “spotting” in cattle.²⁰

The image of the scrub was a powerful way for eugenicists to illustrate eugenic principles to lay audiences. Rural audiences were already familiar with the idea of scrubs, and the scrub’s vague paternity and ambiguous anatomy made it an apt stand-in for different groups collected under the umbrella of the eugenically unfit. Eugenicists familiar with livestock breeding practices recognized that to literally breed humans like livestock required systematizing polygamy and incest. As a result, elite eugenicists tried to quash livestock analogies that raised the specter of sex radicalism. These cautions, however, were frequently lost in popular translation, where agriculture and livestock metaphors continued to be an important way of translating—and proving—eugenic expertise to lay audiences. In 1926 and 1927, for example, the AES sponsored a national “eugenics sermon” contest. The contest asked entrants to preach sermons at churches explaining the compatibility of human eugenics and Christian devotion. The collected sermons were a revealing window onto popular eugenic translation since the preachers addressed their sermons to large lay audiences and did so usually without any formal training in genetics. Indeed, in these sermons, agricultural and livestock metaphors remained the most common and consistent ways to explain how and why eugenics worked, even when, in doing so, the metaphors explicitly contravened the warnings of the AES about sex radicalism. For example, W. P. Lemon’s sermon to Andrew Presbyterian Church of Minneapolis in 1927 reversed the typical relation of the livestock analogy by pondering how catastrophic it would be to breed animals like humans:

Suppose we applied the methods we use in breeding our children to breeding our livestock. We should then allow every individual in the herd to breed, sterilizing none. The weaklings and deformed would receive special care and be permitted to propagate. Polygamous and consanguinous unions would be forbidden by law. Every animal would be left free to choose its own mate for life. Under such conditions stock raising would be reduced to the standard of the early American Indian.

With this thought experiment conducted, Lemon concluded that applying the insights of livestock breeding, in the form of eugenics, to human populations was imperative.

²⁰ Kimmelman, “American Breeders’ Association”; Laura L. Lovett, *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890–1938* (Chapel Hill, 2007); Colin R. Johnson, *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* (Philadelphia, 2013). Charles B. Davenport, “Eugenics, a Subject for Investigation Rather than Instruction,” *American Breeders Magazine*, 1 (no. 1, 1910), 69. Emphasis added. D. S. Burch to Harry Laughlin, Nov. 12, 1927, folder 1.602 “1927–1929,” box 524, entry 3: “Central Correspondence 1913–1953,” Records of the Bureau of Animal Industry. Laughlin to Burch, Nov. 21, 1927, *ibid.* Harry L. Laughlin, “Race Assimilation by the Pure Sire Method,” *Journal of Heredity*, 11 (June 1920), 259–63. Joseph W. Wilson to C. D. Lowe, Feb. 14, 1931, folder 1.602 “1927–1929,” box 547, Records of the Bureau of Animal Industry. Lowe to Wilson, Feb. 18, 1931, *ibid.*

Most of the sermons were more circumspect and simply cited how the USDA's investment in improved livestock had paid tangible benefits to farmers across the nation. But many made explicit use of the contrast between scrubs and purebreds. "No farmer believes in breeding from 'scrubs'; but from pure blood or certified and pedigreed stock. Why?" pondered Frederick Adams before the congregation of the United Church of Hinesburg, Vermont, in 1926. "Because they have been 'bred up' to a standard; the best traits have been conserved by proper mating."²¹

The BAI and its allies echoed this rhetoric of blood purity in material related to the campaign. "There is not a farmer in the country whose status would not be improved by purifying the blood of his farm animals of every type, and keeping it pure," explained an article, drawn from publicity material, about the campaign in the *Atlanta Constitution*. Discussion of "better" and "pure" blood linked directly with other conversations among farmers and breeders about breeds as "races" that applied explicitly racial logics to different breeds' economic and demographic fates. Regardless, the agricultural press frequently wrote of both animal races and "race suicides" in language strikingly similar to the copious breathless commentaries on the alleged reproductive slump of white, Anglo-Saxon manhood.²²

Just as with contemporaneous discourses of human "race suicide," the BAI's explanation of animal breeding attached reproduction to a corporeal teleology of racial ascents and declines. "Once the use of pure-bred sires becomes general throughout the country, the process of grading up will be rapid," wrote Mohler. The first poster generated by the campaign—"Which Way is Your Live Stock Going?"—aptly captured the sense of futurity in Mohler's words but gestured at a collective body greater than the herd. A line of robust "purebreds" paraded upward to a fruitful, orderly farm, while a glum march of emaciated, bent "scrubs" trudged down to a barren, broken homestead. In this sense, the poster linked the biological improvement of animals to healthy landscapes and farms and, thus, explicated the interweaving of human and animal fates embedded within the concept of improvement. Other material more explicitly linked livestock improvement and the social body by appealing to "the future food needs of this country's increasing population." In such a figuration, if farmers would not improve their livestock, the future social body risked malnourishment and starvation.²³

The particular end toward which collective and individual bodies were progressing depended on both aesthetic and economic factors. Different breeds had different uses; a Holstein was a fine dairy cow, but she took on weight too slowly to be a productive beef cow. For a dairy farmer, a single bull was sufficient breeding stock. If they could not be sold or rented to another farm, surplus bulls, even purebreds, were castrated and sent to

²¹ On popular eugenics, see Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley, 2002); Lovett, *Conceiving the Future*; Kline, *Building a Better Race*; and Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds., *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s* (Athens, Ohio, 2006). On the thinking of elite eugenicists around livestock breeding analogies, see "A Eugenics Catechism," n.d., "AES—Printing Order, 1926–1942 #4" folder, box 11, American Eugenics Society Papers Collection (American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pa.); and O. Cook to Roswell H. Johnson, May 6, 1927, "Cook, O. F." folder, box 14, *ibid.* For the Andrew Presbyterian Church sermon, see Sermon #9 in "Huntington, Henry S. #3" folder, box 15, *ibid.* For an example of a circumspect sermon, see Sermon #41 in "Harris, Sidney" folder, *ibid.* Sermon #2 in "Adams, Frederick F." folder, box 1, *ibid.*

²² "Better Livestock," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 7, 1922, p. 4. "Economy in Beef Production Comes from Better Blood," *USDA Weekly Newsletter*, Dec. 3, 1919, p. 1. Rosenberg, "Race Suicide among the Hogs."

²³ Mohler, "Memorandum for Assistant Secretary Pugsley," 6. "Nation-Wide Drive for Better Stock," *New York Times*, Aug. 15, 1919, p. 23. See similar "population" language in "Drive against Scrub Sires," *Orange Judd Farmer*, Oct. 25, 1919, p. 618.

the feedlot. For all breeding stock, dams typically outnumbered potential sires by ratios of 20:1 or more. On smaller farms, a farmer might forgo owning sires altogether and choose to rent a sire from a neighbor or, if available, a bull association. Husbandry experts often lamented that, lacking a robust and systematic economy of sires, farmers wasted good blood. An article in *Wallace's Farmer*, for example, complained about the untimely demise of "Cornucopia Pauline Count 13th . . . a great sire . . . sold to the butcher for \$50." To avoid such "tragic instances," the article made a case for the formation of bull associations, a primary objective of the campaign.²⁴

Campaign material tended to portray female animals—scrub and purebred, alike—as the passive beneficiaries of improved male sexuality rather than a locus of improvement. It depicted dairy cows as refined specimens of maternity and femininity. However, their femininity was tied to their milk producing potential and feminine appearances, and not to their abilities as sexual laborers. A USDA exhibit at the 1919 National Dairy Show showcased a cow, Bossie, "dolloed up in all the finery known to cowdom, the veritable fashion plate of the animal kingdom." The USDA took a slightly different approach at the dairy show the next year, when it took care to show both purebred and scrub dairy cows at their exhibit. This contrast, however, reaffirmed male sexuality as the instrument of change. "Mrs. Scrub Dairy Cow is about to break into the upper class of dairy society," announced the *USDA Weekly Newsletter*. "Madam scrub will parade with the blue-blooded aristocracy of the cattle world." This depiction cast Madam Scrub as scaling the social ladder through prudent marriages. She did not "get into society on the strength of her own qualities; she is accepted purely on account of the merits of her mate and her progeny." Coincident with the USDA's focus on male sexuality, there was a place for Madam Scrub in the dairy aristocracy, provided she matched with a purebred male.²⁵

In contrast, the campaign construed male sexuality as the primary locus of contamination, and it situated scrub sires as a "threat" to collective health and vitality to be addressed with extraordinary violence. In the first year of the campaign, the BAI literature called for scrubs to be "eliminate[d]," "eradicated," "discard[ed]," and "slaughter[ed]." Scrubs were only "mongrel, misfit, miscellaneous males" and "the greatest enemy to the business." Other writers were downright bloodthirsty. "At present prices for pure bred bulls, it is a crime to permit a scrub bull to roam the pasture. Swat him! Sell him! Banish him! Kill him!" wrote Alexander Jackson, favorably quoting an author in the *Oklahoma Farmer*. Other publicity associated with the campaign described scrub eradication as total war. The *USDA Weekly Newsletter* described bull associations as "wag[ing] eternal warfare on the scrub." In 1920, the USDA reported that, owing to scrub bulls' status as "enemies of good production," a Wisconsin farmer sought to rename them as "bulshheviks." In riffing on the menace of communist espionage, the pun mutually constructed Bolsheviks and Bulshheviks as threats that warranted emergency action and state violence.²⁶

²⁴ E. W. Sheets, "Memorandum to Mr. Rommel," Dec. 11, 1920, folder 369, box 456, entry 3: "Central Correspondence 1913–1953," Records of the Bureau of Animal Industry. "Save the Good Bulls," *Wallace's Farmer*, Dec. 12, 1919, p. 2481. H. A. Hopper, "Better Sires Campaign Needs Support of Every Agency," *National Stockman and Farmer*, Nov. 1, 1919, p. 885.

²⁵ "Foster Mothers on Parade Fix Fashions at Chicago," *USDA Weekly Newsletter*, Nov. 5, 1919, p. 3. "Gets Place among Purebreds to Show Merits of Her Mate," *ibid.*, July 21, 1920, p. 6.

²⁶ "Community Breeding Develops Better Cattle, Puts 'Scrub' Sires in Discard," *ibid.*, March 19, 1919, p. 9. "West Virginia Launches War against Scrub Sires," *ibid.*, Oct. 1, 1919, p. 2. "Scrub Sire's Foes Line Up," *ibid.*, Oct. 1, 1919, p. 2. "Swat the Scrub Sire," *ibid.*, Nov. 5, 1919, p. 5. Untitled item, *ibid.*, March 1923, p. 8. Alexander Jackson, "Just Can Him," *Rock Island Magazine*, 16 (Sept. 1921), 11. On war language, see Edmund P. Russell, "'Speaking of Annihilation': Mobilizing for War against Human and Insect Enemies, 1914–1945," *Journal of*

Such rhetoric may have suggested that the scrub was without value, but the incentives of the campaign ensured that scrubs still had value, just not as breeding animals. Indeed, the BAI and its allies made sure that farmers had ample buyers for scrubs as meat. The campaign subsidized the killing of genetically inferior animals or, in other words, assigned a positive value to the death of the reproductively unfit. The first step was to identify and quarantine scrubs within a suitable spatial unit. (Since most counties in the United States had a county agent, the BAI chose the county as that unit.) Within a given county, agents conducted livestock surveys intended to produce both nationally scalable data and maps for follow-up work.²⁷

Next, agents pushed farmers to eliminate scrub sires by providing a range of subsidies. Farmers might be persuaded of the merits of pure breeding and still balk at the logistical challenges and investments necessary to finding a good stud. The campaign facilitated exchanges by bringing buyers and sellers together and by helping secure financing for the purchases. In Sevier County, Arkansas, for example, County Agent E. D. White arranged the purchase of twenty-four purebred bulls, and then he helped farmers “ship out” the displaced scrub bulls. Similarly, “county agents, agricultural high school teachers, and banks” in Virginia facilitated the sale of two carloads of purebred boars that would otherwise have been wastefully castrated and sold for meat. If the farmer could not afford to purchase a purebred sire, campaign agents worked with bankers to facilitate loans and organized similarly situated farmers to create breeding cooperatives or to jointly purchase sires. In some cases, agents persuaded owners of purebred sires to forego stud fees in areas “cursed with scrub sires.”²⁸

More broadly, the campaign’s allies arranged prizes and premiums for farmers who agreed to use only purebred studs, and they also subsidized the sales of purebred studs. For example, the Chicago-based feed retailer Chapin & Company pledged \$1,000 to the first county “to become free of scrub, grade, and other inferior sires.” In Georgia another “Better Sires’ train” promised to offer farmers “a premium above the market price . . . for scrub bulls disposed,” while in northeastern Michigan the Michigan Central Railroad and the Detroit and Mackinac Railroad worked with Michigan State College to allow farmers to trade one hundred scrubs for an equal number of purebred bulls. In Massachusetts a Holstein-Friesian breeder promised to trade one of his purebred “bulls for any scrub bull in the county.” Across these and other examples, the campaign organized an array of private actors—banks, chambers of commerce, meat-packers, railroads, and breeders among them—into an efficient BAI infrastructure.²⁹

American History, 82 (March 1996), 1505–29; and Edmund Russell, *War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War I to Silent Spring* (New York, 2001). “Hope for Scrub-Free U.S.; Bull Associations Working,” *USDA Weekly Newsletter*, April 2, 1919, p. 16. “War on Scrubs,” *Extension Animal Husbandman*, 10 (June 1928), 26. “A New Name for Scrubs,” *USDA Weekly Newsletter*, May 12, 1920, p. 2.

²⁷ “Hope for Scrub-Free U.S.,” “Scrub Purebreds Counted,” *USDA Weekly Newsletter*, Dec. 17, 1919, p. 7; “Methods Used Successfully in Bringing About a Wider Use of Purebred Sires,” May 14, 1923, p. 3, Animal Breeding folder, box 964, entry 17: “General Correspondence of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, 1906–1970,” Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture.

²⁸ “Arkansas,” *Extension Animal Husbandman*, 20 (Dec. 1930), 10. “Virginia,” *ibid.*, 17. “The Better-Sires Campaign Attracts Western Attention,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 30, 1919, p. D7; “Organize to Banish Scrubs,” *USDA Weekly Newsletter*, June 11, 1919, p. 11; “Specific Facts and Figures on Benefits Following Use of Better Sires.” “Offer Free Use of Good Sires,” *USDA Weekly Newsletter*, Oct. 29, 1919, p. 11.

²⁹ “Prizes Offered in Better-Bull Campaign to Free Missouri Farms of Scrub Bulls,” *USDA Weekly Newsletter*, April 13, 1921, p. 12. “Prize of \$1,000 for First Purebred-Sire County,” May 27, 1920, Animal Breeding folder, box 725, entry 17: “General Correspondence of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, 1906–1970,” Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture. “‘Better Sires’ Train Itinerary Completed,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 3, 1928, p. 5; “Pure-Bred Dairy Bulls Exchanged for Scrubs,” *Baltimore Sun*, Oct. 27, 1929, p. 2. “Specific Facts and Figures on Benefits Following Use of Better Sires.”

The campaign and its allies circulated—and circumscribed—the concepts of purebreds and scrubs as figures with specific relationships to collective vitality and health. Scrubs were a contagious threat to collective vitality because they passed on bad blood and stole value from herd and nation. The campaign translated both the etiology and treatment of infectious disease into a program for governing any genetic illness deemed a threat to collective health and prosperity. Eradicating livestock genetic illness fit perfectly with the area eradication model precisely because, by design, area eradication distributed labor and harnessed private violence for public ends. Left to this, the campaign might merely have recirculated extant scrub discourse without, in fact, focusing on institutions that governed human life and reproduction. However, the most sensational and highly publicized component of the campaign made animals players in a “didactic theater” that promoted the power of the state to govern reproduction.³⁰

The Trial of the Scrub Sire

In the most popular public spectacle organized by the campaign, the function of the trial was clear: like humans, animals could be brought before a court to have the truth of their bodies determined. County agents created a public spectacle, known as the “trial of the scrub sire,” usually at a county or state fair, around the “mock” trial of a scrub sire for “theft” or “grand larceny.” Hundreds of such trials were held in every region of the country, often drawing audiences of thousands of spectators. The BAI furnished an elaborate script for the event, replete with model cross-examinations, closing arguments, jury instructions, and a funeral oration. In organizing the event, county agents collaborated with farm bureaus, chambers of commerce, rotary clubs, and other voluntary civil associations. Prominent citizens served as the officers of the court—a judge, sheriff, prosecutor, and defense attorney, and a jury comprising farmers. The county agent, with monetary or animal contributions from his civil society partners, obtained a scrub sire—usually a bull, but sometimes a boar, a ram, or even a cock. An indictment was drafted, naming the animal and enumerating its crimes. Organizers circulated the indictment in local newspapers and publicized the event. On the day of the trial, the organizers brought the animal to the site of the trial—usually the county courthouse or fairgrounds—and opened the trial. Any citizen who wished could speak for or against the scrub, but the county agent typically testified for the prosecution and secured a number of “expert” witnesses to do the same. Following the testimony and closing arguments, the jury deliberated. In almost all cases the scrub bull was convicted and sentenced to death. In most cases a barbecue followed an execution, though, as D. S. Burch wrote in the trial instructions, it was “impracticable to barbecue the bull which was alive at the time of the trial owing to the length of time required to cook the meat. However, the barbecue will convey the impression that [the] ultimate destination of the scrub bull is for meat purposes.”³¹

In staging a trial for a scrub bull, Burch and the BAI drew on an ancient practice that had been infused with renewed meaning and presence in American popular culture at the turn of the twentieth century. The trial and execution of animals for various crimes had been conducted in Europe into the early modern period by both secular and ecclesiastical

³⁰ Lawrence M. Friedman, *The Big Trial: Law as Public Spectacle* (Lawrence, 2015), 4.

³¹ Burch, *Outline for Conducting a Scrub Sire Trial*, 18.

courts. The historian Amy Wood notes that the practice was revived in the United States in the late nineteenth century to punish “murderous” circus elephants that had trampled humans. Like at the trial of the scrub sire, large audiences attended the elephant executions, and newspapers hungrily reported on the events. The executions resonated with the public because they allowed people to witness in spectacular fashion the potent legal ritual of execution, which, by 1900, was usually conducted in private. Such private executions did not always satisfy the public desire for retribution, sentiments that often spilled over into lawless vigilante action and lynching. Elephants, as wild and natural beasts, stood in for a savage criminality, often coded as black, that civilization sought to tame through law. “A community’s demand for vengeance against a rampaging and crazed ‘beast,’” Wood writes, “who was then hanged before a throng of spectators, certainly echoes, in familiar and eerie form, lynching practices.”³²

The comparison of elephant executions and scrub trials discloses the scrub trial’s unique pedagogical function. Scrub trials were also held in large public spaces that, in the South, were racially segregated, and some of the trials (in and outside the South) may have been spatially proximate to recent lynchings. However, the trials’ links to lynching were far murkier than the elephant executions. Unlike elephant executions, scrub sire trials were not hastily improvised, and they were not held exclusively or predominantly in the American South, although they did originate there. Nor did the participants or spectators draw explicit comparisons between scrubs and specific human racial categories. Instead, scrubs functioned as the broader category of eugenically unfit life, a category of value that breeders and eugenicists both agreed could span human and nonhuman populations. In addition, the trials were meticulously planned and scripted to buttress the USDA’s authority and, more broadly, respect for the laws of the state and the laws of nature. While the elephants were executed for specific actions, scrub sires were tried and executed not for what they had done but for what organizers considered the “nature” of their bodies. Elephant executions centered around the conventional narrative of a wrong-doing being met with retribution, but the trial of the scrub sire positioned the state as an adjudicator of intrinsic (and speculative) value. The issue was not what the scrub had done; it was what the scrub’s body had the potential to do through reproduction.

Pickens County, South Carolina, hosted the first recorded scrub sire trial in October 1922 before “a great crowd” at the county fair. The county agent, with the assistance of “rural and town policemen” brought a scrub bull before “Judge Jameson, and after arguments on both side[s] were completed . . . the defendant was found guilty . . . and was sentenced to death on the block, local butchers to act as executioners.” Likely inspired by Pickens County, the mayor and sheriff of Statesville, North Carolina, presided over a trial “carried on with due observance of the law at the county court house” in November of the same year (see figure 3). W. Kerr Scott, who would go on to be a U.S. senator and then governor of North Carolina, prosecuted the bull. Reflecting growing enthusiasm for the trials, Burch authored a comprehensive set of instructions to allow other county agents to follow the lead of South Carolina and North Carolina. The booklet was immediately in

³² M. C. Claar to Burch, July 11, 1928, folder 1.602 “1927–1929,” box 529, entry 3: “Central Correspondence 1913–1953,” Records of the Bureau of Animal Industry; B. R. Comstock to Bureau of Animal Industry, Nov. 21, 1924, folder 1.602 “1922–1924 East Wing,” box 507, *ibid.* Burch, *Outline for Conducting a Scrub Sire Trial*, 18. Amy Louise Wood, “Killing the Elephant: Murderous Beasts and the Thrill of Retribution, 1885–1930,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 11 (July 2012), 405–44, esp. 440.



Figure 3. This photograph documents a 1922 scrub bull trial in Statesville, North Carolina. Future North Carolina governor and U.S. senator W. Kerr Scott prosecuted the defendant, the bull held in the pen shown in the far left of the photo. *Photograph by William Jasper Stimson. Courtesy Iredell County Public Library Photograph Collection, Troutman, North Carolina.*

high demand, with the BAI reporting requests from county agents for five hundred copies within a month of its publication in March 1924.³³

The trial of the scrub sire picked up steam as a mass spectacle and an entertaining diversion for rural people. The trial gathered substantial media attention and sizeable audiences, with accounts of trials circulating in local and national newspapers. In Pennsylvania, five hundred people attended a scrub bull trial in Martinsburg, in 1926, while more than one thousand attended a 1924 trial in Waynesboro. A Portage County, Wisconsin, trial drew a crowd of 3,500. Hundreds of spectators attended a 1924 trial in Lincoln County, Oregon. Savvy county agents advertised and staged the trial to maximize the interests and attention of large crowds. For example, “twenty-five hundred card invitations were mailed and 100 colored posters advertised” the Waynesboro trial. The county agent arranged for Waynesboro merchants to hold a “dollar day” sale before the event. The trial was conducted on an elevated platform lit by “electric lights” and the agent arranged for a band to accompany the proceedings.³⁴

³³ “The Trial and Death Sentence of Mr. Scrub Bull,” *Raleigh (NC) Progressive Farmer*, Nov. 11, 1922, p. 5. “Scrub Bull Found Guilty after Fair Trial in Court,” *Lenoir (NC) News-Topic*, Nov. 30, 1922, p. 2. See also the account in “Scrub Bull to Be Put on Trial! Why Not a Scrub Boar?,” *Berkshire World and Corn Belt Stockman*, Dec. 1, 1922, p. 21. “Court Trials for Scrub Sires,” *USDA Official Record*, April 23, 1924, p. 3; “Court of Bovine Justice,” *Manitowoc (WI) Herald-Times*, Sept. 24, 1924, p. 6.

³⁴ On the Martinsburg and Waynesboro, trials, see “Extension News Item,” *USDA Official Record*, Sept. 15, 1926, p. 6. On the Portage County trial, see “Scrub Bull Has Court Record,” *ibid.*, Sept. 8, 1926, p. 2. On the Lincoln

As the historian Lawrence Friedman notes, early twentieth-century Americans clamored for the “didactic theater” of spectacular “headline trials.” Some commenters astutely recognized that the public’s affection for the dramatic form of the trial could be exploited for free publicity, and the BAI and CES pursued a similar strategy around scrub trials. Friedman maintains that media and public scrutiny meant that prosecutors and courts in headline trials were particularly fastidious about procedure. The effect of this proceduralism instilled public faith in the consistency and fairness of trials, the “rule of law,” and more banal exercises of state power that proceeded apace outside public view. During the Progressive Era, the American state flowed increasingly through municipal courts, law enforcement, and administrative hearings, most receiving little public scrutiny or attention. Spectacular headline trials, then, underwrote the hearings, panels, and bodily inspections increasingly organized by state and medical authorities to assess and administer eugenic fitness. In both the case of immigration restriction and sterilization, state certified experts—doctors and immigration agents—performed perfunctory inspections of human bodies to assess their reproductive fitness. In rural America, public health authorities frequently linked eugenic fitness to livestock and plant breeding at agricultural exhibitions and fairs, hosting Better Baby, Fitter Family, and 4-H Health contests where doctors, nurses, and county agents inspected and scored the bodies of contestants. And, in countless courtrooms, prosecutors and judges argued that criminality was a heritable characteristic of the criminal’s body, as degeneracy was the nature of the scrub’s body. The general faith in the capacity of the state to execute eugenic policies hinged on the belief that experts, even without public scrutiny, would faithfully and dispassionately apply the principles of successful breeding didactically advanced by the trial of the scrub sire.³⁵

The BAI encouraged similar didactic proceduralism in the trial of the scrub. Despite the spectacular nature of the proceedings, the BAI emphasized that the integrity of the “medium of the trial” had to be maintained as much as possible and that the proceedings should not devolve into “a burlesque on the dignity of the law.” Publicity material in newspapers often referred to the “due process of law” granted to the scrub sire, assuring readers that he was given a full, “fair[,] and impartial trial.” Burch’s instructions emphasized that the officers of the court “have experience and acquaintance with court proceedings” and ideally be prominent members of the local bar. Similarly, while “local color and some levity” should pepper the proceedings, “the purpose is to hold the interest of the audience and convince listeners that purebred sires are desirable and scrub sires highly undesirable.” A trial that respected procedure would ultimately be more compelling for the audience. For this reason, Burch recommended that the trial be robustly adversarial. As the *USDA Official Record* explained, giving persons who “really desire to defend the scrub sire . . . plenty of time and opportunity to do so . . . stimulates the prosecuting attorney to his best effort and greatly increases the educational value of the event.” Trials were well suited not only to adjudicate acts but also to persuasively determine the truth of the defendant’s body.

County trial, see “Stage Scrub-Bull Trial,” *Norfolk (VA) New Journal and Guide*, Sept. 20, 1924, p. 3. On the Waynesboro trial, see “Court of Bovine Justice,” 6.

³⁵ Friedman, *Big Trial*, 4. “New Styles in Bulletins,” *USDA Official Record*, April 25, 1931, p. 1. Friedman, *Big Trial*, 2–7. On multiplying hearings during the Progressive Era, see Michael Willrich, *City of Courts: Socializing Justice in Progressive Era Chicago* (Cambridge, Eng., 2003). On eugenic fitness at agricultural exhibitions and fairs, see Lovett, *Conceiving the Future*; and Rosenberg, *4-H Harvest*. On criminality as heritable, see Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals*. On eugenic inspections of bodies, see Canaday, *Straight State*; Stern, *Eugenic Nation*; and Dolmage, *Disabled upon Arrival*.

The scrub's crime was not his actions but his existence. "This male individual of the species bovine is a rank imposter and a parasite," explained the USDA's script, "a danger to the herd with which he is accustomed to associate, and by virtue of his nature, a menace not only to the prosperity of his owner, but to the community at large."³⁶

Scrub trials usually played out according to the USDA's guidelines. In most cases, the agents successfully recruited judges and members of the local bar to participate, and defense attorneys relished the opportunity to put on a good show. Where trials diverged most was in the immediate fate of the defendants. Burch's booklet encouraged that the bull be slaughtered at the conclusion of the trial, but he allowed that this might not always prove practical. The expense of procuring a bull, even a scrub, could be cost prohibitive, and many county agents "borrowed" a suitable defendant from a cooperating farmer and then returned him at the conclusion of the trial. In those cases, such as Fairfield's Howard County trial in 1923, spectators would hear "a shot" but not witness an actual death. Regardless, unlike the elephant trials, the trial, not the execution, was the object of spectacle and the didactic instrument. The trial adjudicated the potential value of the sire's body—if it was suitable for meat or for breeding—and, once uncovered, the scrub sire's actual death was a banal afterthought, an unremarkable death regularly suffered by millions of other nameless animals as meat was made. Attendees witnessed the juridical process and a reproductive valuation in a single spectacular event.³⁷

The universality of the "principles of successful breeding" did not mean that all creatures of a species were the same. A trial's humor was often premised on differences among types of animals of the same species. "What is the difference between a scrub bull and a purebred?" posed the prosecutor. "They are alike because they both multiply, but they are different because the scrub never gets the right answer," answered the butcher. Biological truths, uncovered by the trial, marked some animals for death and meat, others for life and reproduction. Different species and different members of the same species were "naturally" fitted for dramatically different social destinations. The putatively "natural" biological characteristics of animal bodies endowed collective choices about how to treat those bodies with the gravity of nature, precisely "disguising collective social practice as inborn individual traits." The scrub's trial gestured at both—on the one hand, the idea of life as a domain organized by natural and universal principles of breeding and, on the other hand, the power of the state to divide that domain on the basis of equally natural speculative and racial divisions.³⁸

Like the reference to the Bulshevik, the trial of the scrub bull must be read as parody. The object of the parody was not the law or legal proceedings, although this was the medium of parody. The demand that the law be treated with dignity and respect, and carefully scripting a trial according to that assumption, meant that the power of the trial to discern the truth of bodies was never in doubt. By placing a bull on trial, the trial "mocked" the concept of absolute speculative difference, and the script derived its spectacular humor by playing with, suspending, collapsing, and sometimes reversing any possible differences

³⁶ "New Styles in Bulletins," 1. Burch, *Outline for Conducting a Scrub Sire Trial*, 19, 5. "Scrub Bull to Be Put on Trial," 21. "Scrub Bull Has Court Record," 2. Burch, *Outline for Conducting a Scrub Sire Trial*, 7.

³⁷ Burch, *Outline for Conducting a Scrub Sire Trial*, 15. "To Try Scrub Bull," *Frederick (MD) News*, Oct. 31, 1923, p. 2.

³⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Better Sires—Better Stock," 4. Burch, *Outline for Conducting a Scrub Sire Trial*, 6. Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*, 261.

between humans and cattle that might restrict the powers of the state to the governance of the reproduction of the one but not the other.

In this, the trial of the scrub sire was balanced precariously around failure in which either too much or too little imitation brought ruin. Too successful an imitation rendered grotesque results: a bull endowed with full legal human personality was not a suitable meal. But too poor an imitation undercut the didactic theater of the trial. If the defense attorney was a dunce, the judge a brute, and the jury a pack of fools, spectators would be liable to take the lesson that trials, and the state that organized them, could not be trusted. That lesson would mean juridical proceedings were ill-fitted to adjudicate the speculative value of bodies, much less to tender advice about agriculture and livestock. A burlesque undermined the state's robust claim to being able to govern the continuity of life implied by the principles of better breeding, and it especially called into question the state's capacity to distinguish differences within species. If state responses did not appear to flow dispassionately from the nature of the bodies revealed by the trial, the state—invested with ugly passion rather than expert reason—could hardly transform “collective social action into inborn difference.” And, so, the parody needed to tack back and forth between these poles. In this way, the scrub's trial reaffirmed the capacity of the state to judge the value of a body and to coat that judgment in the patina of natural difference. The trial seemed to reveal natural differences in value, when, in fact, it produced differences in value. In the trial, the body of the animal was the terrain of a critical collapse of a scientific revelation and a political valuation, precisely the knotting of representations, identities, discourses, and institutions that could coproduce livestock breeding and eugenic racecraft.³⁹

The scrub trial, then, had obvious significance for human governance. Of course, the USDA's investment in promoting state capacities was primarily mobilized by its institutional charge to manage the nation's livestock, but some participants explicitly connected the trial to human controversies. “[Judge] Cleaves told the jury that the rule holds good in the breeding of dairy animals as in the human family that like begets like,” explained an article in the *Lewiston (ME) Daily Sun* about a 1929 trial. Similarly, S. B. Cleland, a Minnesota extension worker, recommended calling human parents and their offspring to the stand to demonstrate the principles of breeding at stake in the trial. In Cleland's alternative script, a runty man was called to the stand and asked to identify his sons: three strapping, hulking men and three skinny, undersized men. What appeared at first to be a rebuttal of the universal principles of breeding, however, was quickly reversed with the gag's conclusion. When asked to explain the discrepancy between himself and his sons, the man pointed out his enormous wife (the stage directions suggested having the role played by a man in women's attire for maximal comedic effect). “Yep, ain't she a dandy?” panned the man. “I may be a scrub all right, but she's a purebred if there ever was one.” At a time when eugenicists openly clamored for the state to sterilize the reproductively unfit, such a confession would be remarkable and dangerous. Nevertheless, it also disclosed that the trial adjudicated not only the value of the scrub's body but also the capacity of the state to assess the biological value of human bodies and to manage death and reproduction accordingly.⁴⁰

³⁹ Burch, *Outline for Conducting a Scrub Sire Trial*, 19. U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Better Sires—Better Stock,” 4. Friedman, *Big Trial*, 4. Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*, 261.

⁴⁰ S. B. Cleland to H. W. Gilbertson, April 8, 1924, folder 1.602 “1922–1924 East Wing,” box 507, entry 3 “Central Correspondence 1913–1953,” Records of the Bureau of Animal Industry; [S. B. Cleland], “Trial of a Scrub Sire,” 1925, p. 17, Department of Agriculture Archives (Twin Cities Special Collections, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis). “Verdict of ‘Guilty’ against Scrub Bull,” *Lewiston (ME) Daily Sun*, Nov. 20, 1929, p. 16.

Conclusion

By the end of the 1920s, critics asserted that the production-maximizing initiatives of the USDA only further defaced commodity prices; production control and price supports were needed. President Franklin D. Roosevelt brought the leading advocates of this position into his administration to design the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), the signature component of early New Deal agricultural policy. This shift in policy proved doubly fatal to the campaign. The campaign's production-maximizing rhetoric was suddenly out of place in a USDA working to convince farmers to produce less. More importantly, the AAA generated an enormous amount of administrative work for the CES, and all CES educational efforts suffered as a result. Because the campaign had always been funded through the BAI's office budget, it was never formally concluded. Material from the campaign continued to circulate well into the 1940s and even the 1950s, but BAI experts stopped producing new material, and the CES ceased to organize the associated public events. The campaign faded away.⁴¹

The campaign expressed and reproduced the period's broader enthusiasm for eugenics. It consolidated assumptions about the state capacity necessary for the execution of eugenic policies and buttressed public faith in the state's ability to determine who was fit to breed. However, this approach also soldered pure breeding to popular eugenic logics in ways that made them strikingly difficult to separate in the popular imagination. The USDA and rural publics remained committed to the wisdom of pure breeding well after the approach had lost practical and theoretical support. Indeed, critics of pure breeding approached the issue with rationales strikingly similar to the critics of eugenics. By the 1920s, academic geneticists and biologists criticized the simplistic accounts of inheritance that many eugenicists espoused. Some critics contended that eugenicists imputed differences to inheritance that were better explained by social and environmental factors—a position that galvanized progressive criminal and legal reformers. In a similar fashion, critics of pure breeding argued that differential productivity among livestock was driven primarily by environmental factors such as feeding, and purebreeders irrationally fetishized phenotypical traits that had been arbitrarily established in the nineteenth century.⁴²

The historians of science Bert Theunissen and Margaret Derry both conclude that the longevity of pure breeding, even after the advent of Mendelian genetics, owes to practical and economic considerations among breeders. Namely, progeny testing required large numbers of animals and sophisticated statistical analysis. Moreover, phenotypical conformity was an effective marketing strategy. Purebreeders obtained premiums for "pure-blooded" animals with otherwise mediocre productivity. Both of these points are correct, but we should also ask why purchasing publics believed phenotypical conformity rooted in the nobility and purity of ancestral lines was something of value in the first

⁴¹ Agricultural Adjustment Act, 48 Stat. 31 (1933). Sarah T. Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (Cambridge, Eng., 2007); Conkin, *Revolution Down on the Farm*; Rosenberg, *4-H Harvest*; Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal*. On continued circulation of material related to the campaign, including scrub sire trials, see, for example, "St. Clair Count Purebred Sire Owners Organize," *Asheville (AL) Southern Aegis*, April 10, 1941, p. 4; Mouzon B. Peters, "Jackson County Indicts Scrub Sires," *Chattanooga (TN) Daily Times*, July 5, 1943, p. 13; H. G. Pinkston, "Scrub Bull Trial to Be Feature of Dairy Show," *Cullman (AL) Tribune*, Sept. 19, 1946, p. 2; and "Cattlemen Agree to Convict Scrub Bull," *Salinas (CA) Californian*, April 18, 1953, p. 17.

⁴² Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*. On urban progressive reformers and criminology, see Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010). Ezra Parmalee Prentice to H. B. Ellenberger, Feb. 14, 1938, "Prentice, Parmalee #8" file, box 10, Hubert Goodale Papers (American Philosophical Society).

place. Moreover, why did the purchasing public trust expert breeders to successfully lard this purity and purge contaminating scrubs from herds?⁴³

Invocations of value must be understood in the context of the use of breeding animals as didactic instruments of human race science and the capacities of the state to govern reproduction. As Dorothy Roberts contends, the eugenic moment of the early twentieth century was only one expression of the ongoing political project of disciplining and devaluing black reproduction. Similarly, as scholars of eugenics such as Troy Duster, Wendy Kline, Nancy Ordover, and Alexandra Minna Stern maintain, eugenic logics continued to circulate in American culture long after the horrors of Nazi eugenics had allegedly chastened the public's enthusiasm. All of this suggests that explicitly eugenic policies are only a small expression of a much larger popular belief in biologically reproduced hierarchy and the state's capacity to govern it.⁴⁴

Such considerations should inform how scholars understand contemporary reactions to industrial livestock animals and the rhetoric of purity in the food system. "Heritage breeding" movements endeavor to restore lost breeds and trade heavily on discourses of purity and hygiene. These movements often present contingent and malleable biological characteristics as timeless "breeds" by appealing to the racial logics of pure breeding. They invite consumers to invest in the fantasy that livestock were historically distributed among discrete "breeds" that careful governance can effectively preserve. Scholars must search for more robust accounts of how humans inscribe racial meanings on landscapes, biomes, and animals to understand how people are often talking about race even when they appear to be talking about cows or pigs. In histories of livestock breeding, the failure to account for racecraft hides racialized inscriptions in a "color-blind" rhetoric of dispassionate science and business. Racecraft wields such extraordinary power in American history not just because it produces material human inequality but also because it structures many of the aesthetic, political, and ethical categories that permit life to be sustained, multiplied, and comparatively judged and valued. The valuation of life is inextricable from capitalist production in the food system, for both humans and animals. The adjudication of value for animal life can hardly be divorced from racial politics and aesthetics when, as this article has shown, the bodies of animals have been vital sites for the coproduction of meat and eugenic racecraft.⁴⁵

⁴³ Bert Theunissen, "Breeding for Nobility or for Production? Cultures of Dairy Cattle Breeding in the Netherlands, 1945–1995," *Isis*, 103 (June 2012), 278–309; Derry, *Masterminding Nature*.

⁴⁴ Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*. Troy Duster, *Backdoor to Eugenics* (Routledge, 2003); Kline, *Building a Better Race*; Nancy Ordover, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (Minneapolis, 2003); Stern, *Eugenic Nation*.

⁴⁵ On heritage breeding, see Brad Weiss, *Real Pigs: Shifting Values in the Field of Local Pork* (Durham, N.C., 2016).