EUGENIC IDEAS, POLITICAL INTERESTS, AND POLICY VARIANCE
Immigration and Sterilization Policy in Britain and the U.S.

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> [T]here is now no reasonable excuse for refusing to face the fact that nothing but a eugenics religion can save our civilization from the fate that has overtaken all previous civilizations.
>
> —*George Bernard Shaw*

A growing body of literature has sought to incorporate ideas into political analysis. Ideas have been invoked to explain phenomena as diverse as contrasting responses among social democrats to the Great Depression,[1] the evolution of European integration,[2] differing outcomes in race policy,[3] and shifts in macroeconomic policy.[4] In the decade after Peter Hall issued a call for studies that explained not that ideas matter but how and when they mattered, there have been conceptual advances in both the categorization of ideational frameworks and the specification of their impact.[5] In the former at least four dis-

* The authors are grateful for comments received on an earlier draft of this paper at the conference on new institutionalism at the University of Göteborg, May 25–27, 2000, and to an anonymous *World Politics* referee.

[1] Sheri Berman, *The Social Democratic Moment: Ideas and Politics in the Making of Interwar Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), introduction.

[2] Kathleen McNamara, *The Currency of Ideas: Monetary Politics in the European Union* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[3] Erik Bleich, "Problem Solving Politics: Ideas and Race Policies in France and Britain" (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1999); Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Postwar Britain: The Institutional Origins of a Multicultural Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[4] Peter A. Hall, "Policy Paradigms, Social Learning and the State: The Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain," *Comparative Politics* 25, no. 3 (1993).

[5] Hall, ed., *The Political Power of Economic Ideas: Keynesianism across Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

tinct categories of ideas have been delineated as factors influencing policy and politics:

1. ideas as culture—broad, shared understandings that shape, at times subconsciously, the belief patterns and behavior of those socialized into it[6]

2. ideas as expert knowledge—expertise built up within epistemic communities that under propitious conditions can be disseminated to a broader research and policy community[7]

3. ideas as the solution to collective action and free-rider problems—social identifiers such as class or religion that inspire individuals to actions they would not take had they not been grouped under the ideational abstraction[8]

4. ideas as "programmatic beliefs"—abstract, integrated, systematic patterns of belief with direct policy relevance[9]

Within any ideational category, ideas may have different causal impacts. In the most recent review of the literature, Sheri Berman outlines three distinct levels of causality requiring explanation.[10] First, how do ideas become politically prominent? Even as policy-relevant ideas constantly circulate among academics, journalist, NGOs, and political activists, most languish unnoticed with only a fraction making it into serious policy discussion. Second, how do ideas become institutionalized? Some, after all, come into political prominence but then disappear from serious political and policy discussion, as occurred with Fascism, a good, if contentious, example. Yet others become a permanent part of the landscape, either as the consensus or as one among several major competitors. Keynesianism was the former during the 1960s and, despite being overtaken by monetarism, remains the latter today. Finally, how do ideas actually come to exercise a causal influence on policy and/or politics? Simply showing that ideas, even prominent ones, are out there does not amount to answering the question.

This article seeks to respond to this last question through an examination of eugenic ideas and their influence on public policy between the world wars in Britain and the United States. Eugenic ideas (defined below) garnered extensive support and were similar in content in both countries, but eugenic-based policies varied sharply: the U.S. implemented extensive eugenicist policies, whereas the U.K. implemented none. Focusing on the cases of immigration and sterilization policy, the

[6] Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in Forty-three Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[7] E. Adler and P. M. Haas, "Conclusion: Epistemic Communities, World Order, and the Creation of a Reflective Research Program," *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992), 380.

[8] Gordon Marshall et al., *Social Class in Modern Britain* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

[9] Berman (fn. 1); Hugh Heclo, *Modern Social Politics in Britain and Sweden* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

[10] Berman, "Ideas, Norms and Culture in Political Analysis," *Comparative Politics* (forthcoming).

article provides an ideational account of this puzzle. At the same time, it uses the two cases as a means for reflecting back on the role of ideas in politics more generally. Given that eugenic ideas were (broadly) equally powerful in both countries, the cases provide an ideal basis for shedding light on when and how extant ideational frameworks influence public policy.

Not only does the article provide a specific ideational account of contrasting policy outcomes across nations, but it also uses the eugenics cases as the basis for a consideration of the conditions under which ideational frameworks more generally are likely to influence politics. We argue that ideas are more likely to be translated into policy under three conditions: when there is a synergy between ideas and interests, when the actors possess the requisite enthusiasm and institutional position, and when timing contributes to a broad constellation of preferences that reinforce these ideas, rather than detracting from them. These points in turn branch out into broader theoretical debates. The first point relates to the issue of epiphenomenality—do ideas have an impact independent of actors and interests? While we associate ourselves with a powerful strain of thought linking ideas with interests, we argue that the result of this linkage is more, not less, independent ideational impact. Through the mechanisms of "cover" provision, reputation enhancement, and coalition building, the impact of ideas is maximized when they serve individual interests. The second incorporates the increasingly sophisticated insights of the historical institutionalist literature. The third draws on the recent, still embryonic theoretical work emphasizing the importance of timing for politics and policy, and it argues that there are two central ways in which this variable shapes the evolution of public policy. First, when political crises develop, usually unexpectedly, they undermine the policies associated with them. Second, timing contributes to a process of cognitive association that undergirds or undermines particular policies.

The article comprises five sections. The first defines eugenics and outlines the basic puzzle that the article seeks to explain. The second analyzes the nature of the eugenic ideas in the two countries, emphasizing the high degree of commonality between them. The third compares the (unsuccessful) British campaign for a eugenic-based population policy in the form of voluntary sterilization with the (successful) American campaign in favor of eugenics-based immigration policies. The fourth provides an ideational account of the contrast between the two results. Finally, the fifth summarizes the argument and considers its theoretical implications.

I. Eugenic Ideas in Britain and the U.S.

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, eugenics—along with racism and imperialism—had a profound influence on thinking in Europe and North America. Eugenics, defined by its founder as "the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally,"[11] had two essential components. First, its advocates accepted as axiomatic that a range of mental and physical handicaps—blindness, deafness, and many forms of mental illness—were largely, if not entirely, hereditary in cause. Second, they assumed that these scientific hypotheses could be used as the basis of social engineering across several policy areas, including family planning, education, and immigration. The most direct policy implications of eugenic thought were that "mental defectives" should not produce children, since they would only replicate these deficiencies, and that such individuals from other countries should be kept out of the polity. In addition, many eugenicists believed that those suffering from these illnesses were predisposed to greater procreation, with the result that entire nations and/or continents were biologically inferior. However instinctively unappealing these ideas are now, they—along with equally common notions of racial inferiority—enjoyed wide currency. Although detractors existed, these beliefs were held with the same conviction that the opposite positions—that all races are equal, that imperialism is evil, that all forms of human life are worthy of equal respect and treatment—are held today.

Eugenics was an international movement articulating genetic hypotheses, social theory, and policy prescriptions. Originating in the U.K., it spread to Germany, Scandinavia, France, North America, and Australia, with a high level of consistency in the content of the ideas and the policy proposals generated by them. What is striking is that the policy outcomes flowing from them differed; hence the case selection. Despite the fact that both the U.S. and Britain shared similar liberal values, policy outcomes varied sharply: eugenic policies were widespread in the former and essentially nonexistent in the latter. This article offers an ideational account of the policy variance in the fate of a common heritage of eugenic ideas that were particularly well articulated and similar in the two countries.

[11] Francis Galton, *Memories of My Life* (London: Methuen 1908), 321.

Other Lines of Theoretical Inquiry

The cases are particularly interesting in that they seem to undermine the expectations of powerful strains of institutionalist theory that have dominated qualitative social science over the last decade and of path-dependence theories. In the first instance, as historical institutionalists have emphasized, Britain is the quintessential unitary state with a strong executive, a weak legislature, an emasculated court, and no bill of rights;[12] the U.S. is a federation with a powerful legislature, a weak executive, and a strong (if then more timid) judiciary supported by a bill of rights with unquestioned legitimacy. In other words, in the polity providing for multiple veto points and blocking strategies of any bold policy innovation—the U.S.—eugenic policies were adopted earlier and taken further, as numerous states adopted sterilization polices and thousands of individuals were sterilized.[13] Indeed, only Nazi Germany—in which institutional opposition and civil society were crushed—had a more ambitious program. Likewise, the country that had operated the world's most liberal immigration regime from 1776 until 1882 adopted race-based and eugenic-inspired immigration policies. At the opposite end of the institutional spectrum—Britain—no eugenic policies were adopted. This was the country whose institutions provide few channels for gaining access to policy networks while privileging those actors who manage to do so and the one that most easily and directly translates policy preferences into policy outcomes. The British pattern obtained despite the existence of a high-profile policy committee that proffered extensive evidence in favor of voluntary sterilization schemes.

At the same time, other influential studies have incorporated a different explanatory variable, policy trajectories, variously referred to as path dependence or (more generally) policy feedback.[14] With respect to eugenics, however, previous policy was not a predictor of subsequent policy. Rather, the concept of sterilization was peculiar to the violent and messianic twentieth century, so policies encouraging it broke new ground. Moreover, in the area of immigration, which was also heavily conditioned in some countries by eugenic ideas, previous race-based policies founded on assumptions of racial/national hierarchies did not

[12] On this, see Hansen (fn. 3).

[13] Edward Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); John W. Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

[14] Paul Pierson "When Effect Becomes Cause: Policy Feedback and Political Change," *World Politics* 45 (July 1993); Bo Rothstein, *Just Institutions Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Kathleen Thelen, "Historical Institutionalism and Comparative Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999).

result in their extension. Thus, although a British campaign in which Jews and East Europeans were demonized as biologically inferior was followed by the avowedly anti-Semitic immigration legislation of 1905, there were afterward no additional immigration measures of that type. The policy was liberally applied, but its racist aspects were curtailed, with subsequent policy driven by security concerns and with Germans being the obvious target. In the U.S., immigration policy was famously open until the 1920s, when eugenics arrived with a vengeance.[15] Race-based quotas were implemented, and the country became until the 1960s *kein Einwanderungsland* (not a land that welcomed immigrants).

Viewed from the perspective of the theories of institutional structures and policy legacies, the outcomes in Britain and the U.S. are a puzzle. Why did the profound intellectual support enjoyed by eugenics in the U.K., backed up by government-sponsored commissions, not translate into a eugenic-based sterilization policy? Why, despite the powerful myth of the U.S. as a country of immigration and despite the multiple veto points provided to all actors opposing radical policy change, did the U.S. adopt eugenic-based immigration policies? And what do these two cases reveal about the role of ideas in politics?

Measuring the Influence of Ideas on Politics

The development of techniques for delineating the existence of ideas as independent variables and establishing their influence on political processes and public policies has been patchy. Berman outlines the methodological steps she considers prerequisite to demonstrating a role for ideas in determining policy choices. One must first establish the existence of ideologies or "programmatic beliefs"—abstract, integrated, systematic patterns of belief with aims directly relevant to particular courses of policy. One must then show an observable correlation between these ideas and selected public policies that conform in their broad outlines to the ideas' basic tenets. Thus, although Milton Friedman promulgated his ideas in the 1960s, there would be little point in looking for the influence of monetarism on Harold Wilson's or Lyndon Johnson's economic policies. And finally one must specify the mechanisms through which the ideas can be demonstrated to directly influence politics in a way that is not merely epiphenomenal to material interests.[16] The issue of epiphenomenality is central, and we return to it later.

[15] Desmond King, *In the Name of Liberalism: Illiberal Social Policies in Britain and the U.S.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), chap. 4.

[16] Berman (fn. 1), introduction, esp. 19–25.

Applying this framework to the study of eugenic ideas, there is a prima facie case for the influence of ideas on politics. Eugenic ideas were abstract, systematic, and integrated, positing an essentially genetic—hence, scientific—basis to biological and intellectual fitness across individuals and nations. They offered clear policy prescriptions across policy areas: health policies encouraging (or requiring) the sterilization of "mental defectives," immigration policies favoring Northern Europeans and excluding Southern Europeans and the developing world, and family policies that encouraged procreation among the genetically fit. A significant number of nation-states and/or subnational governments adopted policies in some or all of these areas.

In what follows, we address the question through an analysis of proeugenicist campaigns in the two countries: the British campaign in favor of voluntary sterilization (which failed) and the American campaign in favor of eugenics-based immigration policies (which succeeded).[17] We argue that the policy variance between the two countries reflected not the strength of the ideas in the two countries (which were broadly similar) but rather the degree to which ideas mapped onto policymakers' (and particularly politicians') strategic political interests. Where they did, as in the U.S., eugenics succeeded; where they did not, as in the U.K., eugenics failed. As we discuss, institutional position and timing serve as important intervening variables.

II. Eugenic Ideas and Policies in Britain and America

Based on a process-tracing analysis[18] of the evolution of eugenic policies in both countries, we argue that there are two reasons why eugenic ideas influenced policy in the U.S. but failed to do so in Britain. First, the U.S. saw a particular synergy between eugenic ideas and strategic interests: motivated by political opportunism and (in some measure) racism, Congressman Albert Johnson, chair of the House Committee on Immigration, found in eugenic ideas a powerful justification, apparently backed by nothing less than science itself, for a restrictive immigration policy enjoying, it seemed, increasing public support. By contrast, in the U.K., while eugenic ideas enjoyed support among

[17] It would be tempting to compare American sterilization policies, which were widespread, with the absence of such policies in the U.K., but the institutional origins differ sharply: sterilization in the U.S. was a state-level policy, whereas it would have been national in the U.K. Comparing British sterilization policy with American immigration policy, however, allows a cross-national comparison.

[18] Andrew Bennett and Alexander L. George, "Research Design Tasks in Case Study Methods," http://www.georgetown.edu/bennett/RESDES.htm (consulted April 2000).

politicians and while much of the intellectual and cultural elite thought that there was much to be said in favor of (at least voluntary) sterilization, open support for it brought as many political risks as payoffs because of strong opposition from labor and Catholics. Second, because the enactment of American eugenic policies predated by almost a decade Nazi Germany's adoption of ruthless population policies, which led to the murder of some mental patients and to the forcible sterilization of tens of thousands more, the issue in the U.S. was not contaminated by association with Nazi practices.

Both points have broader theoretical implications. The first relates to the question of epiphenomenality, or the argument that the influence of ideas is derivative of actors' interests. Though the first argument would seem to suggest that eugenic ideas were epiphenomenal, it in fact does not. The measure of the impact of ideas has to be their effect on public policy; in other words, if the ideas were unavailable, would the policy be different or nonexistent?[19] In the U.S. immigration case restrictionist arguments were more convincing and enjoyed greater support because they were embedded in eugenicist thought. The linking of ideas with interests magnified the impact of both the ideas (giving them a carrier who would act as their spokesperson in the political sphere) and the restrictionist case with which they were linked. The second point relates to the issue of *timing*, which is central to the question of when ideas and ideational frameworks will have a policy impact and when they will not. Ideas that are enthusiastically received in one decade will fall flat or be overwhelmingly resisted in another. The eugenics cases highlight some factors explaining why.

Eugenics in the United Kingdom

Eugenics attracted support from an eclectic group of scientists, Fabians, upper-class conservatives, and civil servants.[20] A recent study by Richard Soloway marvels at "the persuasiveness of qualitative biological evaluations that fell under the broad mantle of eugenics. . . . Eugenics permeated the thinking of generations of English men and women worried about the biological capacity of their countrymen to cope with the myriad changes they saw confronting their old nation in a new century."[21]

[19] This standard meets the falsifiability requirement.

[20] The precise composition of what can broadly be called the eugenics movement is a matter of some scholarly debate. See, in particular, Michael Freeden, "Eugenics and Progressive Thought: A Study in Ideological Affinity," *Historical Journal* 22, no. 3 (1979); and Greta Jones, "Eugenics and Social Policy between the Wars," *Historical Journal* 25, no. 3 (1982).

[21] Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), xvii–xviii.

While the precise nature of the eugenics movement is a matter of debate, it was bound together by a belief that an alteration of the gene pool would have a range of positive consequences—decreasing the fertility rate of the poor and mentally defective, reducing public funds needed for poor relief, insane asylums, and prisons; and warding off British economic and imperial decline—a fear that haunted the British political elite in the post-1914 period. For them the robust confidence of the belle époque appeared gone forever.

Eugenic Aims

Although plagued by a lack of scientific consensus on the hereditary basis of mental deficiency,[22] eugenicists crystallized their policy positions within the plush (then much more so than now) walls of the British government and establishment: over the course of ten years, two high-profile committees made up of the leading lights of the British establishment contributed to the eugenic cause. In 1924 the Wood Committee was appointed with the prosaic task of reviewing the procedure for ascertaining the number of mental defectives.[23] Its membership included the prominent eugenicists Cyril Burt, Evelyn Fox, A. F. Tredgold, and Douglas Turner. The committee soon associated itself with the then widespread fear that the rate of mental deficiency was accelerating.[24] And its 1929 report praised the "science of eugenics"and employed its terminology:

> If, as there is reason to think, mental deficiency, much physical inefficiency, chronic pauperism, recidivism are all parts of a single problem, can it be that poor mental endowment manifesting itself in an incapacity for social adjustment and inability to manage one's own affairs, may not be merely a symptom but rather the chief contributory cause of these kindred social evils?[25]

The report catalyzed the Eugenics Society to intensify its parliamentary lobbying efforts in favor of sterilization: the Committee for Legalizing Eugenic Sterilization was formed to draft a sterilization bill and to build a coalition of support, drawn from the social work, public health, and mental care communities.[26] But the society's only notable

[22] This point has been emphasized by John Macnicol, "The Voluntary Sterilization Campaign in Britain, 1918–39," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no. 3 (1992). It has, however, a certain retrospective ease to it: science rarely moves forward by consensus, and the most politically influential opinion is not necessarily the majority one.

[23] *Report of the Mental Deficiency Committee* (Wood Report) (London: HSMO, 1929).

[24] Macnicol (fn. 22), 429.

[25] Wood Report (fn. 23), 83.

[26] Macnicol (fn. 22), 429.

success was a request by a Major A. G. Church, Labor M.P. (and a member of the society's Committee for Legalizing Eugenic Sterilization) in 1931, for leave to introduce a private member's bill legalizing the operation. The request, which was portrayed by its opponents as fundamentally anti–working class, was defeated by 167 votes to 89.[27] Systematic attempts by C. P. Blacker, secretary of the society, to recruit Labor Party supporters to the cause in order to refute this charge were mostly unsuccessful.[28] Failing in its attempt to exert direct parliamentary pressure, the society turned to civil servants in the Ministry of Health and on its Board of Control. Through lobbying, and through deputations by ostensibly less partisan bodies such as the Central Association for Mental Welfare,[29] the Association of Municipal Associations and the County Councils' Association,[30] the eugenicist movement managed to secure the appointment of a departmental committee on sterilization under the chairmanship of Sir Laurence Brock.[31]

In 1932 the Brock Committee was assigned the task of assessing the extent to which mental illnesses were hereditary and to evaluate the utility of sterilization as a way of stemming the spread of such illness. The committee held thirty-six meetings, took testimony from sixty witnesses, received a plethora of statistical data, and issued its report in 1934.[32] Brock was a senior civil servant who had spent much of his career dealing with health matters (serving as assistant secretary at the ministry, 1919–25). Key members of the committee—Fisher, Tredgold, and above all Brock himself—were enthusiasts of eugenics; Brock regularly supported the Eugenics Society, while Fisher belonged to the Committee for Legalising Eugenic Sterilisation. He advised the Eugenics Society on drafting its bill for voluntary sterilization. Brock was instrumental in having the committee appointed under his own leadership, and he dominated the proceedings.[33]

[27] *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 255 (July 21, 1931), cols. 1245–58.

[28] Soloway (fn. 21), 198–99.

[29] Resolution passed at meeting of the executive council of Central Association for Mental Welfare, PRO MH58/103, July 8, 1929. The association had links with the Eugenics Society, and it was an active promoter of sterilization.

[30] Letter from the Mental Hospitals Association to the secretary, Ministry of Health, PRO, MH58/103, November 27, 1931; deputation from CCA, AMC, and MHA, brief for the minister' s reply, PRO, MH58/103, November 28, 1931.

[31] Macnicol (fn. 22), 430.

[32] House of Commons, "Report of the Departmental Committee on Sterilisation" (Brock Report), Cmd 4485, Parliamentary Papers, 1934, vol. 15, p. 611.

[33] Letter from Brock to Robinson about the committee's membership, PRO, MH79 292, April 22, 1932; and Macnicol "Eugenics and the Campaign for Voluntary Sterilization in Britain between the Wars," *Social History of Medicine* 2, no. 2 (1989), 167.

The committee report came out in favor of a bill supporting the voluntary sterilization of mental defectives:

> [W]e know also that mentally defective and mentally disordered patients are, as a class, unable to discharge their social and economic liabilities or create an environment favourable to the upbringing of children, and there is reason to believe that sterilization would in some cases be welcomed by the patients themselves. . . . In this view we are unanimous and we record it with a full sense of our responsibility. . . . [There is an] "overwhelming preponderance of evidence in favour of some measure of sterilization."[34]

Thus, following more than a decade of intensive organization, scientific study, and public debate largely organized by the Eugenics Society, the eugenics movement articulated a clear programmatic agenda, backed by some of Britain's most eminent scientists (if not by science itself), and a discrete policy goal: the voluntary sterilization of mental defectives.

Eugenic Ideas in the United States

Inspired by British eugenicists,[35] the American eugenics movement originated in the late nineteenth century, and it enjoyed its greatest legislative achievements in the late 1910s and 1920s, peaking with the 1927 Supreme Court decision, *Buck v. Bell*. Whereas the British eugenics movement was exercised by the mental inferiority and sexual promiscuity alleged to be rife in working-class slums, American eugenicists focused on the "racial" inferiority of nationalities whose entry into the U.S. threatened the American gene pool. These ideas enjoyed extensive support.[36] Exploiting the "prestige of science,"[37] political elites cited eugenic research in support of policies to sterilize selected patients and, as this article illustrates, in support of restrictive immigration policies based on a purportedly scientific hierarchy of "races." Such motives are evident among the eugenicists advising on U.S. immigration policy. This role interacted favorably with the claim not only that physical traits were reproduced generationally but also that behavior, too, had its roots in biology. Social Darwinism pandered to this tenet, with its claims about the extent to which the offspring of the poor, or the criminal, or the feeble-minded were themselves likely to reproduce these

[34] Brock Report (fn. 32), 39.

[35] Mark H. Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984), introduction.

[36] Frank Dikotter, "Race Culture: Recent Perspectives on the History of Eugenics," *American Historical Review* 103 (April 1998), 467.

[37] Ibid., 468.

parental defects. This approach leads directly into the family histories undertaken and popularized in the United States from the 1890s. Essential to this research was a fear of racial degeneration. Natural selection was viewed as a healthy struggle between nations, individuals, and races: "This conflict, far from being an evil thing, was nature's indispensable method for producing superior men, superior nations, and superior races."[38] The eugenicists' alarm about racial degeneration reflected their specific fears: that higher birthrates among the genetically inferior would lead to a "menace of the feeble-minded"[39] and that inferior nations, men, and races would, through immigration, undermine American supremacy. The American eugenicists defined as superior those people descended from Nordic or Aryan stock, and they classed as inferior those of East European, Mediterranean, Asian, African, Native American, or Jewish descent.

The Eugenicist Case

Eugenics gradually gained in strength over the course of the first three decades of what became the American century. In a manner broadly equivalent to what happened in Britain, Congress gave encouragement to the movement through the appointment of the Dillingham Commission (established in 1907, reporting in 1910). Like the Brock Committee before it, the American commission saw a threat in concentrated pockets of genetic inferiority. While the former believed that "defectives drift to the slums," where "like marries like . . . and the chances of two carriers [of defective genes] mating is many times greater than it is in any other section of the population,"[40] the Dillingham Commission argued (from an exhaustive study of seven cities) that "the new immigrant races live largely in colonies . . . and . . . are as a class far less intelligent than the old."[41] The new immigrants were disproportionately represented in asylum populations (47,078 of 150,151 committed to asylums) and among the mentally feeble.[42] The commission recommended a series of restrictionist measures: a literacy test to immigrants (enacted in 1917 after many previous failed attempts), a quota by race "arriving each year [fixed at] a certain percentage of the average of that

[38] Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 145.

[39] House Committee on Immigration, NA RG 233, 69th Cong., letter from Frank L. Babbott, president, Eugenics Research Association, to Congressman Johnson, March 31, 1927, Committee Papers, Box 341, Folder: H.79A-F20.1.

[40] Brock Report (fn. 32), 41–42.

[41] Senate, *Report of the Immigration Commission* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1910).

[42] Ibid., 9, 22.

race arriving during a given period of years," the exclusion of unskilled workers without dependents, an increase in the head tax, a requirement of minimum resources on arrival, and annual limits at each port.

If the Dillingham Commission reflected a mix of eugenicist argument and pre-eugenicist restrictionism, the latter became boldly eugenicist when it became linked with fears of high birthrates. Statistics on higher incidence of crime and "insanity" among recent immigrants, however dubious and disregarding of second-order causes (poverty, lack of education, racism, and so on), slid easily into the argument that those from Southern and Eastern Europe were inferior to those from Northern Europe. If such inferior immigrants were arriving in large numbers and/or tended to have higher fertility rates, then the fear of inferiority became a fear that "the old Anglo-Saxon, Nordic stock was in danger of being swamped by a massive increase in the number of hereditary degenerates."[43] By the mid-1910s these fears had spread rapidly through eugenicist networks. In 1914 both the Medical Society of New York State and the Massachusetts Medical Society complained to the House of Representatives Immigration Committee that procedures for screening immigrants had failed to weed out the "mental defective." The societies warned of the "direful consequences of [immigrants] being allowed to marry and to propagate and so deteriorate the mental health of the nation."[44]

Thus, just as the echoes of distant thunder drew the U.S. into the world war, eugenics had—as it had in the U.K.—evolved into a coherent, respectable ideology proffering clear prescriptions for fending off genetic and national weakness. In the same way that many British eugenicists linked genetic inferiority, sexual excess, and high fertility with class, their American counterparts linked them with nationality. Harry Laughlin, of the Eugenic Record Office, was a man who would play a high-profile policy role in the 1920s.[45] He argued that (non–North European) immigration exacted a double toll: it imposed both a fiscal burden (because such immigrants were more likely than native-born Americans to be "degenerate" and to require institutional care) and a racial cost (by diluting the quality of the national stock).[46] Dilution in this context alluded to biological degeneracy resulting from intermar-

[43] Garland Allen, "The Role of Experts in Scientific Controversy," in H. Tristram Englehardt, Jr., and A. L. Caplan, eds., *Scientific Controversies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 172.

[44] House Committee on Immigration, petitions from the New York and Massachusetts Medical Societies, NA RG 233, 63d Cong., Box 458, Folder: H.R.63A-H8.1.

[45] King (fn. 15); and Stefan Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[46] See, for instance, letter from Laughlin to James J. Davis, secretary of labor, July 30, 1930, in Laughlin Papers Folder C-4-1, Special Collections, University Archives, Truman State University.

riage, as well as to cultural contamination, dangers often considered associated. The solution lay, as a British eugenicist put it, in "cutting off the worst":[47] sterilizing the unfit and, in the U.S., closing the borders to any more of them.

III. The Eugenicist Campaigns: American Success versus British Failure

Despite the broad ideological continuity between the U.S. and the U.K. and despite the similar early institutional forms the eugenicist reform campaigns took in the two countries, the result was policy divergence: American immigration policy was reformed along eugenicist lines, whereas British family/natalist policy never involved sterilization, whether forced or voluntary. This section traces these divergent outcomes.[48]

The British Campaign

The publication of the prosterilization Brock Report was a high point for the Eugenics Society. It welcomed the committee's work and recommendations for setting out the way toward a sterilization policy: "We think that, if the general public could be educated to distinguish between sterilization and castration, many members of the Social Problem Group [that is, the mentally handicapped] would avail themselves of facilities for voluntary sterilization in order to prevent the birth of unwanted children. This, however, could only happen if a eugenic conscience and a racially conscious public opinion could be created."[49] Thus, those who would most benefit from sterilization had to be educated to recognize the appropriateness of making such a choice, and the Eugenics Society saw as its defining mission the assumption of the leadership of the campaign to disseminate pro-eugenicist sterilization propaganda.[50] The report, the society hoped, would advance such a eugenic consciousness.

The publication of the Brock Committee's report was followed by petitions in favor of legislation on sterilization. At the Ministry of Health, Arthur Robinson suggested to the minister that he should try

[47] Brock to Robinson, PRO, MH79/292, March 16, 1932.

[48] Their origin cannot simply be that restrictive immigration policies were easier to adopt than sterilization, as the U.S. enacted policies in both areas.

[49] Evidence submitted by the Eugenics Society to L. G. Brock's Sterilization Committee, PRO, MH51/228 31100, March 1, 1933, 26.

[50] Ibid.

to get a debate on the report on a private member's motion.[51] In late January 1934 the health minister, Hilton Young, wrote to Wing Commander A. W. H. James M.P., asking him to convince as many M.P.s as possible to vote in favor of a motion on voluntary sterilization.[52] The latter thereafter served as the main proponent of sterilization in Parliament. A deputation to Young, made up of representatives from the Joint Committee on Voluntary Sterilization, the County Councils Association, the Association of Municipal Corporations, and the Mental Hospitals Association presented him with a draft bill for voluntary sterilization. It cited the support of an impressive litany of professional bodies.

Young listened to the deputation but remained skeptical about legislation. He told the group that while "much public opinion had undoubtedly been massed in favour of the report," on the other hand, "the effect of the report had also been to intensify the activity of those who opposed, generally on religious grounds, the principle of sterilization." As a consequence, Brock's report had "formed fresh opinion in favour of sterilization but had left the old opposition unshaken."[53] Young admitted to being persuaded of the "desirability" of the Brock proposals but was extremely anxious about their opponents and the general unease of public opinion on a measure that many—to the dismay of eugenicists—thought involved "cutting people up."[54] This line was one adopted from the time of the publication of Brock's report. A parliamentary question on June 13, 1934, requested that the views of local authorities be ascertained, and the minister told Dr. Blacker in July of the same year that public opinion remained unprepared for sterilization.[55] The report was taken up further in the House in July 1934 by James, when his order paper motion was heard. He spoke critically: "I regret that, when we have a unanimous report on this very important subject by so weighty a committee, the Government has not yet found it possible to implement it or to hold out any immediate prospect that they are going to do so."[56] This discussion, however, was the extent of parliamentary debate and it did little to bring a bill on sterilization closer. Sterilization, voluntary of otherwise, which had enjoyed exten-

[51] Minute, Ministry of Health, PRO, MH58/104B, January 25, 1934.
[52] Letter from Young to James, PRO, MH58/104B, January 26, 1934.
[53] Report of the meeting between the minister of health and deputation of associations, PRO, MH58/100, May 23, 1935, 2.
[54] Ibid. See also Macnicol (fn. 22).
[55] Minute to Miss Sharp, PRO, MH58/10, March 15, 1935.
[56] *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons (July 3, 1934), col. 1825.

sive intellectual and political support in 1920s Britain, was never to see the light of day in the U.K.

The American Eugenicist Campaign and Immigration

Whereas the interwar years turned out to be a time of profound disappointment for British eugenicists, their American counterparts enjoyed a series of legislative successes. Numerous states—including Virginia, California, South Carolina, and West Virginia—enacted voluntary (and not so voluntary) sterilization policies and won the backing of the Supreme Court. Writing the majority decision in the 1927 *Buck v. Bell*, which upheld a Virginia state law permitting sterilization of a "feebleminded" and "moral delinquent" Carrie Buck, the U.S. jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes declared that "three generations of imbeciles are enough" and that it was legitimate for the state to prevent the reproduction of "degenerates."[57] Buck was duly sterilized, as were many citizens in other American states that had enacted comparable laws.[58] Reducing the number of such citizens would have fiscal dividends for society, it was claimed, and also result in a more robust population.

At the same time the immigration argument, too, followed the eugenicist line of thought. As in the U.K., eugenicists were brought into the policy-making apparatus, as the House Committee on Immigration sought evidence from them. In 1920 Harry Laughlin gave testimony before the House Committee on Immigration on the "biological aspects of immigration." Laughlin used the occasion to rehearse arguments familiar in eugenic circles but probably less well known to policymakers or the public. He also introduced the first of his several documentations about the high public cost of maintaining immigrants who needed professional care or were incarcerated. This fiscal calculation was a salient strand of eugenic thought in the 1920s. Laughlin told the committee that "the character of a nation is determined primarily by its racial qualities: that is, by the hereditary physical, mental, and moral or temperamental traits of its people." This approach set the research agenda at the Eugenics Record Office, which was to acquire detailed records from insane hospitals and prisons and use them to assess the relative importance of heredity and environment in forming "degenerate Americans."[59]

[57] *Buck v. Bell*, 274, U.S. 200 (1927), 207. See Paul A. Lombardo, "Three Generations, No Imbeciles: New Light on Buck v. Bell," *New York University Law Review* 60 (1985).

[58] As recounted in Larson (fn. 13).

[59] House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Biological Aspects of Immigration*: Hearings, 66th Cong., 2d sess., April 16, 1920, 3.

The House committee asked Johnson to produce a series of reports. In 1922 Laughlin produced a 100-page analysis of America's melting pot; in 1924 he reported his extensive field research (in 120 pages) in the main emigrant-exporting countries in Europe; and in 1928 he discoursed (from an 80-page study) on the "eugenical aspects of deportation," building upon his earlier work. Each study was widely distributed and discussed.

For the melting pot study, Laughlin derived a set of predictions (termed quotas) from the 1910 census, about how many members of each nationality—based on a normal distribution—should be found in state institutions (about each of which data were collected for January 1, 1921).[60] Applied to a huge data set, Laughlin suggested that the "outstanding conclusion" of his analysis was that "making all logical allowances for environmental conditions, which may be unfavorable to the immigrant, the recent immigrants, as a whole, present a higher percentage of inborn socially inadequate qualities than do the older stocks."[61] He singled out a number of European countries from the data that vastly exceeded their predicted quotas and were guilty of "dumping" their socially inadequate on the United States. In respect of insanity these included Russia, Finland, Poland, Ireland, Bulgaria, and Turkey, findings that were consistent with those of the Dillingham Commission.

The Eugenic Bases of U.S. Immigration Policy

The upshot was that Laughlin's research, together with that of other eugenicists, provided the blueprint for U.S. immigration policy and was reflected in formal legislation—the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act based on national quotas. From 1927 immigration was limited to a total of 150,000 annually, of whom nationalities resident in the United States according to the 1890 census could claim 2 percent each. A commission established by the 1924 act formulated the national origins formula, which was finally implemented in 1929. This formula apportioned quotas on the basis of the estimated national origins distribution of the white population in the U.S. in the 1920 census.

From 1924 U.S. inspectors had a significant role in vetting potential immigrants in their home country, a procedure Laughlin wanted strengthened (though it is unlikely that questionnaire results could predict accurately which individuals would become public charges). Im-

[60] House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Analysis of America's Modern Melting Pot*: Hearings, 67th Cong., 3d sess., November 21, 1922, 733.

[61] Ibid., 755.

proving these mechanisms was linked directly by Laughlin and the House committee with the need to reinforce eugenic principles in immigration policy: they mounted campaigns, in which race became, for one observer, "by far the most powerful source of objection" to immigrants.[62] This system was dismantled only in 1965.

IV. Accounting for the American-British Contrast

The eugenicist campaigns in the U.S. and the U.K. provide fertile comparative ground for those interested in understanding the contrasting role of ideas in policy-making across nations. Despite highly similar ideological movements and broadly similar patterms of policy evolution (the appointment of high-level committees designed to marshal evidence in favor and against the eugenicist cause), policy outcome varied, and varied sharply.

Ideas and Interests

The most important factor accounting for British failure and American success is the degree of convergence between eugenic ideas and actors' strategic interests. Support for immigration control had been growing since the 1880s in the U.S., as white, Anglo-Saxon, and German immigrants (and their children) saw themselves and their vision of the U.S. threatened by Southern European, Irish, and non-European immigration. The American Protection Association, founded in 1887, had two million members by the mid-1890s and the support of the Immigration Restriction League, formed in May 1894 by a group of Harvard graduates.[63]

In the 1910s and 1920s such concerns were fueled by an outraged press. In 1923 the *Saturday Evening Post* published one of its restrictionist articles, by Kenneth Roberts, about Laughlin's report, which stirred up public alarm. Complaining that permanent legislation had been unduly delayed, the journalist reported, from a study by Harry Laughlin that "the cost of supporting these socially inadequate people of alien stock is so great that nearly 8 percent of the total expenditures of all the states must be devoted to their upkeep in state custodial institutions."[64] The linking of immigration with costs—and by implication

[62] Gossett (fn. 38), 297.

[63] Barbara M. Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956); Desmond King, *Making Americans: Immigration, Race, and the Orgins of the Diverse Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[64] Kenneth L. Roberts, "Lest We Forget" *Saturday Evening Post*, April 18, 1923, 160.

with individuals who are unwilling to roll up their sleeves and work hard to make a go of it—resonated strongly with the American public, as it does today. Some seventy-five years later majority support for 1996 welfare legislation limiting social entitlements to American citizens (as opposed to permanent residents legally resident in the country) was sealed when Congressional Budget Office figures stated that the measure could save net $25 billion.[65]

For politicians looking for a career-defining issue, anti-immigration was a winner. In 1918 Johnson was elected to Congress as a staunch restrictionist, and a year later he assumed the chairmanship of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization.[66] Eugenics was to be the ideal tool, a perfect marriage of ideas and interests. Johnson provided the eugenicists with a prestigious platform from which to proffer and secure support for their ideas; the eugenicists provided Johnson with the putative scientific support that made his case seem for many incontrovertible. Thus, it was Johnson who asked Laughlin to undertake his famous 1920s studies, which later became the basis of U.S. immigration policy.

By contrast, the strategic value of sterilization policy was far less clear for British policymakers. Part of this reflected the rigid nature (much more so then than now) of the British class structure. The eugenicists, fully fledged toffs to a man (and they were almost all men), faced class suspicion from the labor movement, Labor M.P.s, and the working class in general, many of whom viewed sterilization and the eugenicist project more generally as a concealed class war.[67] This suspicion stemmed in part from institutionalist roots: the British educational system tracked the elite from wealthy professional and aristocratic families from an early age, as they moved from exclusive public schools such as Eton and Harrow, to Oxbridge, and finally to the civil service, politics, and/or the empire.[68] The segregation was near complete, and it nourished suspicion and hostility among large (though not all) sections of working-class opinion. Working-class opposition dogged the prosterilization campaign until the end. In the context of a party system that had coalesced around a Tory/Labor split following the decline

[65] Susan Martin, "The Attack on Social Rights: U.S. Citizenship Devalued," in R. Hansen and Patrick Weil, *Dual Nationality, Social Rights and Federal Citizenship in the U.S. and Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2001).

[66] King (fn. 15), 70.

[67] Macnicol (fn. 33), 163.

[68] Oli Waever, "The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998), 710–12. We thank Sven Steinmo for pointing this out.

of the Liberals, this meant that one of the two major parties was consistently opposed to sterilization, and the other risked alienating working-class Conservatives, "angels in marble," as Disraeli famously put it, on whose support Tories have always relied.[69]

At the same time Catholic opinion was sharply opposed. Although representing a small proportion of British population, the Catholic church magnified its influence by joining with the labor movement in an antisterilization coalition. Together, this opposition sharply reduced the government's incentive to legislate: when the deputation visited the minister of health in 1935, he responded discouragingly, citing a skeptical public.[70] It was recommended that the minister assure the deputation that the proposal to legislate on sterilization was "receiving the active attention of responsible Ministers."[71] In other words, little was to be done.

The divergence between the cases reflects, then, not the strength of the ideas—coherent, policy-relevant frameworks[72]—but the degree of fit between ideas and actors' material interests. This points needs to be developed. The debate among political scientists about interests—about whether they are independent of institutions or defined by them, whether they are transparent or concealed, whether they are equivalent to revealed preferences or not—continues,[73] but we know that political actors pursue some combination of interests—gaining votes (whether through maximization or through simply minimum winning coalitions), moving up within the party and committee hierarchy, influencing the content of policy, enhancing their individual prestige, and/or aggrandizing power. The specific content of the interest is less important than the actor's perception that particular ideational frameworks further these interests.[74] In such an instance those actors will act as their spokesmen. Taking a perception that ideas advance an actor's interest as the key predictor of when those ideas will transfer to politics has the advantage of parsimony, and it also answers the call to specify

[69] On this, see Robert McKenzie and Allan Silver, *Angels in Marble* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1958).

[70] Notes for the minister, "Deputation on Voluntary Sterilisation," PRO MH58/100, May 17, 1935, 4–5.

[71] Ibid., 5.

[72] On this, see Berman (fn. 1).

[73] Sven Steinmo, Kathleen Thelen, and Frank Longstreth, *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), introduction; George Tsebelis, *Nested Games: Rational Choice in Comparative Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[74] Peter Gourevitch put this point well: "To become policy, ideas must link up with politics—the mobilization of consent for policy. Politics involves power. Even a good idea cannot become policy if it meets certain kinds of opposition, and a bad idea can become policy if it is able to obtain support." Gourevitch, "Keynesian Politics: The Political Sources of Economic Policy Choices," in Hall (fn. 5), 87–88.

the "mechanism of translation from academic debate to public consciousness."[75]

Institutional Position and Individual Enthusiasm

Related to this point is the issue of institutional position, which further contributes to whether the ideas are incorporated, refracted, or simply rebuffed. The cases at hand appear at first blush to violate the predictions of institutionalist theory, as the concentration of power in the British executive did not in itself make the reception of eugenic theory easier.[76] Likewise, the critical factor was not, as James Walsh has recently argued, whether "it is adopted by the leadership of a bureaucracy that has sole authority over the relevant policy tools."[77] In the U.K. the minister of health had full responsibility—subject to the ever-present need for cabinet consent—for sterilization; in the U.S. control over immigration policy was divided between the Department of Labor, the State Department, and, of course, a fractured legislature with weak parties. The factor distinguishing the two cases was rather the degree of individual enthusiasm displayed by actors involved in determining and implementing policy, irrespective of whether they had sole or shared responsibility. The point, however intuitively plausible, needs to be emphasized, as ideational accounts have been notable for their lack of attention to individual actors and their motivation, concentrating instead on institutional structures and the experience of past policy. In the U.S. Congressman Johnson was an enthusiastic supporter of eugenic ideas and eugenicist immigration policies, and he devoted his chairmanship of the House Committee on Immigration to furthering both. Likewise, the Department of Labor shared a passion for eugenicist immigration policies, seeing in them a means to reducing costs. It found Laughlin's research central to this aim, making it the centerpiece of a memorandum about the enforcement of immigration laws. Billing Laughlin as "one of the world's best known scientists," the department reported the results of his survey of public institutions for the physically and mentally handicapped. It emphasized "this expert's" finding "that while the foreign born constitute 14.70 per cent of the nation's population, they furnish 20.63 per cent of the population of these institutions, and that 44.09 per cent of the inmates of these institutions are either of

[75] Mark Blyth, "'Any More Bright Ideas?' The Ideational Turn in Comparative Political Economy," *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 1 (1996), 237.

[76] As predicted by Peter A. Hall, "Conclusion," in Hall (fn. 5), 374.

[77] Walsh, "When Do Ideas Matter? Explaining the Successes and Failures of Thatcherite Ideas," *Comparative Political Studies* 33 (May 2000), 487.

foreign birth or born of parents of foreign birth."[78] The department joined Johnson as a strong partisan and carrier of eugenic ideas. By contrast, British politicians—with an eye to pockets of public opposition—were sympathetic toward but less than fully passionate about those ideas. Neither the minister of health nor anyone else within the government was willing to risk aligning himself with a controversial policy. The reluctance of the former obtained despite significant support for sterilization within the ministry itself.[79]

Naturally, individual enthusiasm for ideas and the policies flowing from then cannot alone account for a carrier's role in transferring ideas into politics. Enthusiastic individuals may possess so few institutional resources that their enthusiasm is structurally destined to remain without influence. Nonetheless, the cases are in part consistent with the predictions of historical institutionalism in that actors wishing to translate ideas into policy require a sufficiently strong institutional platform from which to make their voice heard—whether a position in the U.K. cabinet, a seat in the U.S. Congress, or the chairmanship of a powerful committee. Once signed on, however, carriers perform two essential functions.[80] The first is proselytizing in favor of new ideas, providing them an audience, and, when successful, bringing them into prominence. The second is to channel ideas that are prominent (in the sense of worked out), backed by expert opinion, and policy relevant into the policy process.

Epiphenomenality and Ideas

One of the standard critiques of ideational analysis is that the variables offered are in fact not independent but rather are ephiphenomenal to other, interest-based factors that are the ones that actually matter causally. By suggesting that ideas influence politics when they further

[78] Department of Labor, Memorandum, "In the matter of cooperation between officers of States and Municipalities with officers of the United States in connection with the enforcement of the Immigration Laws," 14 pp., October 1923, 2. Papers of Calvin Coolidge, file 133 (reel 78), Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

[79] At the time of the Brock Committee's appointment, servants at the Ministry of Health expressed the hope that the Brock inquiry, by its specialist nature, would be buffered from the fears of public opinion that a royal commission would face; minute, Ministry of Health, PRO, MH58/104A, March 21,1932.

[80] For some of the existing literature on ideational carriers, see Thomas Risse-Kappen, "Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies," *World Politics* 43 (July 1991). See also Berman (fn. 1), introduction. From the constructivist literature (examining the role of "norm entrepreneurs" in constructing the limits of acceptable and unacceptable behavior), see M. Finnemore and K. Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998), 896–99; and L. Lessig, "The Regulation of Social Meaning," *University of Chicago Law Review* 62 (1998), 968–73. On constructivism as an ideational approach, see Jeffrey T. Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory," *World Politics* 50 (January 1998).

policymakers' (self-defined) interests, we might appear to be providing fodder for this argument. One way to test this assumption is to consider the mechanisms through which ideas serve actors' interests. Three candidates present themselves. First, ideas—eugenics or any other coherent set—may simply provide cover for what politicians would want to do anyway. A politician may wish to cut taxes because voters like lower taxes and then happily find that economists have elaborated a theory about how tax cuts also further economic growth. Second, ideas may enhance a politician's profile and reputation. Otherwise obscure politicians can use ideas as a platform for launching themselves into the public eye. Third, ideas may serve to build coalitions; if they appear plausible and are backed by respected public opinion, more policymakers may be willing to support them and more members of the public may find themselves attracted to them. But this can be useful only to actors who see their interests served by the ideas.

Distinguishing these three levels serves analytic clarity, but it also serves to refute the epiphenomenality argument. Thus, ideas in all three cases are not epiphenomenal if they serve to strengthen the position of the carrier arguing in favor of the policies backed by the ideas or if they lend further support to the ideas themselves. Ideational frameworks nonderivatively influence policy if they *independently* encourage support for a policy. Ideas are out there and have an impact on politics only when seized upon by political actors and through this process find an entry point into politics. Further, once they make it past this entry point, their strength is channeled and magnified. This idea is especially clear in the case of monetarism. As a coherent critique of Keynesianism, it had grown up alongside the latter doctrine itself, and thinkers such as Hayek and Friedman provided ideological critiques and policy alternatives in the heyday of the 1960s Keynesian consensus. Yet these were virtually unknown among the general public (which generally accepted the then common line that recessions could be avoided and that there was a basic trade-off between inflation and employment) and found no sympathy among politicians. When Margaret Thatcher saw in them an explanation for the U.K.'s economic malaise and a way out of it (through higher interest rates, lower taxes, less spending, and so on), they found their point of entry into politics. Monetarist ideas were translated into policy only when she believed that they would serve her own rational interests and those of the Conservatives.[81] At the same

[81] One could think of other examples. The idea of "Europe" has been used (and abused) many times by politicians who embedded their preferred policies in it. Crudely, German and (especially) French politicians have argued that common agricultural policy (which ensures above-market prices for farm

time, the transferal process increased support for the ideas and legitimized public support for them. Today there is a near consensus that the key to perpetuating the Clinton boom is through monetarist methods: avoiding demand-led inflation and restricting the money supply through higher interest rates.

Timing

Finally, there is the issue of timing. As Paul Pierson recently argued, "*When* things happen matters for *how* they happen."[82] The success of proeugenicist American reforms was not unrelated to the fact that passage of the quota-based immigration policy preceded by almost a decade the compulsory sterilization policy adopted by Nazi Germany on January 1, 1934. British eugenicists, by contrast, secured the appointment of an exploratory committee only a few years before the Nazi law, which quickly became interlocked with pernicious medical practices, including compulsory sterilization and euthanasia. Although British eugenicists had originally expressed enthusiasm for the Nazi law, they were shocked by its excesses and, then, to their frustration, found their own proposals discredited by them. It is important to emphasize that the results were not overdetermined by timing;[83] it was not the whole story, for two reasons. First, support for sterilization in the U.K. had existed in the 1920s, well before the Nazis came to power, and a parliamentary campaign in its favor failed because it ran up against a suspicious public and a hostile alliance of labor and the Catholic church. Second, the adoption of the Nazi law itself did not immediately kill the eugenics campaign; indeed, before its true nature was revealed, British eugenicists referred to the Nazi law favorably, as a reflection of what policy could achieve.

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products, resulting in oversupply and the exclusion of imports from developing countries), is essential to the construction of Europe; British politicians, governing a country where agriculture is a small concern, have not seen it that way. Less crudely, international relations theorists have argued that politicians invoked the idea of Europe in the late 1980s to overcome "Eurosclerosis" when European integration stalled. In doing so, they overcame the problem of multiple equilibria; that is, if there are many ways in which integration can go forward, and each is Pareto optimal, then how do states agree among them? Ideas—in this case the idea of mutual recognition of goods and services as the foundation of further European integration—overcome the problem by selecting one as "the best." See Geoffrey Garrett and Barry R. Weingast, "Ideas, Interests and Institutions: Constructing the European Communities' Internal Market," in Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, eds., *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993). See Blyth (fn. 75), 241–44.

[82] Pierson, "Not Just What, but *When:* Issues of Timing and Sequence in Comparative Politics" (Paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, Boston, September 1998).

[83] We thank Kathleen Thelen for drawing our attention to this issue.

From a theoretical angle, timing is an intervening variable contributing fundamentally to the environmental conditions[84] that may encourage or discourage particular policy proposals. The constituents of timing are (at least) twofold. First, political crises, occasioned for instance by the spectacular failure of previous policies,[85] radically undermine the ideational framework(s) inspiring the policies and also occasion a search for new ones.[86] Second, there is a process of cognitive association. We understand the world through processes of analogue and association, and contrasting analogues and associations provide radically different interpretations of the same social processes. When Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal in 1958, the British, French, and Israeli governments invoked the appeasement analogy to make sense of his actions and to determine the appropriate response to them; as appeasement is always a sin in the post-Hitler world, the response was armed conflict. For the Arab world and above all for Palestinians, however, Nasser was associated with valorous freedom fighters. When the Gulf War broke out, the West and the Palestinians invoked similarly contrasting analogies. Timing contributes to this associational process in that it makes certain associations or analogies more likely than others.

All aspects evinced in the immigration/sterilization case reflect associations between and across policy areas. Policy ideas and the proposals flowing from them become associated with the success or failure of related proposals and are viewed with approbation or opprobrium, respectively. Taking an example from economic policy, supply-side economists argue that tax cuts are economically positive along nonzero-sum lines because they contribute to greater overall wealth and thus to higher government revenues. While the relationship between tax cuts and economic growth is disputed, recent economic history makes clear that the relationship is contingent. When tax cuts coincided with economic recession—such as in the U.S. from 1981 to 1983—timing undermined supply-side ideas; when they coincided with economic expansion—such as in Canada from 1994 to the present—it reinforced support for them. When state planning and government intervention were associated with global economic expansion—such as in France from the 1950s to the 1970s—the ideas behind it garnered

[84] On environmental conditioners, see Andrew P. Cortell and Susan Peterson, "Altered States: Explaining Domestic Institutional Change," *British Journal of Political Science* 29, no. 1 (1999), esp. 184–87.

[85] There is an established literature on the importance of policy failure. See Peter A. Hall (fn. 4), 275–96; Heclo (fn. 9); Walsh (fn. 77); McNamara (fn. 2).

[86] Adler and Haas (fn. 7), 380.

large support in France and abroad; when they were associated with economic recession—such as in France in the early Mitterrand years—they were (almost entirely) discredited. Finally, when eugenic ideas and policies were associated with fiscal prudence and national greatness, they received cross-party endorsements; when they were associated with undemocratic state brutality, their credibility vanished.[87]

V. Summary and Implications

This essay has offered an account of why, despite the existence of similar intellectual traditions in the U.S. and the U.K., eugenic ideas were implemented in the former but not in the latter. It has argued that, subject to a broad temporal environmental constraint, eugenicist ideas succeeded in the U.S. for two reasons: because there was a greater degree of fit between the policy implications of these ideas and the strategic interests and political actors and because there were political actors in influential (but not unchallenged) policy positions who served as their enthusiastic spokesmen. Stated more generally, the cases suggest that ideas are more likely to be translated into policy under the following circumstances: when there is a synergy between ideas and interests (that is, when actors believe that taking up these ideas will serve their interests), when these "carriers" possess the requisite enthusiasm and institutional position, and when timing contributes to a broad constellation of preferences that reinforce, rather than detract from, these ideas.

Relating these considerations to the existing scholarly literature, these findings are consistent with a strain of thought that views ideas as channels for interests.[88] The conclusion differs, however, in that it views the result of a convergence between ideas and interests as yielding more, not less, ideational causal impact. That is, when policy advocates embed their arguments in persuasive ideational frameworks, they both ensure the broader dissemination of the ideas and strengthen their argument with reference to them. Through a feedback process, the ideas are

[87] The point relates to recent work on struggles over issue definition; politics is about defining issues in the way that serves an actor's ends. Taking the gun control example, if the NRA succeeds in defining gun control as a matter of protecting the American constitution, it is highly likely to check gun control efforts; if its opponents define it as an issue of saving children, the opposite will obtain. See Frank R. Baumgartner, *Conflict and Rhetoric in French Policymaking* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989). The eugenic cases highlight how this process of issue definition will be buffeted by exogenous developments; those who wished to define eugenics as an issue of the rights of the individual against oppressive state power saw their argument carried by developments in Nazi Germany.

[88] Gourevitch (fn. 74); Stephen Krasner, *Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investments and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); David Robertson, "Political Conflict and Lesson-Drawing," *Journal of Public Policy* 11 (1991).

heard more broadly and gain greater support by association with the advocate, while the advocate sees her case strengthened through association with the ideas.[89]

Eugenics responded to failure in the broad sense that it involved seeking daring new solutions to age-old problems, but it was not as such a response to the failure of a previous paradigm governing immigration and population policy. When successful, eugenic policies resulted from a temporal partnership between rational interest and coherent ideational framework—something less that *Weltanschauung*, something more than a policy prescription.

Societal interests, given central place in recent work by Walsh,[90] are naturally relevant to this account, but they are subsumed under the strategic interest variable: when societal pressure runs in favor of particular ideational frameworks and the policy prescribed by them, then actors have, all things being equal, an interest in pursuing them; when it runs against, they do not. Likewise, for the sake of parsimony, institutional position and political enthusiasm can be subsumed under strategic interest: when there is a strong political interest in translating ideas into policy, political actors will be likely to support them, and to support them strongly.

[89] Naturally, the whole process can go in reverse: ideas viewed as disreputable can discredit the actors proposing them, while ideas that might otherwise have support become discredited when associated with disreputable characters. A good example of the former would be socialist ideas in the postwar U.S.: discredited by association with the Soviet Union, they brought down any brave soul who publicly advocated them. An example of latter would be appeasement: it has been wholly delegitimized by Neville Chamberlain's naïve and clumsy policy toward Adolf Hitler.

[90] Walsh (fn. 77).