

From 1920s Ellis Island, to the Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded, to the rugged beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and beyond, a young immigrant fights for her dignity and those she loves against America's rising eugenics movement, when policies of prejudice later echoed in Hitler's "final solution" drove the state-mandated imprisonment and forced sterilization of those considered "unfit" based on class, race, disability, education, and country of origin.

**THE LIES THEY TOLD**  
by **Ellen Marie Wiseman**

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They were promised a haven for the tired, the poor,  
the huddled masses yearning to breathe free.  
Then they were criminalized, robbed, and imprisoned  
in the name of "genetic purity."  
Because before it fueled the Nazis in Europe,  
eugenics was all the rage in America.



# The Past is Present

"We cannot have too much immigration of the right kind, and we should have none of the wrong kind."

—President Theodore Roosevelt, 1905

"The biggest problem was the influx of emigrants . . . unwanted human debris . . . from abroad, degrading good pioneer stock through intermarriage."

—Leon Whitney, 1934

"You wouldn't believe how bad these people are. These aren't people. These are animals."

—Donald Trump, 2018

## From the Author's Note in *The Lies They Told*:

While this is a dark time in history to look back on, thirty-one states in the U.S., as well as Washington, D.C., still have laws that allow forced sterilization for the disabled, the incarcerated, and immigrants. In 2020, forced sterilizations at a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center in Ocilla, Georgia, attracted national attention.





Dear Reader,

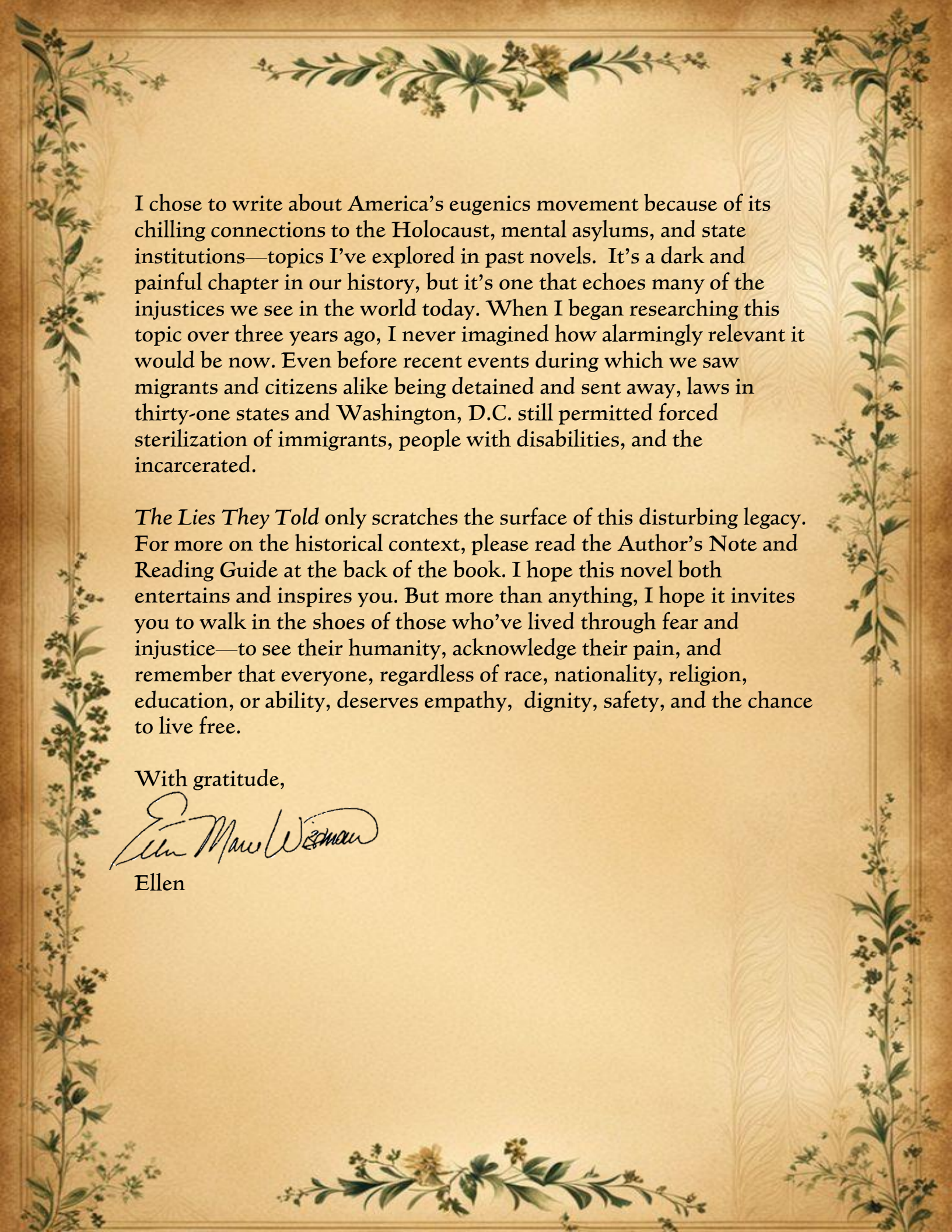
My mother grew up in poverty in Germany during World War II. Then, at twenty-years-old, she made the courageous decision to leave everything behind—her family, her country, her past—for a chance at a better life in America. She boarded a ship alone, filled with hope yet facing the unknown. Though her life in the U.S. remained difficult and she longed for home, her strength in the face of uncertainty has always inspired me. It's part of why I write about the struggles and injustices people have faced throughout history.

My mother's story also reminds me how deeply wrenching it must be to walk away from everything familiar, with no guarantee of what lies ahead. What kind of suffering drives a person to make that leap, whether on their own or with children by their side? And what if taking that risk only leads to more pain?

I think it's easy for most of us to grasp the obvious challenges immigrants face at any time—finding housing, employment, acceptance, and navigating a new culture. But many of those who came to the U.S. during the first half of the 20th century encountered something more sinister: America's eugenics movement. This racist pseudoscience aimed to eliminate those deemed "unfit" and preserve only those who conformed to a so-called Nordic ideal.

During that time, the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to be free discovered that policies of exclusion and eugenics made mere survival a battle. Eugenics laws and beliefs had the power to tear families apart, to institutionalize people for life, and to take away a person's right to have a family. But, as you'll discover in *The Lies They Told*, the threats extended beyond immigrants—American citizens, too, could be labeled mentally, physically, or socially inadequate and then subjected to forced sterilization, institutionalization, and the loss of their children.





I chose to write about America's eugenics movement because of its chilling connections to the Holocaust, mental asylums, and state institutions—topics I've explored in past novels. It's a dark and painful chapter in our history, but it's one that echoes many of the injustices we see in the world today. When I began researching this topic over three years ago, I never imagined how alarmingly relevant it would be now. Even before recent events during which we saw migrants and citizens alike being detained and sent away, laws in thirty-one states and Washington, D.C. still permitted forced sterilization of immigrants, people with disabilities, and the incarcerated.

*The Lies They Told* only scratches the surface of this disturbing legacy. For more on the historical context, please read the Author's Note and Reading Guide at the back of the book. I hope this novel both entertains and inspires you. But more than anything, I hope it invites you to walk in the shoes of those who've lived through fear and injustice—to see their humanity, acknowledge their pain, and remember that everyone, regardless of race, nationality, religion, education, or ability, deserves empathy, dignity, safety, and the chance to live free.

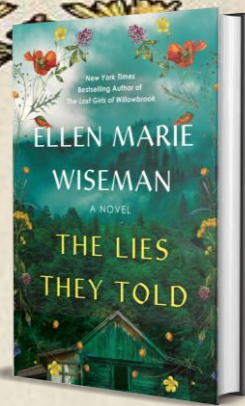
With gratitude,



Ellen




Discussion Questions to spark conversation  
and enhance your reading of  
*THE LIES THEY TOLD*




1. As early as the 1880s, “feebleminded” children in Pennsylvania were being sterilized. In 1907, Indiana was the first state with a compulsory sterilization law, which became the benchmark for the rest of the nation. Eventually, thirty-two states enacted similar laws. The victims of American eugenics were poor urban and rural dwellers from New England to California, immigrants from across Europe, Jews, Blacks, Mexicans, Native Americans, epileptics, alcoholics, petty criminals, the physically and mentally disabled, orphans, sexually active single young women, the infirm, and anyone else who didn’t fit the blond-and-blue-eyed Nordic ideal the movement valued. What was your awareness of eugenics in America before reading *The Lies They Told*? Why do you think so many people today are unfamiliar with it?
2. Lena and her family sell everything they own for a chance at a better life in America, despite the knowledge that if they’re deported, they will return home to nothing. Many poor immigrants experienced similar circumstances, and sometimes families were separated. Do you know the circumstances of your ancestors’ emigration to America?
3. In 1904, the Carnegie Institution established the Eugenics Record Office, or ERO, a research laboratory at Cold Spring Harbor on Long Island that stockpiled millions of index cards on ordinary Americans and carefully plotted the removal of families, bloodlines, and whole peoples. The laboratory also produced propaganda posters and pamphlets, had their own newspaper, and studied children from institutions for the feebleminded. The ERO’s reports, articles, charts, and pedigrees were considered scientific facts in their day, but have since been discredited. The research on the American families, which was collected by field workers going door-to-door with questionnaires about temperament and characteristics, provided much of the information which facilitated the passage of several laws during the 1920s. Do you think people today would willingly fill out a questionnaire about their families handed out by a research laboratory? Would you? Why or why not?



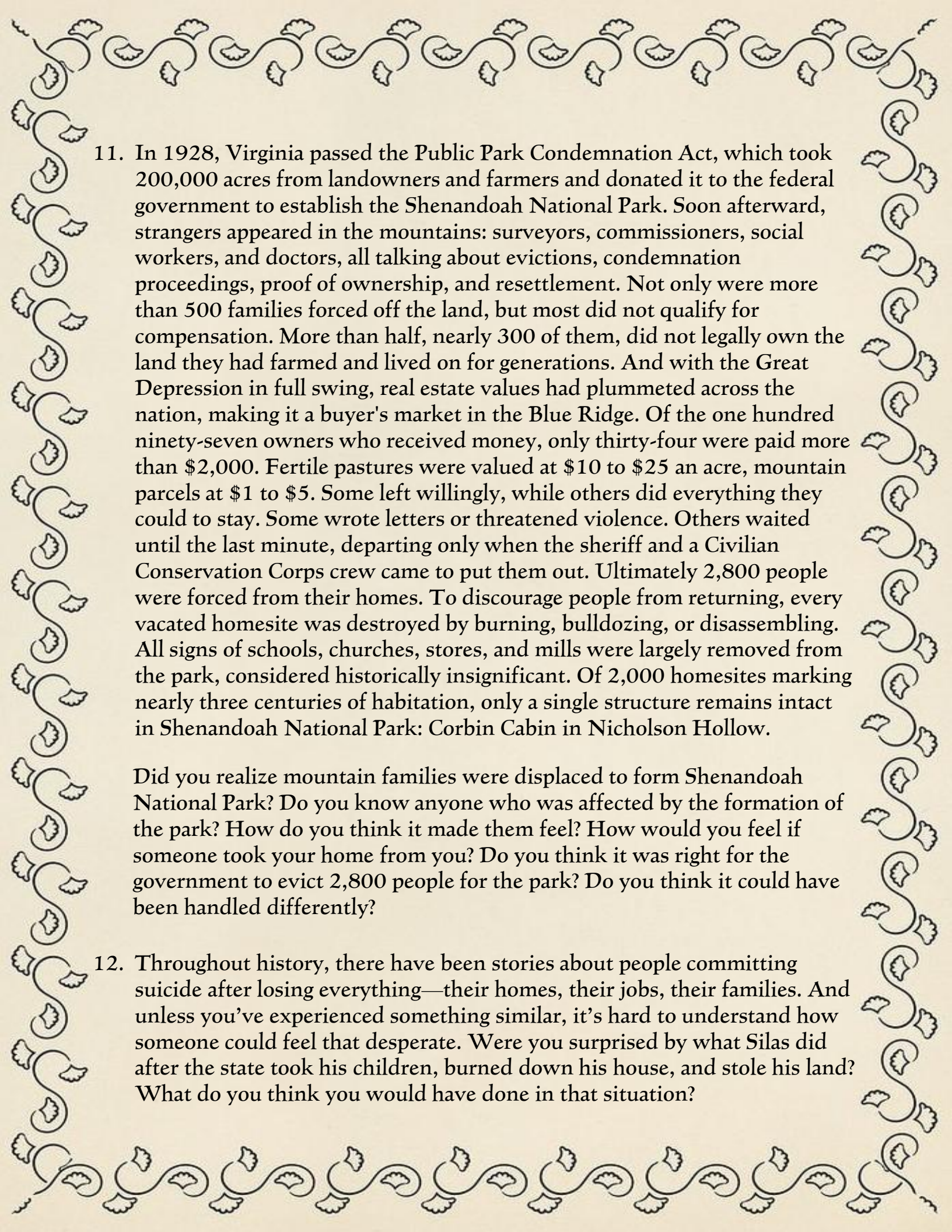
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4. During the first half of the twentieth century, America's sentiments towards immigrant groups changed dramatically, and a fear of the "new immigrants" emerged. The main concern was that they would become a public burden and degrade the quality of American life. After surviving a brutal passage to the U.S., immigrants were immediately judged based on their race, origin, class, and health upon arrival. Following each examination, inspectors used chalk to draw symbols on those who were suspected to be sick or mentally inferior. Some immigrants supposedly wiped the chalk marks off secretly or reversed their clothes to avoid medical detention in rooms or cages. What was your awareness of the testing done on Ellis Island before reading *The Lies They Told*? Do you think it was too strict? Not strict enough? Do you think it was unfair?
  5. After being put through numerous physical examinations and IQ tests on Ellis Island, Lena and her daughter are sent to Hoffman Island to be deloused, where they are instructed to strip naked and sprayed with chemicals. Had you ever heard of Hoffman Island and the process that was used there to get rid of lice? Did the description of the shower chambers remind you of anything?
  6. When Lena's brother Enzo is labeled "feebleminded," one of the immigration inspectors threatens to send him to the Psychopathic Pavilion for the rest of his life. Were you aware that Ellis Island had a psychiatric ward, a maternity hospital, an isolation ward, and a contagious disease hospital? Were you aware that thousands of immigrants were detained and died on Ellis Island?
  7. When Lena finds out her mother and brother are being deported, she has to decide whether or not to stay in the U.S. How do you think motherhood influenced Lena's decision? If she had been childless, do you think she would have tried harder to go back to Germany with her mother and brother or do you think she would have stayed in the U.S.? What would you have done in her situation?



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8. When Lena learns Bonnie and Jack Henry have been instructed to hide if the sheriff or any strangers come around, Lena wonders if she and Ella would be safer somewhere else, even though she has no idea where she could go. At another point in the story, she thinks about running away. If Lena had found a way to leave Wolfe Hollow, what do you think would have happened to her? Where do you think she would have gone? Do you think she would have been better off or worse?
  9. Numerous mountain children who were photographed by Arthur Rothstein ended up in the Virginia State Colony, where many of them would be forcibly sterilized. Some of the children were committed just days after Rothstein photographed them. The photographs were printed free of charge in newspapers across the country to convince the public that the mountain people would be better off if they were relocated. Can you think of other instances when media has used photographs to sway public opinion?
  10. With support from the American Eugenics Society's Committee, the first Fitter Family Contest was held at the Kansas State Free Fair in 1920. The contest was founded by the pioneers of the Baby Health Examination movement, which sprang from a "Better Baby" contest at the 1911 Iowa State Fair and quickly spread to forty states. To compete for the title of a "Fitter Family," a "healthy" family had to provide a condensed record of family traits and history before being administered a medical exam, syphilis test, and psychiatric evaluation. While waiting for their examination, contestants could learn about heredity in Mendel's Theatre or watch a display of flashing lightbulbs that supposedly illustrated the alarming social cost of the high birth rate of the unfit. At the time, it was believed that certain behavioral qualities were passed down from parents to children. This led to the addition of several judging categories including generosity, self-sacrificing, and quality of familial bonds. Additionally, there were negative features that were judged: selfishness, jealousy, suspiciousness, high temperedness, cruelty, feeble-mindedness, alcoholism, and paralysis.

Each family member was given an overall letter grade of eugenic health, and the family with the highest grade average was awarded a silver trophy. All contestants with a B+ or better received bronze medals bearing the inscription, "Yea, I have a goodly heritage." As expected, the Fitter Families Contest mirrored the eugenics movement itself; winners were invariably white with western and northern European heritage. Had you ever heard of these contests? What about the Better Baby contests, which in some states were only open to white babies?

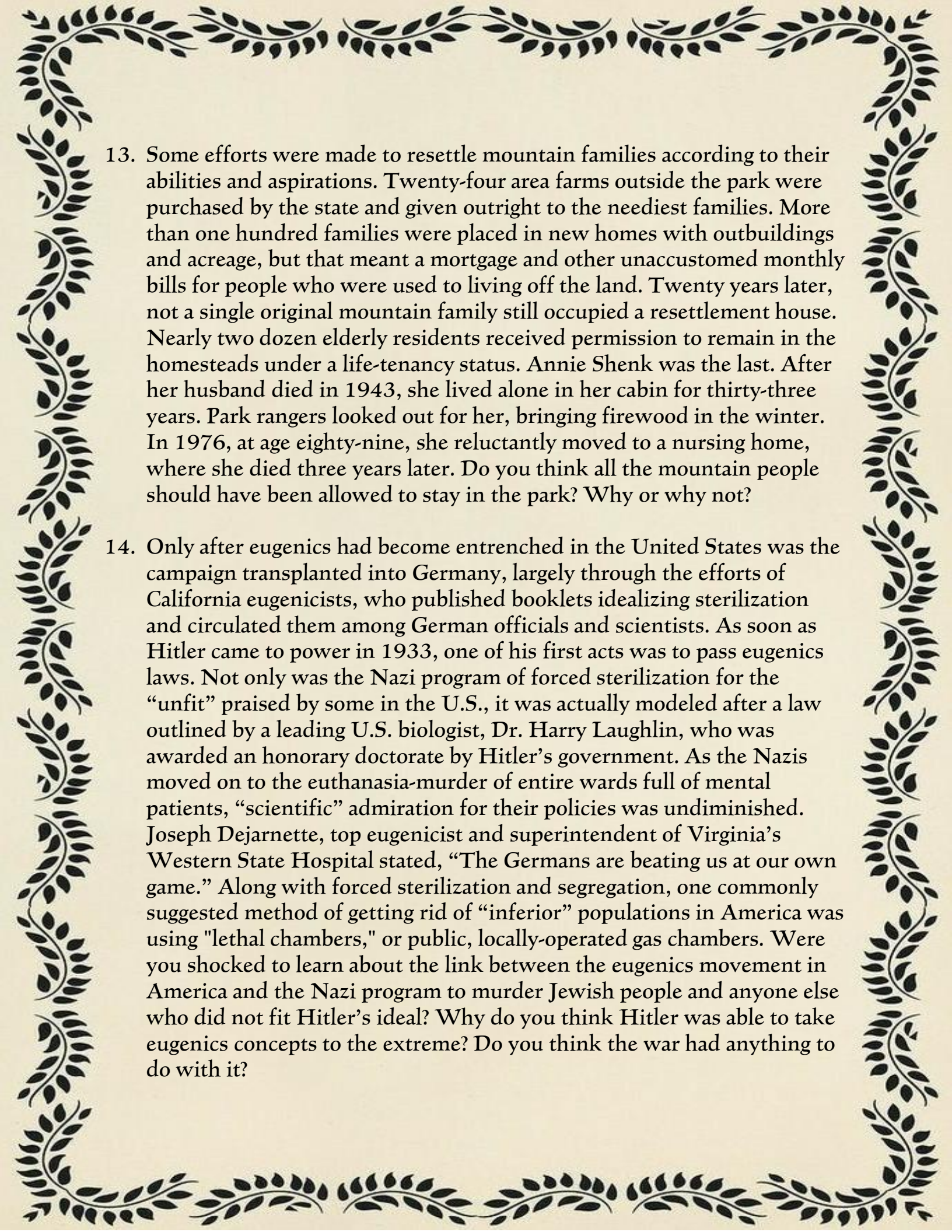


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- A decorative border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern surrounds the text.
11. In 1928, Virginia passed the Public Park Condemnation Act, which took 200,000 acres from landowners and farmers and donated it to the federal government to establish the Shenandoah National Park. Soon afterward, strangers appeared in the mountains: surveyors, commissioners, social workers, and doctors, all talking about evictions, condemnation proceedings, proof of ownership, and resettlement. Not only were more than 500 families forced off the land, but most did not qualify for compensation. More than half, nearly 300 of them, did not legally own the land they had farmed and lived on for generations. And with the Great Depression in full swing, real estate values had plummeted across the nation, making it a buyer's market in the Blue Ridge. Of the one hundred ninety-seven owners who received money, only thirty-four were paid more than \$2,000. Fertile pastures were valued at \$10 to \$25 an acre, mountain parcels at \$1 to \$5. Some left willingly, while others did everything they could to stay. Some wrote letters or threatened violence. Others waited until the last minute, departing only when the sheriff and a Civilian Conservation Corps crew came to put them out. Ultimately 2,800 people were forced from their homes. To discourage people from returning, every vacated homesite was destroyed by burning, bulldozing, or disassembling. All signs of schools, churches, stores, and mills were largely removed from the park, considered historically insignificant. Of 2,000 homesites marking nearly three centuries of habitation, only a single structure remains intact in Shenandoah National Park: Corbin Cabin in Nicholson Hollow.

Did you realize mountain families were displaced to form Shenandoah National Park? Do you know anyone who was affected by the formation of the park? How do you think it made them feel? How would you feel if someone took your home from you? Do you think it was right for the government to evict 2,800 people for the park? Do you think it could have been handled differently?

12. Throughout history, there have been stories about people committing suicide after losing everything—their homes, their jobs, their families. And unless you've experienced something similar, it's hard to understand how someone could feel that desperate. Were you surprised by what Silas did after the state took his children, burned down his house, and stole his land? What do you think you would have done in that situation?



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- A decorative border of stylized leaves and vines frames the text on all four sides.
13. Some efforts were made to resettle mountain families according to their abilities and aspirations. Twenty-four area farms outside the park were purchased by the state and given outright to the neediest families. More than one hundred families were placed in new homes with outbuildings and acreage, but that meant a mortgage and other unaccustomed monthly bills for people who were used to living off the land. Twenty years later, not a single original mountain family still occupied a resettlement house. Nearly two dozen elderly residents received permission to remain in the homesteads under a life-tenancy status. Annie Shenk was the last. After her husband died in 1943, she lived alone in her cabin for thirty-three years. Park rangers looked out for her, bringing firewood in the winter. In 1976, at age eighty-nine, she reluctantly moved to a nursing home, where she died three years later. Do you think all the mountain people should have been allowed to stay in the park? Why or why not?
14. Only after eugenics had become entrenched in the United States was the campaign transplanted into Germany, largely through the efforts of California eugenicists, who published booklets idealizing sterilization and circulated them among German officials and scientists. As soon as Hitler came to power in 1933, one of his first acts was to pass eugenics laws. Not only was the Nazi program of forced sterilization for the “unfit” praised by some in the U.S., it was actually modeled after a law outlined by a leading U.S. biologist, Dr. Harry Laughlin, who was awarded an honorary doctorate by Hitler’s government. As the Nazis moved on to the euthanasia-murder of entire wards full of mental patients, “scientific” admiration for their policies was undiminished. Joseph DeJarnette, top eugenicist and superintendent of Virginia’s Western State Hospital stated, “The Germans are beating us at our own game.” Along with forced sterilization and segregation, one commonly suggested method of getting rid of “inferior” populations in America was using “lethal chambers,” or public, locally-operated gas chambers. Were you shocked to learn about the link between the eugenics movement in America and the Nazi program to murder Jewish people and anyone else who did not fit Hitler’s ideal? Why do you think Hitler was able to take eugenics concepts to the extreme? Do you think the war had anything to do with it?

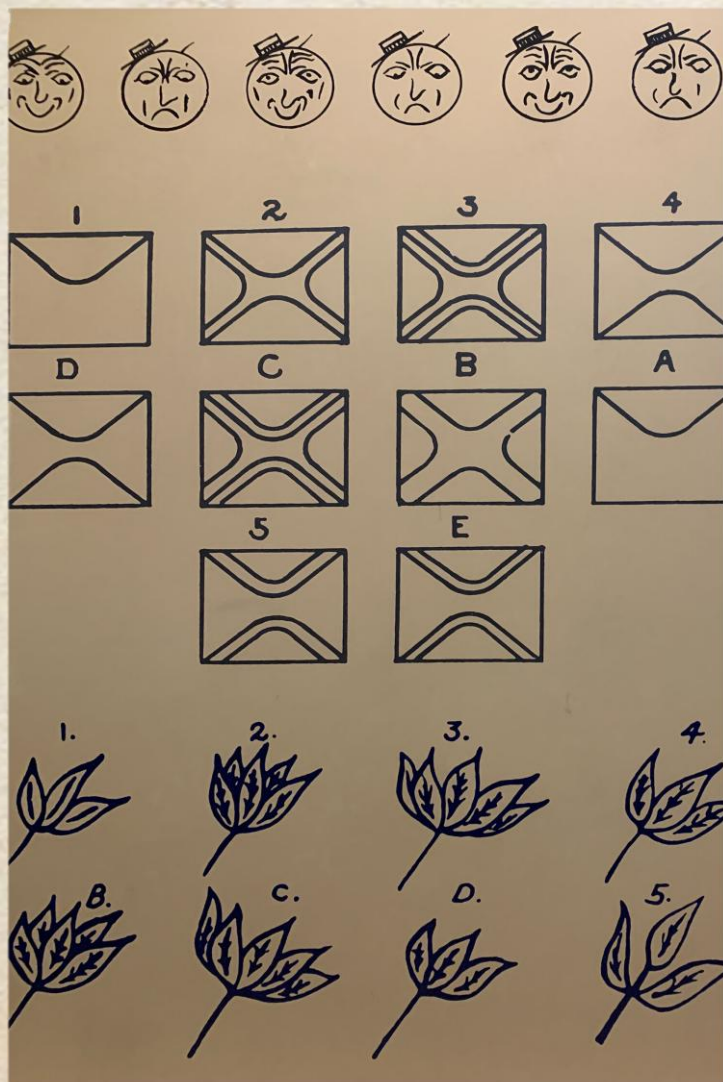


# Ellis Island: Tests & Inspection Process



## Visual Comparison Tests

By 1917, immigration laws prohibited the admission of all aliens diagnosed as suffering from any mental impairment. Doctors at Ellis Island developed tests such as this because they believed an interpreter wasn't required to explain them.

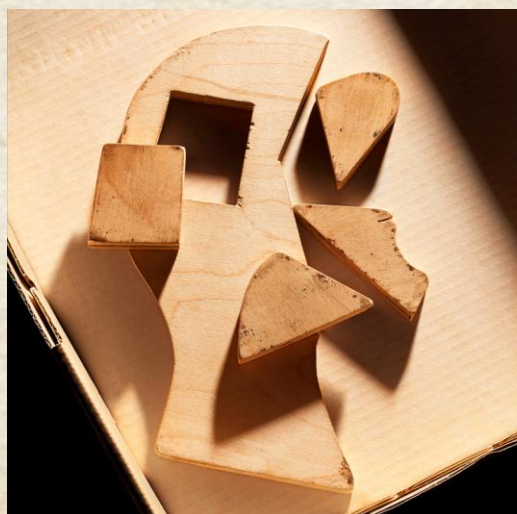


## Doctors' Inspection Codes

X	Suspected mental defect	F	Face	P	Physical and Lungs
⊗	Definite signs of mental disease observed	F+	Feet	Pj	Pregnancy
B	Back	G	Goiter	Sc	Scalp (Furrow)
C	Conjunctivitis	H	Heart	S	Sensility
CT	Trachoma	K	Kernia		
E	Eyes	L	Laziness		
		N	Neck		

## The Feature Profile Test

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, immigrants at Ellis Island were told to complete this wooden puzzle. Those who failed to assemble it correctly risked being labeled "feeble-minded" and deported.





## Arthur Rothstein Photographs

from the United States Resettlement Administration

While he appears as a character in *The Lies They Told*, Arthur Rothstein was a real-life photojournalist who was hired by the Farm Security Administration as their first staff photographer.

His first assignment was to document Virginia farmers who would be evicted to make way for the Shenandoah National Park and about to be relocated by the Resettlement Administration.





# America's Eugenics Movement

## MARRIAGES.- FIT AND UNFIT

### 1. PURE + PURE:—

CHILDREN NORMAL

### 2. ABNORMAL + ABNORMAL:—

CHILDREN ABNORMAL

### 3. PURE + ABNORMAL:—

CHILDREN NORMAL BUT TAINTED;  
SOME GRANDCHILDREN ABNORMAL.

### 4. TAINTED + ABNORMAL:—

CHILDREN  $\frac{1}{2}$  NORMAL BUT TAINTED  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  ABNORMAL

### 5. TAINTED + PURE:—

CHILDREN:  $\frac{1}{2}$  PURE NORMAL  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  NORMAL BUT TAINTED

### 6. TAINTED + TAINTED

CHILDREN: OF EVERY FOUR, 1 ABNORMAL  
1 PURE NORMAL, AND 2 TAINTED.

\* PURE - NORMAL, AND TRANSMITTING ONLY NORMAL.

TAINTED - NORMAL, BUT CAN TRANSMIT ABNORMALITY.

ABNORMAL - SHOWING THE ABNORMALITY.

## HOW LONG

ARE WE AMERICANS TO  
BE SO CAREFUL FOR THE  
PEDIGREE OF OUR PIGS  
AND CHICKENS AND  
CATTLE,— AND THEN  
LEAVE THE ANCESTRY  
OF OUR CHILDREN  
TO CHANGE, OR TO  
"BLIND" SENTIMENT?

This light flashes every 15 seconds

Every 15 seconds \$100 of your money  
goes for the care of persons with bad  
heredity such as the insane feeble-  
minded, criminals & other defectives

**Some people are born to  
be a burden on the rest.**

This light flashes every 16 seconds

Every 16 seconds  
a person is born in the  
United States.



This light flashes every 7 1/2 minutes

Every 7 1/2 minutes a high grade person  
is born in the United States will  
have ability to do creative work &  
be fit for leadership. About 4% of  
all Americans come within this class

**ONLY HEALTHY SEED  
MUST BE SOWN!**



**CHECK THE SEEDS OF  
HEREDITARY DISEASE AND  
UNFITNESS BY EUGENICS**

ISSUED BY THE SCIENCE SOCIETY, 48 REGENT SQUARE, LONDON, W.1



# The Fitter Family Contests



Fitter Families Contest Medal



Photo by Emanuel Wolfe



# EUGENIC CERTIFICATE

THIS GUARANTEES that I have examined the gender of this card and find a perfect PHYSICAL and MENTAL BALANCE and unusually strong EUGENIC LOVE possibilities, well fitted to promote the happiness and future welfare of the race.



*Love & Fate M.D.*

310-10.

34

Popular Science Monthly

## Registering Human Pedigrees

How Kansas Develops Fitter Families;  
A Remarkable Experiment in Eugenics

By Arthur Capper, U. S. Senator from Kansas



Mrs. Mary T. Watts,  
Audubon, Iowa

THE average American family of today is the result of haphazard mating. Men and women marry with little scientific thought as to their physical and mental fitness for bearing and rearing children. When the children come they too often are brought up in the same haphazard fashion in which their parents chose each other. Is it any wonder that the number of mentally and physically unfit increases?

For years, American farmers and breeders



The Eugenics Building at the Kansas Free Fair, where families are judged and registered. Seated in the center is a "fitter family" surrounded by examiners.



Dr. Florence B. Sherbon,  
University of Kansas

member of a family. Another sheet of the record shows the results of the intelligence test, and an examination by a psychiatric specialist of the nerve reflexes, emotional and intellectual responses. A thorough structural examination is made, including strength tests and measurements. The medical record gives the results of a complete physical and organic examination, with blood pressure, hemoglobin blood test and the Wasserman blood test. Every member of the family is examined



310-11.

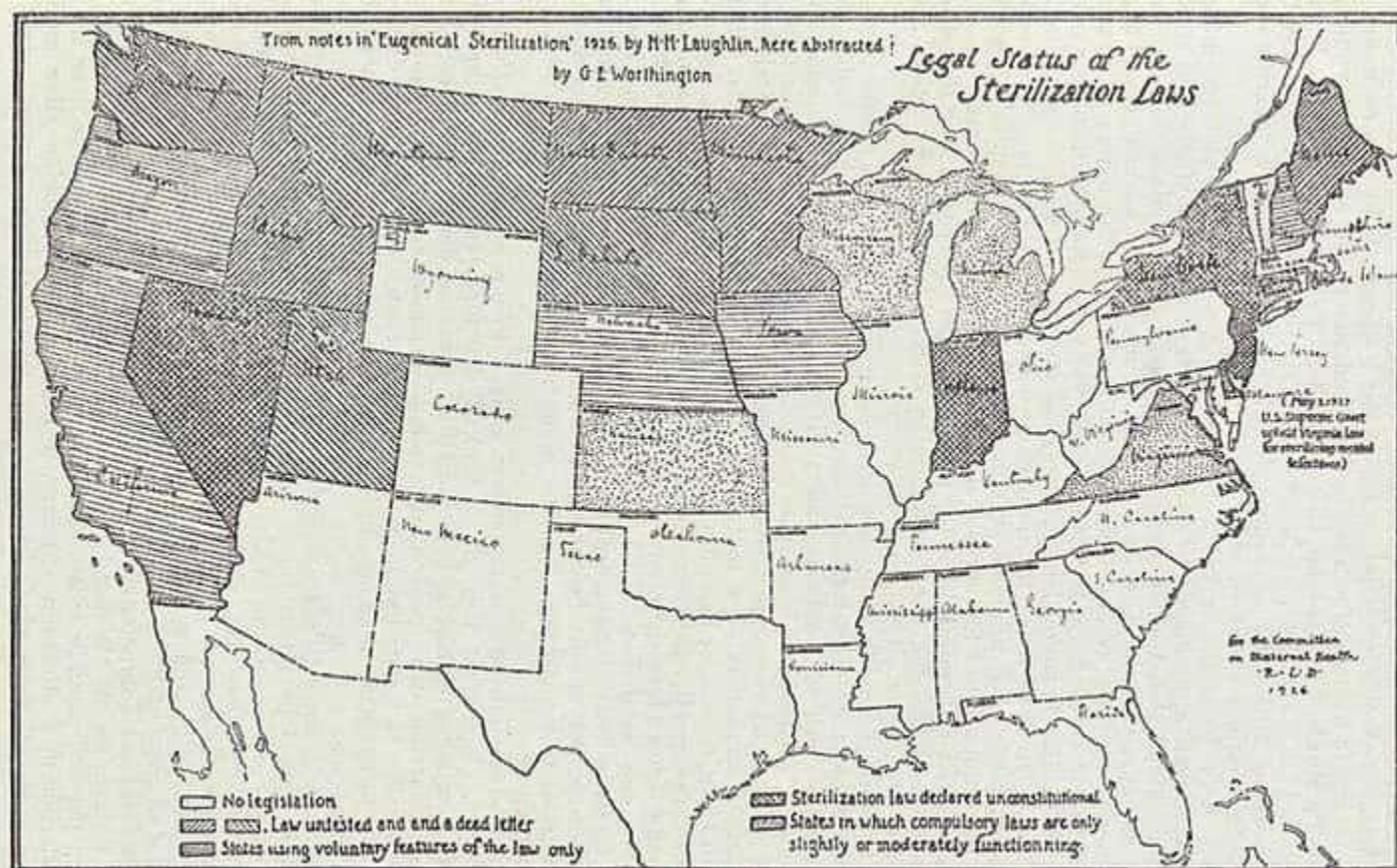
## ESTIMATE OF COMPARATIVE NATURAL INTELLIGENCE OF THE TOTAL WHITE AND FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES

Basin: Psychological Examination of 94,004 white men selected at random, but pro-rata by states, in the United States Army, of whom 12,407 were foreign-born. (From 35, pp. 403-404, 704-705, 714-715, 724-725, 734-735, 744-745, 754-755, 764-765, 774-775, 784-785, 794-795, 804-805, 814-815, 824-825, 834-835, 844-845, 854-855, 864-865, 874-875, 884-885, 894-895, 904-905, 914-915, 924-925, 934-935, 944-945, 954-955, 964-965, 974-975, 984-985, 994-995, 1004-1005, 1014-1015, 1024-1025, 1034-1035, 1044-1045, 1054-1055, 1064-1065, 1074-1075, 1084-1085, 1094-1095, 1104-1105, 1114-1115, 1124-1125, 1134-1135, 1144-1145, 1154-1155, 1164-1165, 1174-1175, 1184-1185, 1194-1195, 1204-1205, 1214-1215, 1224-1225, 1234-1235, 1244-1245, 1254-1255, 1264-1265, 1274-1275, 1284-1285, 1294-1295, 1304-1305, 1314-1315, 1324-1325, 1334-1335, 1344-1345, 1354-1355, 1364-1365, 1374-1375, 1384-1385, 1394-1395, 1404-1405, 1414-1415, 1424-1425, 1434-1435, 1444-1445, 1454-1455, 1464-1465, 1474-1475, 1484-1485, 1494-1495, 1504-1505, 1514-1515, 1524-1525, 1534-1535, 1544-1545, 1554-1555, 1564-1565, 1574-1575, 1584-1585, 1594-1595, 1604-1605, 1614-1615, 1624-1625, 1634-1635, 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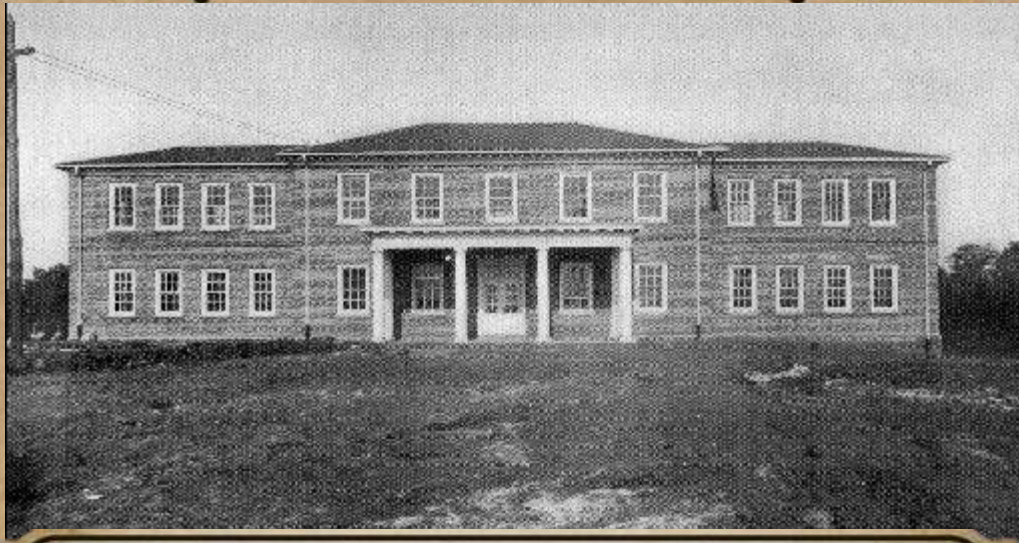


# STATE CRITERIA FOR LEGAL EUGENICAL STERILIZATION

STATE	TYPE OF PATIENT
Alabama	"Feeble-minded."
Arizona	"Inmates of Hospital for Insane."
California	"Feeble-minded, habitual criminals, insane, idiots, mental defectives."
Connecticut	"Feeble-minded, insane, idiots, imbeciles and those with inherited tendency to crime."
Delaware	"Mentally defectives, insane, feeble-minded or epileptic persons."
Idaho	"Feeble-minded, insane, epileptics, habitual criminals, morally degenerate persons."
Indiana	"Hereditary insane, feeble-minded or epileptic."
Iowa	"Feeble-minded, insane, syphilitic, habitual criminals, morally degenerate persons."
Kansas	"Feeble-minded, insane, habitual criminals."
Maine	"Feeble-minded."
Michigan	"Mentally defectives, insane."
Minnesota	"Feeble-minded, insane."
Mississippi	"Persons with hereditary form of insanity, feeble-mindedness, idiocy, epilepsy."
Montana	"Feeble-minded, insane, epileptic."
Nebraska	"Insane and feeble-minded."
New Hampshire	"Feeble-mindedness or certain forms of other mental diseases."
North Carolina	"Mentally defective persons."
North Dakota	"Feeble-minded, insane, epileptic, habitual criminals, moral degenerates and sexual perverts."
Oklahoma	"Habitual criminals, hereditary feeble-minded, insane, idiots, imbeciles, epileptics."
Oregon	"Feeble-minded, insane, epileptic, habitual criminals, moral degenerates and sexual perverts."
South Carolina	"Hereditary form of insanity, idiocy, imbecility, feeble-mindedness or epilepsy."
South Dakota	"Feeble-minded."
Utah	"Habitual criminals, insane, idiots, imbeciles, feeble-minded, or epileptics."
Vermont	"Prevent procreation of idiots, imbeciles, feeble-minded or insane persons."
Virginia	"Hereditary insanity, idiocy, imbecility, feeble-mindedness or epilepsy."
Washington	"Feeble-minded, insane, epileptic, habitual criminals, moral degenerates and sexual perverts."
West Virginia	"Insanity, imbecility, epilepsy, idiocy, feeble-mindedness."
Wisconsin	"Insane, feeble-minded, epileptic and criminal persons."







**The Virginia State Colony  
for Epileptics and Feebleminded**  
Madison Heights, VA (near Lynchburg)



**Carrie and Emma Buck**

*[What Happens When White, Indian  
and Negro Blood Intermingles?]*

## MONGREL VIRGINIANS

A Scientific Study of Racial Inter-  
mixture as it Developed in  
the "Win" Tribe in Virginia

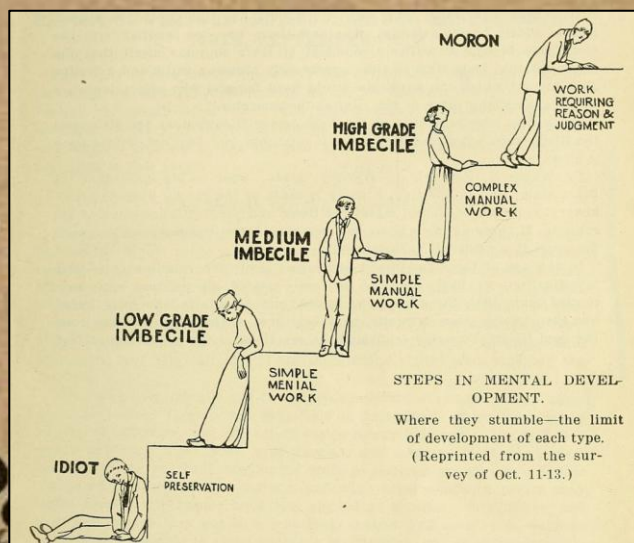
By  
**ARTHUR H. ESTABROOK**  
*of the Carnegie Institution, Washington*  
and  
**IVAN E. McDOUGLE**  
*of Goucher College, Baltimore*

*A Statement of Fact from Eugenical  
and Sociological Points of View*

27 Genealogical charts—7 Tables—Illustrated  
Cloth—6 x 9—205 pages

The Williams & Wilkins Company  
*Publishers of Scientific Books and Periodicals*  
BALTIMORE, U. S. A.

PM-MVs-36





# Recipes

from the pages of *The Lies They Told*

## Bonnie's Apple Fritters

### Ingredients

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour  
1/4 cup sugar  
2 teaspoons baking powder  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon  
1/3 cup milk  
2 eggs  
3 tablespoons applesauce  
2 large Granny Smith apples or Honey Crisp apples  
peeled cored and diced  
canola oil or vegetable oil for frying

*I'm fixing to make fritters  
because Daddy liked them  
best. — Bonnie*

### Glaze

2 cups powdered sugar  
1/4 cup milk  
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

### Instructions

Whisk together flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, and cinnamon in medium bowl. Make a well in the center and add 1/3 cup milk, eggs and applesauce. Stir just to combine. Fold in apples.

Heat 1 1/2 inches of oil in heavy skillet, dutch oven or deep fryer to 375 degrees. Drop about 1/4 cup of batter per fritter into hot oil; spreading it out as you drop. Cook each side until golden brown; approximately 2 minutes per side. Use a slotted spoon to remove to paper towels to drain.

Whisk together 1/4 cup milk, powdered sugar and vanilla. Dunk each fritter in the glaze, turning over to make sure both sides coated. Place on wire racks to air dry and drip.



## Bonnie's Cathead Biscuits

### Ingredients

Makes 8 biscuits

2 cups self-rising flour  
1 to 2 tablespoons shortening at room  
temperature (Momma used lard about the size of a  
walnut)  
1 cup buttermilk  
1/2 teaspoon salt

*Momma used to bake a special baby biscuit for  
me by tucking it away in a hole between the  
other biscuits. — Bonnie*

### Instructions

Work the shortening into the flour until it's like coarse crumbs. Add the buttermilk and stir until it makes a ball in the bowl. You can either pinch off the dough or cut it with a biscuit cutter. I use a tin can because I like to make these biscuits a good size.

Grease or spray pan. Bake in preheated 400 degree oven for 15 to 20 minutes until brown on top.

**Note:** You can also make them using all-purpose flour by adding 1 tablespoon baking powder, 1/2 teaspoon baking soda and 1/2 teaspoon salt. You can also brush melted butter on the tops once cooked or even before cooking if you like.



## Bonnie's Cornbread

### Ingredients

1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour  
1 1/4 cups corn meal  
1/3 cup sugar or honey  
1 tbsp baking powder  
1 tsp salt  
1 cup milk  
1/3 cup oil (see notes below)  
2 lg eggs lightly beaten

If y'all add enough sugar to the cornbread batter, it'll taste as good as any cake you might eat. — Bonnie

### Instructions

- 1) Preheat oven to 400°F and grease a 10-inch cast iron skillet with 2 tbsp additional oil.
- 2) In a large mixing bowl combine corn meal, flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. Mix well.
- 3) Combine milk, oil and eggs in a small bowl. Mix well.
- 4) Add milk mixture to flour mixture and stir just until blended.
- 5) Pour batter into prepared skillet and bake for 20-25 mins or until golden brown. An inserted cake tester into the center should come out clean when corn bread is done.

## GRANNY CREED'S MOUSE'S EAR SALVE

### Ingredients

1/2 cup dried mouse ears  
(either hawkweed or chickweed)  
1 cup oil  
1 ounce beeswax

Heat the oil and mouse ears on low heat for about an hour in a slow cooker.

Strain the oil, removing the herb. Add 1 ounce of beeswax to the infused oil. Heat the mixture on low heat until the beeswax melts, stirring to ensure it's fully incorporated. Pour the salve into clean, dry jars while it's still warm.

IF YALL WANT TO MAKE MOUSE EARS MEDICINE THE  
RIGHT WAY, YOU NEED TO USE HOG LARD AND  
TURPENTINE. - GRANNY CREED



## Mutti's Christmas Stollen

### Ingredients

2 packages dry yeast dissolved in  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup warm water  
1  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup lukewarm milk  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup butter  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sugar  
2 tsp salt  
2 eggs  
7 cups flour  
Optional: dried fruit, raisins, chopped nuts

*Somehow, even when we had very little food, Mutti always found the ingredients to make my favorite sweet bread and hot cocoa on Christmas. - Lena*

### Instructions

Mix first 7 ingredients together and knead for 6-7 minutes. Place in greased bowl, cover with a clean dishcloth, and let rise in warm place 1-1  $\frac{1}{2}$  hours.

Punch down, work in dried fruit, raisins and/or nuts.

Let rise again for  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour. Divide and roll into six long pieces, braid together to make two loaves. Brush with egg yolk. Sprinkle with sugar and almonds.

Bake at 375 30-40 minutes until brown. Add glaze or confectionary sugar. (optional)

## Mutti's old-fashioned Hot Cocoa

### Ingredients

$\frac{1}{4}$  cup unsweetened cocoa powder  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup granulated sugar  
 $\frac{1}{3}$  cup hot water  
 $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon salt  
4 cups milk, dairy or non-dairy  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

### Instructions

In a medium saucepan, combine the cocoa powder, sugar, water, and salt over medium heat.

Cook, stirring constantly, until smooth and bring to a simmer.

Reduce heat, and stir in the milk, do not boil.

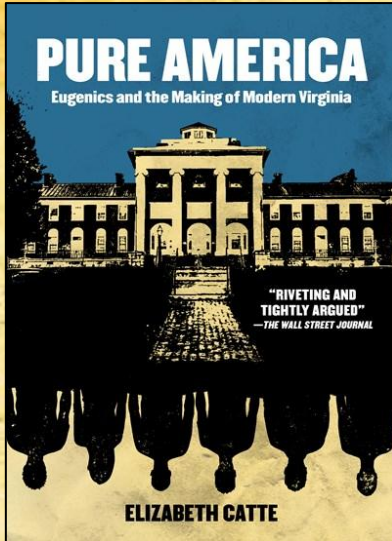
Remove from the heat and stir in the vanilla.

Pour into mugs and serve immediately.



## Further Reading

on the real history behind *The Lies They Told*



*Pure America: Eugenics and the Making of Modern Virginia*  
by Elizabeth Catte  
(Arcadia Publishing, 2021)

A sweeping, unsparing history of eugenics in Virginia, and by extension the United States.

### Im·be·ciles (i

The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck

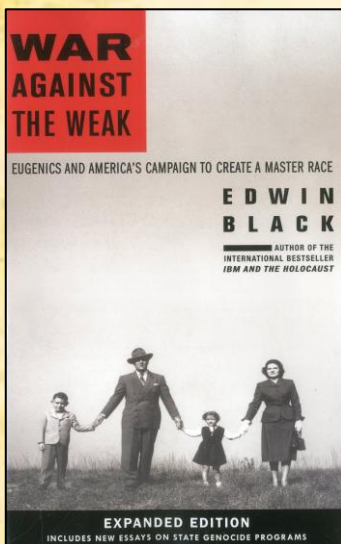
Adam Cohen

"Imbeciles leaves you wondering whether it can happen here—again." —Minneapolis Star Tribune



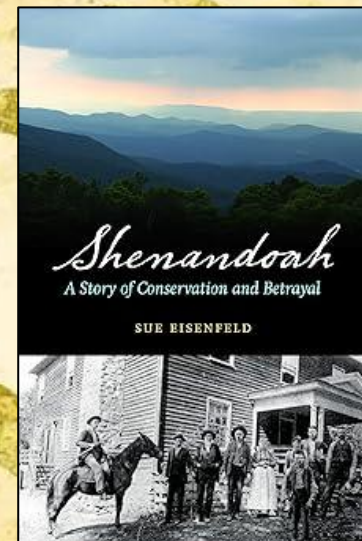
*Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck*  
by Adam Cohen  
(Penguin Random House, 2017)

An examination of the Supreme Court's infamous 1927 *Buck v. Bell* ruling made government sterilization of "undesirable" citizens the law of the land.



*War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race*  
by Edwin Black  
(Dialog Press, 2012)

A chronicle of how American corporate philanthropies launched a national campaign of ethnic cleansing in the United States.



*Shenandoah: A Story of Conservation and Betrayal*  
by Sue Eisenfeld  
(University of Nebraska Press, 2015)





Ellen Marie Wiseman is a *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author known for the compassion, authenticity, and depth with which her novels explore real historical injustices. Born and raised in Three Mile Bay, a tiny hamlet in northern New York, she's a first-generation German American who discovered her love of reading and writing while attending first grade in one of the last one-room schoolhouses in New York State. Since then, her novels have been published worldwide, translated into twenty languages, and sold more than one million copies in the United States alone. A mother of two, Ellen lives on the shores of Lake Ontario with her husband.

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[EllenMarieWiseman.com](http://EllenMarieWiseman.com)



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## Praise from Booksellers & Librarians for *The Lies They Told*



“From the halls of Ellis Island to the backroads of Virginia, Wiseman takes readers on a shocking ride through America’s dark secrets of eugenics and land-grabbing. And yet, she tackles them with her customary compassion and respect, creating characters who leave an indelible mark on her readers’ souls.” – **Julie Earhart-Cracchiolo, St. Louis Public Library** (St. Louis, MO)

“The shocking treatment of rural Virginians during the eugenics movement is on full display in this riveting, important historical novel. While harrowing in its damning arc of man’s inhumanity to man, we root for the resilient, loving Lena and her kinfolk who form an uplifting community that culminates in a warm conclusion.” – **Robin Stern, Books Inc.** (Campbell, CA)

“This is a story that needs to be read and shared.” – **Angela Sides, Monkey and Dog Books** (Forth Worth, TX)

“Readers find themselves on a heart-wrenching journey through a dark period of American history that needs to be told. And no one can tell it like Ellen Marie Wiseman.” – **Marianne Colton, Lockport Public Library** (Lockport, NY)

“This unforgettable and deeply affecting story of a young German immigrant begins with an eye-opening and horrifying experience at Ellis Island and is filled with the remarkable, little-known history of American eugenics, forced sterilizations, and the government’s underhanded way of obtaining people’s generational homes to make way for the Shenandoah National Park. Highly recommended.” – **Vicki Nesting, St. Charles Parish Library** (Destrehan, LA)

“Prepare to be shocked, amazed and engrossed.” – **Fran Ziegler, Titcomb's Bookshop** (East Sandwich, MA)

“A sad part of our history comes to light. But along with the real horrors of land grabs, forced institutionalization, sterilization, and families ripped apart, this story also offers a bit of hope.” – **Kim McGee, Lake Travis Community Library** (Austin, TX)

“A heart wrenching and well researched window into one of the dark periods of time in America's past.” – **Brianna Plumski, Cherry Street Books** (Alexandria, MN)

“An intense, well-researched, at times heartbreaking historical novel... I was horrified by the chilling representations of what was once done to those who were considered “lesser” humans. Yet Lena’s story continues past those dark times and comes to a more than satisfying conclusion, leaving the reader with a sense of hope.” – **Julie Stam, Eisenhower Public Library District** (Harwood Heights, IL)

“I wouldn’t be surprised if this book becomes one of the top 100 of 2025. The author has an incredible talent for crafting a story so vivid, it felt like watching a movie unfold in my mind.” – **Megan Santos, Under the Lantern Bookshop**

“Wiseman’s captivating storytelling and faithful recreation of history make for a gripping read. The universal themes of survival, hope, and resistance against oppression are poignant and timely. A truly exceptional novel about a pivotal yet often overlooked chapter in American history.” – **Karen Troutman, Peru Public Library** (Peru, IN)