

Fixin the Poor: Eugenic Sterilization and Child Welfare in the Twentieth Century

Michael Rembis
University of Buffalo (SUNY)

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That theory is based largely on the recollection of South African navigator T. E. "Fred" Shaw. Spragg's detailed timeline of RAF movements in the vicinity of Miller's flight and fact-checking of anecdotal evidence supporting Shaw's claim thoroughly debunk this theory and its underlying assumptions.

Glenn Miller Declassified will, of course, be of interest to scholars of military history and American music. But it is also an excellent resource for understanding broadcasting (both of music and spoken word) during World War II. Furthermore, *Glenn Miller Declassified* will be of interest to scholars of Iowa and the Midwest, as Miller was a native son of Iowa whose musical mind was shaped by the band culture of the interwar American heartland.

Fixing the Poor: Eugenic Sterilization and Child Welfare in the Twentieth Century, by Molly Ladd-Taylor. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017. xi, 275 pp. Illustrations, tables, map, graph, appendix, notes, index. \$54.95 hardcover and ebook.

Reviewer Michael Rembis is associate professor history and director of the Center for Disability Studies at the University at Buffalo (SUNY). He is the author of *Defining Deviance: Sex, Science, and Delinquent Girls, 1890-1960* (2011).

Molly Ladd-Taylor has written a superb history of sterilization in Minnesota that has far-reaching implications for the study of both the history of eugenics in the United States and the history of the practice of sterilization throughout the country. Using a mix of archival sources, such as state institution records, the Social Welfare History Archives, and the collections of organizations such as the Eugenic Record Office, the Women's Welfare League of Minneapolis, and the Association for Voluntary Sterilization, as well as published works, such as the memoir of Mildred Thomson, who ran the state's sterilization program for almost 35 years (1925-1959) and was instrumental in the creation of the Minnesota Association for Retarded Children (MARC) in 1950, *Fixing the Poor* tells the deeply researched and carefully argued story of sterilization in a state that has not been known for its history of eugenics.

Because Minnesota's circuitous path through eugenic sterilization (1925-mid-1970s) was not as clearly lit as the more direct experiences of some states, such as California, North Carolina, or Virginia, it provides a unique and valuable opportunity to show how eugenics and sterilization were enmeshed as much with state welfare systems as they were with prevailing racialized, gendered, and class-based assumptions about proper or "fit" citizenship. As Ladd-Taylor argues throughout

the book, “Although historians [of eugenics] have focused on the surgeon’s knife, sterilization was just one aspect of a protracted and often callous crusade to ‘fix’ the poor” (117).

Building on a U.S. eugenics historiography that has been growing over the past 30 years, Ladd-Taylor uses her own meticulous research and thoughtful approach to write a long history of eugenic sterilization that stretches from the child welfare and “mother saving” interventions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, through mid-twentieth-century efforts to “normalize” “mentally retarded” citizens and selectively sterilize women of color, to the early twenty-first-century sterilization of women prisoners. Her study shows that “in Minnesota [and in certain other locations throughout the country], worries about bad heredity and preventing the birth of ‘socially inadequate offspring’ were secondary to the more prosaic—and, sadly, more enduring—concerns about sex, illegitimacy, ‘bad’ parenting, overcrowded public institutions, and the cost of relief” (144).

Fixing the Poor is divided into six chapters, with an introduction and conclusion. In the introduction, Ladd-Taylor situates the story of eugenic sterilization in Minnesota within an expanded understanding of the history of eugenics made possible by detailed studies of this troubling and often deceptively mundane past both in the United States and abroad. The reach of eugenics extended well beyond the worst abuses of expert power and state control into the fabric of public welfare systems like the one created in Minnesota. Although many historians have focused on the abuses of eugenics, Ladd-Taylor intentionally focuses on what she calls a “best-case scenario” in Minnesota—the state sterilized 2,350 people out of a total of more than 63,000 Americans sterilized, and surgical sterilization remained “voluntary” in Minnesota—precisely because it reveals the ways the logics of eugenics insinuated themselves into twentieth-century social welfare policies and practices, often in damaging and discriminatory ways. Ladd-Taylor sees eugenics as something more ordinary and perhaps more powerful than a desire to create a “master race.” She is one of a handful of historians whose reading of the history of eugenics is importantly and rightly influenced by the history of disability and of disabled people in the United States as well as the disability rights movement. As Ladd-Taylor contends, “Eugenic sterilization was never only about ‘race betterment’ or social engineering; from the beginning, state sterilization policies [like the one in Minnesota] were rooted in a chronically underfunded and locally variable public welfare system that pathologized persistent poverty and disparaged welfare-dependent individuals as mentally incompetent and undeserving” (225–26).

Readers of the *Annals of Iowa* may take a special interest in the care with which Ladd-Taylor explains the importance of migration and settlement to (and within) Minnesota, as well as the state's colorful social and political history in telling the story of eugenic sterilization in one upper midwestern state. I highly recommend this book for use in undergraduate courses in Minnesota history and in the history of eugenics and for graduate students and experts in the field as well as general readers interested in learning more about this deeply nuanced and troubling past.

[For a fascinating account of eugenics and sterilization efforts in Iowa, see Amy Vogel, "Regulating Degeneracy: Eugenic Sterilization in Iowa, 1911-1977," *Annals of Iowa* 54 (1995), 119-43. — Ed.]

Mexicans in Wisconsin, by Sergio M. González. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2017. People of Wisconsin Series. 144 pp. Illustrations, index. \$12.95 paperback.

Reviewer Janet Weaver is assistant curator at the Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries. She is the author of "From Barrio to '¡Boicoteo!': The Emergence of Mexican American Activism in Davenport" (*Annals of Iowa*, 2009).

Sergio González's *Mexicans in Wisconsin* is the latest in a series of 11 "reader-friendly" books published by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press designed to provide concise introductions to the history of Wisconsin's diverse immigrants. Joining earlier publications about German, Irish, Swedish, Jewish, and other European immigrants to Wisconsin, González shines a much-needed spotlight on the migration paths of Mexicans to Wisconsin from the late nineteenth century to the present. Beginning with musician Raphael Baez, who settled in Milwaukee in 1896, González concludes with the explosive growth of Wisconsin's Latino population between 1990 and 2010 and the renewal of "anti-immigrant fervor, this time spurred on by unfounded statements made by the Republican candidate Donald Trump" (122). Employing a chronological approach, he integrates Mexicans into the fabric of Wisconsin's social, economic, and labor history, situating their life stories within the history of European immigration, war, and civil rights.

Well written, engaging, and astute, *Mexicans in Wisconsin* provides insight into the factors that fueled Mexican migration to Wisconsin throughout the twentieth century and propelled activism, from the social and economic upheaval of the Mexican Revolution to the termination of the bracero program in 1964. González contextualizes compelling individual and family stories with big-picture analysis that