Call for Papers

Human Breeding for the Improvement of the Nations: Proto-Eugenic Thinking before Galton.

Workshop to be held at the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC
September 25-27, 2008

Conveners:
Maren Lorenz (German Historical Institute, Washington, DC),
Christoph Irmscher (Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana)

Proposals are invited for an international multi-disciplinary workshop on the (comparative) history of the development of proto-eugenic thinking and planning in Europe with focus on - but not restricted to - the German speaking countries and similar developments in the United States.

Human breeding utopias have become socially acceptable again. While historians of science have vigorously responded to the new challenges posed by prenatal diagnostics, the human genome project, and cloning, scholars in other disciplines, especially in the German-speaking countries, have been more restrained or have limited themselves to discussing German racial politics and the practice of euthanasia under National Socialism. But increased academic attention to the subject has significantly changed the traditional geographical scope of the study of eugenics and has also led to an extension of the conventional temporal framework, pushing the emergence of eugenic thinking way past back the year 1880. More recent research has focused on the role of the egalitarian, social, and/or utopian movements such as the women’s and the labor movement, and Christian churches and charities in Germany, Austria, and the United States in the implementation and promotion of eugenic thinking. After a period of waning
academic interest in the history of ideas, investigations of the intersections between formulations of moral and legal normativity and scientific standardization are now enjoying renewed attention among researchers. *Pace* the common notion of eugenics as a phenomenon of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, concepts of "human breeding" or “perfection of the human race” were being developed throughout Western Europe since the middle of the 18th century and eventually made their way to the United States. The fact that these concepts led to relatively early forms of eugenic legislation and practices at least in France and Germany (e.g., marriage prohibitions) seems not to have been of much interest outside the history of sciences.

We are looking for participants willing to share their ongoing research on a range of interconnected topics including - but not limited to - the following:

1. The role of case studies and tracts dealing with "medical police" and "medical hygiene" focusing on the “improvement of the nation”
2. Proto-eugenics and the natural sciences
3. Religion and proto-eugenics
4. Visualizing Proto-eugenics: the role of (scientific) illustration
5. The hereditary transmission of disabilities and diseases and the origins of so-called "freaks of nature" and "degenerate" peoples and races in scientific and other journals or newspapers of the 19th century.
6. Early forms of eugenic legislation and practices (e.g. marriage prohibitions)
8. National trends (in particular in Germany and the United States) as reflected in the definition of the human as well as ideas about breeding.
9. The extent to which the medical influence of proto-eugenic thinking is reflected in utilitarian models of state and citizen formation (mobility, immigration, and race).
10. The extent to which the medical influence of proto-eugenic thinking is reflected in literature and arts.
11. The transfer of scientific and cultural discourses across national and linguistic borders.
The conference will be held in English and focus on the discussion of pre-circulated papers of about 7,000 to 8,000 words (due by August 15, 2008). The GHI will cover the cost for travel and accommodation of participants.

For more information, please do not hesitate to contact us via email: Maren Lorenz (lorenz@ghi-dc.org) Christoph Irmscher (cirmsche@indiana.edu).

Please send a proposal of no more than 500 words and a brief CV via email to Ms. Bärbel Thomas (b.thomas@ghi-dc.org). The deadline for submission is Jan 15, 2008.

Participants will be notified by mid-March.