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Controlling Human Heredity (Control Of Nature)



Synopsis

In the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, it was widely assumed that society ought to foster the breeding of those who possessed favourable traits and discourage the breeding of those who did not. Controlled human breeding, 'eugenics' as it

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This concise book is a fine overview of the history of eugenics. It is largely chronologically organized and focused particularly on the USA and Britain. Paul covers the scientific roots of eugenics, its complex relationships with differing political movements, its interpenetration with demographic concerns about declining middle and upper class birth rates, the fate of eugenics movements in the 40s and 50s, and the relationship of modern medical genetics to eugenics. Paul starts with the widespread and to modern ears, rather naive, hereditarianism of the late 19th century and the enormous impact of Darwinism. These ideas extended across society but with very complex results. Paul takes pains to describe the great variety of ideas and motivations associated with eugenics. The evolution of eugenic ideas is quite complex and aspects of eugenics were appropriated by both conservative and reformist political movements. Paul does a nice job of concisely narrating the complex history. The impact of changes in genetics and their complex relationship to eugenics is discussed also. There is a lot of interesting detail in this book. The idea of sexual selection, for example, drove some reform efforts. Paul makes the interesting observation that the most

deplorable eugenic practices were associated with the financial problems of the 1930s. The relationship of the eugenics movement to modern medical genetics and the considerable differences between medical genetics and many prior versions of eugenics is delineated well. As a concise overview, this book is excellent. Some minor drawbacks are the focus on American and British genetics. The German experience is covered only briefly, mainly in relationship to American-British eugenics.

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