

Emerging in America in the late 19th century, the eugenics movement gathered strength as immigrants from southern and eastern Europe flooded into the country. In 1903, with the strong backing of President Theodore Roosevelt, Congress barred the entry of anyone with a history of epilepsy or insanity. Four years later, the unwanted list was expanded to include “imbeciles,” the “feeble-minded,” and those with tuberculosis. Meanwhile, doctors took up the cause of compulsory sterilization, and Indiana became the first state to authorize its use on the “unimprovable” in state-run institutions.

In 1910, Charles Davenport, a Harvard-trained biologist, founded the Eugenics Record Office (ERO), in Cold Spring Harbor, New York, to press for eugenics legislation. The lobby received generous support from wealthy individuals such as Mary Williamson Harriman, the widow of railroad magnate E. H. Harriman, and John D. Rockefeller, and from foundations

such as the Carnegie Institute and the Rockefeller Foundation. An ERO model statute provided much of the basis for the 1924 Virginia law under which Carrie Buck was sterilized.

Before long, however, scientific and medical advances began to cast serious doubt on the theory of eugenics, says Quinn. “Hereditary feeble-mindedness was shown in many instances to be the incidental result of birth trauma, inadequate nutrition, untreated learning disabilities, infant neglect, or abuse, often enough the consequences of poverty rather than the cause.” The ERO closed its doors in 1939.

Four decades later, the director of the hospital in which Carrie Buck had been sterilized sought her out. “It was transparently clear,” Quinn writes, “that neither Buck nor her sister [who had also been sterilized] was feeble-minded or imbecilic. Further investigation showed that the baby Carrie Buck had given birth to—Justice Holmes’s third-generation imbecile—had been a child of normal intelligence.”

## *How to Get Lucky*

“The Luck Factor” by Richard Wiseman, in *Skeptical Inquirer* (May–June 2003),  
P.O. Box 703, Amherst, N.Y. 14226–9973.

Some people seem to be born lucky, while others never catch a break. Ten years ago, Wiseman, a psychologist at the University of Hertfordshire, England, decided to investigate whether that’s so. His finding: People largely make their own luck, good or bad.

He rounded up 400 volunteers, people who considered themselves either exceptionally favored by fortune or exceptionally not. Then he poked and prodded, subjecting them to interviews, personality quizzes, intelligence tests, and various experiments. “My research revealed that lucky people generate their own good fortune via four basic principles. They are skilled at creating and noticing chance opportunities, make lucky decisions by listening to their intuition, create self-fulfilling prophecies via positive expectations, and adopt a resilient attitude that transforms bad luck into good.”



Consider those “chance opportunities.” In one experiment, Wiseman asked his subjects to count the number of photos in a newspaper. Some finished the job in seconds, but others took, on average, about two minutes. Why the difference? Page two of the newspaper bore a message in large type: “Stop counting—There are 43 photographs in this newspaper.” The lucky ones noticed. The unlucky ones, generally tense and anxious sorts, were so intent on counting that they tended to miss the message.

Into every life, of course, some rain must fall. But the lucky and the unlucky generally react differently when it does. In one experiment, Wiseman asked his subjects to imagine how each of them would feel if he or she were shot in the arm by a robber while waiting in line at a bank. The unlucky bemoaned their fate: “It’s

just my bad luck to have been in the bank then." The lucky had a different reaction: "Things could have been a lot worse; I might have been shot in the head." That sort of positive attitude among the lucky, says Wiseman, "helps keep their expectations about the future high," and makes a continued lucky life more likely.

But the ill-starred need not fear that all is lost.

Wiseman explained "the four main principles of luck" to a group of volunteers who then went off for a month to put the principles into practice. On their return, he says, 80 percent reported that they "were now happier, more satisfied with their lives, and, perhaps most important of all, luckier." A fortunate outcome, indeed! (Knock on wood.)

## *The Bright Side of Prison*

"Women in Prison: A Comparative Assessment" by Heather Heitfield and Rita J. Simon, in *Gender Issues* (Winter 2002), Transaction Periodicals Consortium, Rutgers University, 35 Berrue Circle, Piscataway, N.J. 08854-8042.

Globalization has been a good thing for most women around the world, and one piece of evidence for that proposition, oddly enough, is that more of them are in jail than ever before.

It makes sense, say Heitfield and Simon, a graduate student and professor, respectively, at American University. Globalization produces economic and social progress, which allows more women to "assume the positions of authority and power that have traditionally been held by men." That also means "increased exposure to opportunities to commit workplace and property crimes such as larceny, fraud, embezzlement and forgery." Apparently, women have been seizing those opportunities.

In their survey of 26 countries, Heitfield and Simon find that Thailand tops the list of dubious honor. Women make up 18 percent of the prison population there. Next come Argentina, the Netherlands, and the United States, all at

levels slightly above eight percent. (There were just under one million women behind bars in the United States in 1998.) At the bottom of the scale are Israel, Pakistan, and Nigeria, where women constitute two percent or less of the prison population.

Feeding these and other data into a computer, the authors looked for correlations. They found that incarceration rates were pretty closely linked with levels of female education and literacy. More education generally means more women in prison. So does a higher rate of economic growth. Yet, surprisingly, the authors uncovered no meaningful connection between jail time and women's participation in the work force or other labor-related indicators. They say their findings point to a need for new prisons and for new policies for dealing with inmates who, among other things, bear and raise children.

### PRESS & MEDIA

## *The Media's Iraq War*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

"During seven weeks spent with half a dozen [U.S. Army] units," recalls David Zucchini, a reporter for *The Los Angeles Times* (May 3, 2003), "I slept in fighting holes and armored vehicles, on a rooftop, a garage floor and in lumbering troop trucks. . . . I ate with the troops. . . . I complained with them about the choking dust, the lack of water, our foul-smelling bodies, and our scaly, rotting feet."

Like the 600 other journalists "embedded" in U.S. military units during the 43-day war in

Iraq, Zucchini was dependent on his hosts for sustenance, transportation, protection—and access. This last enabled him to write vividly detailed stories about the battle for Baghdad and the performance of American soldiers in combat. But the officially sanctioned access also limited him. "I could not interview survivors of Iraqi civilians killed by U.S. soldiers. . . . I had no idea what ordinary Iraqis were experiencing."

Despite its drawbacks, the extensive embedding experiment (which had been tried on