

Senate Resolution No. 20

Introduced by Senators Alpert, Kuehl, Ortiz, and Scott

Relative to eugenics.

WHEREAS, The goal of the eugenics movement of the twentieth century was racial betterment through the elimination of hereditary disorders or genetic defects by means of sterilization, selective breeding, and social engineering; and

WHEREAS, The eugenics movement gained popularity in the United States around the turn of the century, with Indiana enacting the nation's first eugenics-based sterilization law in 1907; and

WHEREAS, In the United States Supreme Court case of *Buck v. Bell* (1927) 274 U.S. 200, Carrie Buck sued to overturn a Virginia state law that allowed state-mandated sexual sterilization of persons that the state deemed "imbeciles" or "feebleminded"; and

WHEREAS, In a landmark 8-to-1 decision concerning that case, the United States Supreme Court upheld the sterilization law; and

WHEREAS, More than 30 states enacted similar eugenics laws; and

WHEREAS, In 1909, California passed a eugenics-related law permitting the involuntary asexualization of inmates of state hospitals and prisons; and

WHEREAS, Under California's eugenics law, and subsequent amendments to it, inmates of state hospitals and institutions for the mentally retarded, certain prison inmates who were considered sexual or moral "degenerates" or were serving life sentences, and epileptics could be involuntarily sterilized so that they would not produce similarly disabled offspring; and

WHEREAS, In practice, the eugenics laws were used to target virtually any human shortcoming or illness, including alcoholism, drug addiction, pauperism, syphilis, and criminal behavior; and

WHEREAS, Regrettably, between 1909 and 1964, an estimated 20,000 Californians were sterilized, and some 65,000 men and women were sterilized nationwide; and

WHEREAS, Regrettably, eugenics laws were frequently used as a respectable, "scientific" veneer to cover activities of those who held blatantly racist views; and

WHEREAS, The "science" of eugenics has since been discredited; now, therefore, be it



Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, That it hereby expresses its profound regret over the state’s past role in the eugenics movement and the injustice done to thousands of California men and women; and be it further

Resolved, That this resolution addresses past bigotry and intolerance against the persons with disabilities and others who were viewed as “genetically unfit” by the eugenics movement; and be it further

Resolved, That all individuals must honor human rights and treat others with respect regardless of race, ethnicity, religious belief, economic status, disability, or illness; and be it further

Resolved, That the Senate urges every citizen of the state to become familiar with the history of the eugenics movement, in the hope that a more educated and tolerant populace will reject any similar abhorrent pseudoscientific movement should it arise in the future, and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.

Senate Resolution No. 20 read and adopted by the Senate June 30, 2003.

Attest: _____
Secretary of the Senate

