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Performing American Eugenics

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Scholars attribute the origins of eugenics, meaning "good genes," to Francis Galton, who outlined processes of purification through selective breeding. This movement gained popularity in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, led by biologist Charles Davenport. However, this manuscript will interpret how the movement has contributed to how American institutions view people of color, people with disabilities, and the corresponding stereotypes and expectations of *what* an American ought to be. I will examine Susan Glaspell's 1921 play*, Inheritors*, and argue how its treatment of immigrants and marginalized groups promotes the eugenics movement. Glaspell's (1921) play is particularly unique because it is typically viewed as a work of feminist drama; however, the eugenics movement seems to be antifeminist. By viewing her play under a eugenic lens, we are better able to understand the relationship between women's rights and the eugenics movement. In prioritizing those who get to reproduce, and therefore, continue in American society, Glaspell's *Inheritors* (1921) promotes the privileges granted to those who can live within the society's socio-political expectations while exterminating those who cannot. Through this manuscript, I hope to raise awareness of the eugenic undertones in media by examining the ways in which a progressive play can be used to support eugenic ideology.

Performing American Eugenics

Meaning "good genes," eugenics was coined in the late nineteenth century by Charles Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton (1883), who defined it as the program of discovering the "practicability of supplanting inefficient human stock by better strains" (Galton, 1883, 1). The broad goal was to engineer human beings into one set of physical ideals. Today, the eugenics movement is largely remembered in history from Nazi attempts at creating one "master" race. However, far less remembered is the popularity of eugenics in the United States throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Historical amnesia around American eugenics has enabled neo-eugenic policies and ideologies throughout the late twentieth century and well into the twenty-first century to become a part of everyday life, whether one is aware of it or not. This manuscript tries to break through the amnesia by recovering a specific historical moment in the

early twentieth century when eugenics was an elemental feature of popular culture, especially theater. I argue that Susan Glaspell's play *Inheritors* (1921) both affirms and challenges key tenets of eugenic thought, using the concept of inheritance to rethink what "ability" means across race, ethnicity, gender, and class.

Throughout the twentieth century, "Punnett squares," formed by Gregor Mendel, were used as a tool to explain the principle of inheritance to the American public, often at state fairs (Wolff, 2009). The use of Mendel's laws and Punnett squares to explain basic genetics was useful for explaining "hard-line eugenics" to the masses, as the Punnett squares could be easily drawn, observed, and could be used as a tool to explain Mendelian Genetics (Hasian, 1996). Eugenicists would urge their followers to consider who they might procreate with, and because of this thinking, mass tracking of genealogy and biological lineage became mainstream in American culture, leading to the Cold Spring Harbor Research lab, which housed generations of familial data (Wolff, 2009).

Furthermore, "hard-line eugenics" tended to be more conservative in its approach, advocating for private citizens to take individual action to breed "fitter" families. One of the largest proponents for American "hard-line eugenics" was biologist Charles Davenport, who ran the Eugenics Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor when eugenics most prominent (Wolff, 2009, 56). Davenport fits into this category of "hard-line eugenics" because he sought to find ways to improve the American gene pool and discover which traits were an evolutionary disadvantage to society. In doing so, Davenport and many states, institutionalized and sterilized people who were the cause of "social disruption" (Wolff, 2009, 216).

The language of "social disruption" not shows a fear of social and moral deterioration but extends itself into the fear of white racial extinction. This fear powered eugenics in the early twentieth century because, according to Hasian—a scholar who focuses on the rhetoric of eugenics—Davenport was "[writing] at a time when Anglo-Americans were worried that the 'better' classes were beginning to 'degenerate'" (Hasian, 1996, 22). To preserve the whiteness, eugenicists like Davenport tried to create a program and a narrative that would promote only the "best" families.

Conversely, there is the second definition that functions as a major branch of eugenics, which combines the biological concepts of inheritance and epigenetics, meaning that environmental conditions can affect a person's biological makeup. This school of thought originated from Lamarck's theory of evolution, which states that animals adapt to their changing environments through the span of their own lives and then bequeath those changes to their offspring (Hasian, 1996, 21). Influenced by Lamarckism, eugenicists believed in government intervention in the health of populations to achieve the goal of racial perfection and securing a "fit" national "stock" (Hasian, 1996, 26). To achieve this goal,

"positive" and "negative" eugenic policies were implemented to encourage or discourage reproduction among particular groups. Positive eugenics "aimed to encourage and increase reproduction among those without hereditary afflictions" (Levine, 2017, 7). "Negative" eugenics restricts reproduction through forced institutionalization, sterilization, and euthanasia, most frequently among disabled and racialized groups (7).

Francis Galton, who coined the term eugenics, inspired the first negative eugenic policies which prohibited the marriage of "mental defectives'" and proposed forced "sterilization" (Levine, 2017, 3). These "mental defectivities" were left vague, to give ultimate power to eugenic leaders, but often included people associated with sexual promiscuity, alcoholism, poverty, epilepsy, anxiety, or any kind of physical or cognitive disability. In leaving this definition vague, not only were the eugenicists able to argue for class, and ability-based restrictive policies, but they were able to extend these policies to serve their racist ideologies, which not only framed people of color as less "fit" than their white counterparts but helped perpetuate arguments against interracial marriage and the idea that certain races and ethnicities were "primitive" (Levine, 2017, 86). "Fitness" quickly became a way for arguments against certain ethnicities, as well as certain races. Fitness, legacy, and inheritance became fundamental to the eugenics movement, and as a result became particularly prevalent to the popularity of the eugenics movement since the values that eugenicists held of fitness, legacy, and inheritance, also generally aligned with American values of inheritance, legacy, patriotism, and ability.

The biological foundation for the eugenics movement is fundamental in understanding how eugenicists promoted their message, however these arguments were also grounded in social conventions and moral beliefs. For instance, Francis Galton argued that what each family passed down, whether that be a prestigious education, financial wellbeing, intelligence, or a disability, would ultimately determine the fate of one's family. Eugenicists were able to put pressure on ordinary people by creating outlets that would cause Americans to question what traits they would pass down to future generations, and by doing so, eugenicists were able to ask important, yet seemingly basic, ethical and moral questions. Yet these answers were often misconstrued to encourage widespread control over marginalized groups of people who were starting to get more rights because of the progressive movement, happening at the same time.

In oversimplifying Mendelian genetics, leaders of the eugenic movement convinced middle-class Americans that the chances of passing down certain traits would be so high that bearing children may not even be a worthwhile for the parents or country (Levine, 2017). For example, if a person had a stutter, eugenicists and potential parents may misunderstand these very basic and oversimplified Punnett squares to mean that there is a 75% chance of passing down a potentially opportunity stealing stutter, creating a child who would likely not be able to join the American way of life that eugenicists were trying to create. Eugenicists would have framed

this as an issue of morality, arguing that if a mother really cared about her hypothetical children or even the future of America, then the mother could not ethically have children because she would be giving them a stutter that would decrease the child and the country's overall "stock" of future workers (Levine, 2017). However, Americans seemed to overlook the fact humans are too complex for a Punnett square developed by a monk who studied peas and would not be suitable to determine their family's and nation's future. However, the propaganda fueled by eugenicists, and perhaps by playwrights like Susan Glaspell, led Americans from all spheres of society to consider the very pressing issue of what they would pass down to their possible children, and how this heritage would in turn impact not only the well-being of their families, but also their country and communities.

The eugenics movement is arguably one of the most pervasive movements of modern history because of the intense methods of propaganda used by eugenicists to sell their idea not only to the upper classes of society but also to many "ordinary" people. One of the most popular and well-known ways of marketing these ideas in the United States was at state fairs. At state fairs, eugenic representatives would give presentations and performances educating all in attendance on Mendelian genetics, eugenics, and the importance of adhering to this lifestyle (Wolff, 2009). In conjunction with "fitter family" competitions, where families could display their proud genes, and compete against other families to see whose family best conformed to eugenic ideals—there were also theatrical performances to educate the American public on eugenics and mendelian genetics. These performances served as an important way for the dissemination of information regarding this new "science."

These interactive displays of eugenics were popular amongst families in the twentieth century and have been centered at the forefront—alongside discussions of policy—of eugenic academia. However, there were far subtler ways in which eugenicists were able to propagate their message, one such way being theater. Scholars, however, have largely overlooked the impact that these more subtle techniques have allowed for the eugenics movement to root itself into popular culture and American identity. Historically, however, movies, art, music, and drama have taken on roles that have made themselves pieces of propaganda. Theater and the arts serve are unique, especially when compared to the plays performed at eugenic fairs in the early twentieth century. Theater is mimetic to these plays since in some sense, both vectors try to spread knowledge. However, theater serves to represent and uphold certain cultural ideologies, while simultaneously questioning and challenging those values.

Plays written in the early twentieth century can be viewed under this same lens and applied to eugenic values that were discussed and debated in America. Tamsen Wolff's book, *Mendel's Theatre*, studies how the eugenics movement helped propel modern American theater. In doing so, Wolff also examines how eugenics works in plays, and how these plays

have in turn promoted the eugenics movement, one such play being I will primarily Susan Glaspell's 1921 play, *Inheritors*.

Susan Glaspell, a prominent female author who wrote "over fifty short stories, nine novels, fourteen plays, and one biography" lived from 1876 until 1948, throughout the first wave of feminism, which was primarily focused on the promotion of white, wealthy, and educated women (Ozieblo, 2010). In 1916, Glaspell and her husband founded the "Provincetown Players," and devoted this group to promoting theatrical performances that did not necessarily follow the standard conventions that mainstream, commercial theater had to follow (Wolff). Many of the plays written and performed by the players were innovative, if not radical, and tended to showcase female writers (Wolff, 2009).

Written while Glaspell was still with the Provincetown Players, *Inheritors* follows the Morton family, a pioneering family who live in the Midwest of the United States, throughout four generations. In the first act, the audience is introduced to Grandma Morton, who is the first generation of Mortons to settle and live on the frontier. Her son, Silas, is inspired by his friend, Felix Fevejary, to build his own college for future generations of all children. In acts two and three, Silas is dead, and his son Ira lives. Ira has a dead wife and son, but lives on with his daughter, Madeline. However, Hindu students hold a protest on Morton College's campus while a United States senator is visiting to decide if the college will continue to get funding. The students are arrested, and Madeline, Ira's daughter, the granddaughter of the college's founder and niece of the college's president, is also arrested for supporting the Hindu students. Her uncle—in his attempt to not only please the senator, but also to keep a grasp on Madeline's autonomy—forbids Madeline from going any further in the protests, however, when she decides to continue her involvement, she is arrested again, and further pushed away from her family. In the final act, Madeline is forced to say goodbye to her family and old life, as she is taken to prison.

The acceptance of Madeline's prison sentence seems to advocate for a type of feminism in which a woman can choose her own fate. There are countless moments in which her Aunt and Uncle give Madeline a chance to step back and apologize for her actions, however, Madeline refuses these opportunities. In doing so, she is given the same opportunity, autonomy, and respect as a man, and her choice is generally accepted by those around her. Since she is given this opportunity, she can control her own fate to an extent, and she chooses the option that gives her less of an opportunity to continue her family's lineage.

At the same time, her choice seems to be removing the risk of having a fifth generation of Mortons, who would have the same defects and useless traits that previous generations were burdened with. Essentially, Madeline is halting the continuation of unadaptable Mortons, which according to eugenicists, is the ethical action to take. When Madeline is given the same autonomy as a man, she makes the correct decision in going to prison,

which supports the eugenic feminist idea that when women are given the same rights as men, better breeding will occur (Ziegler, 2008).

The eugenic undertones of the first wave of feminism seem to be apparent in Madeline's decision to go to jail, and then presumably not have children. Although the Mortons' biological legacy may end at this point, the new American values that the play transitions to—individuality and autonomy, provide a critical insight into the complex relationship between eugenics and early feminism.

Furthermore, first wave feminism was primarily focused on suffrage and getting women into universities and certain jobs (Buchanan, 2010). However, the women who were most benefitted by this reform were wealthy and white women and excluded women of color as well as poor women. Simultaneously, the American progressive movement was taking place. The progressive movement, white activists, were largely able to advocate for, and create, better working conditions, equality, environmental protections, and fewer corrupt politicians. Much of the language—such as duty, legacy, and inheritance—was used in the progressive movement, just as it was in both the feminist movement and eugenics movement. The combination and crossover of rhetoric in these three social movements, connects all three, and makes them all blurred in some sense. The blurring enabled white women to gain an advantage against other women who were not as well situated.

Furthermore, wealthy white women had more influence, especially in the years leading up to the passage and ratification of the nineteenth amendment in 1919 and 1920 since these women were able to make significant financial contributions to feminist causes (Johnson, 2015). These donations, and the white women's ability to racially identify with white men, made legislation and social change primarily focused on increasing the rights of wealthy white women. And in doing so, first wave feminism worked against women who were poor or women of color—the same women who would have been deemed as "unfit" for motherhood.

This classification of not being "fit" to be a mother is demonstrated in Glaspell's play through not only Madeline, but also through the indigenous and immigrant characters. However, what makes Madeline unique is her status as the play's protagonist, as this gives her a special ability wherein, she seems to be getting what she wants by going to jail. This moment highlights the status of white women in the early twentieth century, as although they were still being oppressed by the patriarchal society, these women were given more freedom in comparison to other marginalized groups. However, according to scholar and activist, Ruby Hamad, this is what white feminism encompasses; although there are advancements being made for women, these advancements are only really created for white women, and since these women have racial similarities to white men who dominate society, a large portion of a society stops this advancement once white women advance toward equality, leaving behind women of color (Hamad, 2020, 174). Hamad goes on to argue that this

action systemically keeps women of color behind because of the "guilt" that these white women would have to admit to for being racist (Hamad, 2020, 177). This seems to be like the eugenics movement, and to the broader implications that the *Inheritors* leaves for the reader, as the eugenics movement was made to promote a certain group or person—while of course keeping control over another—yet also promising to better society for everyone through controlling reproduction, especially of those deemed "unfit".

In examining the *Inheritors*, I will argue how its treatment of immigrants and traditionally oppressed groups promotes the eugenics movement. However, Glaspell's play is particularly unique because it is typically viewed as a work of progressive feminist drama since the play's protagonist rejects conventional gender norms and is portrayed as a heroine. Additionally, Glaspell was radically progressive for her time, as she was extremely sympathetic towards immigrants and largely opposed the restrictions on immigration that the United States imposed, which can further be seen in Glaspell's writing on Madeline (Ben-Zvi, 2005, 14).

Simultaneously, the eugenics movement seems to be against progressive thought, as it aims control reproductive autonomy and remove certain groups of people from society. Yet, by viewing her play under a eugenic lens, we are better able to understand the relationship between women's rights and the eugenics movement. By prioritizing those who get to reproduce, and therefore, continue in American society, Glaspell's *Inheritors* seems to promote the privileges granted to those who can live within and assimilate to the society's socio-political expectations while exterminating those who cannot, two key tenants to the eugenics movement. This privileging aligns with the values of the American eugenics movement with the "traditional" American values that many people now associate with American culture and identity. Although Glaspell may not have necessarily endorsed the eugenics movement, the prevalence of reproduction and inheritance in the *Inheritors*, as well as the time in which she was writing, cannot be overlooked.

The *Inheritors*

The *Inheritors* (1921) frames the eugenic goal of white racial perfection as threatened by two kinds of "others": indigenous natives and immigrants. Glaspell focuses on two primary groups of immigrants, the South Asian students at Morton College and European immigrants, who arrive after the Morton's have already claimed their land and the indigenous peoples are no longer a major concern and are never actually portrayed in the play. Scholars have theorized, however, that the reason is so Glaspell would not culturally appropriate Indians or Indigenous peoples (Ben-Zvi, 2005). Yet, under a eugenic lens, which was prevalent in the 1920's, their absence represents a possible extinction, or at least by the white gaze.

In having multiple "othered" groups, it must be understood that the groups who are "othered" are different from each other and function in

different ways. Although Indian and Native American culture are extraordinarily different from each other, Glaspell (1921) seems to combine the two groups together in a few different ways. For example, Glaspell's play does not feature any Native American or Indian characters; their stories are told by white characters (1921, 108). Although the play represents both groups slightly differently, it links these groups to un-American traits, while also showing that the Native Americans act as a source of inspiration and romantic ledged in Morton family. Both non-white peoples are wrapped together by being called the same name—Indian—which suggests their interchangeability and similarity. Simultaneously, however, Glaspell seems to use the "Indian" plot to demonstrate the hypocrisy of certain American rhetoric: which is that the Indian students and Madeline (1921, 165) are fighting for the same freedoms that the United States founders fought for in the eighteenth century.

Positioned against the Indian immigrants, the European families represent a second kind of newcomer to the United States: people from Northern and Eastern Europe. Although they are not the newest type of immigrant, the Europeans seem to pose a threat to the "American" culture that Glaspell (1921) is creating, thereby serving as an additional kind of other. By othering, or establishing a boundary, between the European immigrants and the Morton family, who at the beginning of the play are casted as a truly patriotic family, Glaspell (1921) seems to be exploring the values of United States citizens, such as hard work and perseverance by comparing them to a racially similar outsider. The shift of the Morton family comes after meeting these new immigrants, and in that, Glaspell (1921) seems to be casting these immigrants as another threat to the survival of the Morton family. Whereas both internal and external "Indians" represent a threat to the established white society, the play's second set of "others" can assimilate. Despite being the same race as the Mortons and their apparent ability to assimilate, these immigrants seem to be cast in a different light and are portrayed quite differently from the Morton family.

Glaspell's *Inheritors* (1921) seems to be pro-immigration, as Madeline supports the Indian students, and can see that these students are for the same ideals as Americans are for. However, one must consider the unconscious bias Glaspell held. Despite her own liberal political beliefs, her identity as an upper middle class, educated, white woman, would lend to a type of unconscious bias that will impact her writing. While Glaspell (1921) was writing and performing her play, formative legal and legislative decisions were being made regarding the issue of immigration. Although the major immigration legislation such as the National Origins Act, which limited the number of immigrants coming from Southern and Eastern Europe, did not get passed until the year that Glaspell's (1921) play was produced, the issue of limiting immigration had been ongoing ("Closing the Door on Immigration", 2017). According to Dorothy

Roberts (1998), southern Europeans and Eastern Europeans, including "Poles and Jews," were considered the inferior races of that time" (p.132), however, they were not the only group considered inferior in the nineteenth century. In 1882, the United States passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited immigration of Chinese workers looking to move to the United States (Wu, 2021). The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first federal act that made it illegal for a particular race to enter the country, although it is not the focus of this chapter, and has little to do with Glaspell's play, it does contribute to the sentiment of the eugenics movement, and how exclusive, racist, and nationalistic the entire eugenics movement was, and it certainly did not only impact Eastern European immigrants (Wu, 2021).

This sentiment of anti-immigration, or at least, a skepticism against immigrants, can be seen in the first act of the play, where the reader is introduced to Felix Fejevary, an "exiled Hungarian nobleman." (Glaspell, 1921, 105). However, to the play's viewer—as opposed to those who read the play—Fejevary is introduced as not only a "count at home" (Glaspell, 1921, p. 109) but also as a "refugee because he fought for freedom in his own country" (p. 109). This discrepancy between the character list of the play, which only those reading or working in the play would see, and the visual character that the viewer would see marks a difference between how Glaspell (1921) handles these characters. From only looking at the character list, it is unclear who Fevejary really is, and an "exiled nobleman" (Glaspell, 1921, 105) many evoke suspicion from nationalistic viewers. Yet, at the same time, Fevejary is praised for his heroics in the Civil War and for being a freedom fighter. The suspicion, however, dates to the foundation of the United States, as during the Revolutionary War there was a distrust and fear of having ruling classes, as it was a similar structure that Americans had fought to get away from. This suspicion can also be seen by how Grandmother talks about "Old Mrs. Fevejary," who "had an awful ladylike way of feeding the chickens" (Glaspell, 1921, p. 109). The judgement, speculating about Old Mrs. Fevejary's life, complicates the relationship between the Mortons and these "new" immigrants. Grandmother resents Old Mrs. Fevejary, but she also has a kind of friendship with her. Yet, Glaspell (1921) dismantles any suspicion over the course of the play, with Fevejary portrayed as much closer to the ideal American, thereby showing the success of assimilation. As the Fevejary family grows, they become more and more "American" and more involved in the typical society, while at the same time, the Morton family seems to deteriorate.

When Felix Fevejary II enters, Silas is thrilled and wants to hear about Felix's time at Harvard University. Silas says: "Ah, you know it's wonderful—know it so well you don't have to say it. It's something you've got. But to me it's wonderful the way the stars are wonderful—this place where all the world has learned is to be drawn from me—like a spring" (Glaspell, 1921, p. 121). In this moment, Silas seems jealous of

the opportunity that Felix must be formally educated at such a prestigious institution, and that is part of the reason that he builds Morton College. But this scene also highlights a gap between the Mortons and the Fevejarys. Throughout the exchange, there is a distinct shift in the dialogue between the two characters. In the example above, Silas speaks with a lack of grammatical clarity and precision that figures him as an uneducated pioneer farmer. Comparatively, Felix says: "You almost say what Matthew Arnold says—a distinguished new English writer who speaks of: 'The best that has been thought and said in this world'" (Glaspell, 1921, p. 121). Felix, although a generation younger than Silas, speaks in a more formal manner, and refers to a scholar that Silas would certainly not know about. In creating this educational distance between the Mortons and the Fevejary's, Glaspell (1921) is furthering the importance of class in defining one's patriotism.

In some ways, the European immigrants seem to be a bigger threat than the Indians and Native Americans, at least to the later generations of Mortons. Glaspell's (1921) othering of the Eastern Europeans speaks to how the eugenics movement sought to expose an invisible and hidden gene that could be passed down from generation to generation. Wolff (2009) writes that: "The one constant in the eugenic approach is a reliance on the human body for evidence. The critical underlying question for eugenicists is always, what can we see of the past on the human body in the present and, conversely what can the body hide?" (p. 59).

As an extension of eugenic thought, the *Inheritors* (1921) reveals a profound fear and distrust of identity, of unmasking a hidden and unfriendly character. This hidden presence is what makes the European immigrants so threatening in Glaspell's (1921) play. The European immigrants that the reader is primarily involved with is the Fevejary family, and then the Swedish family, known as the Johnson's. Although these characters are in the play, and represent their own narratives, there are still moments in which they are written to be quite different from the main characters. As established, the wealth that the Fevejary family has is significantly more than the Mortons have ever experienced, and the wealthy nobleman seems to be out of the typical hard-working United States narrative, which is central to the *Inheritors* (1921). Additionally, Ira resents the Johnsons for the death of his wife and seems to blame the Johnsons for a sickness that killed his wife (Glaspell, 1921, p.188). Then, Ira blames World War I on killing his son Fred, a war that he believes America should not have gotten into, Ira says that his son, who died in France, had to "make the world safe for democracy" (Glaspell, 1921, p. 188). This further creates an othering effect toward Europeans, and makes it seem as though citizens of the United States, like Fred, have a moral duty to help the world or the people who may not be fit enough to do so. In doing so, Glaspell (1921) continues the hierarchy of not only citizen versus immigrant, but also creates a narrative between hero and the

helpless victim, a type of American saviorism, rather than white saviorism.

The eugenic attempt to combine both race and ethnicity, further divides these binaries between United States citizens and European immigrants. Yet at the same time, the Morton family accepts, works with, and learns with the Fejevary family. However, this seems to rather show the example of a successful case of assimilation, and perhaps shifts Glaspell's (1921) immigration from an issue of ethnicity to an issue of class and wealth, a similar move often made by eugenicists. This shift seems to not only highlights Glaspell's (1921) experimentation, but also consciously prioritizes issues like class, wealth, and education as adaptations to make one more successful, rather than being a certain ethnicity and race; however, from her writing of the Indian students and the Native Americans, that is not necessarily the case. In this sense, her explanation of the Fejevary family's relationship with the Mortons seems to indicate that white immigrants can assimilate into the homogenized culture.

However, Glaspell's immigrants are not necessarily bad or evil. In fact, they often contribute to the United States' vision of loyalty, hard work, and national pride. The Fejevary family is a case in point. However, this not only contributes to the concept that immigrants can only be assimilated if they are white, but also contributes to the sense of anxiety against new Americans, or "foreigners". When the Fejevary immigrate to the United States, Felix I fights in the Civil War and loses his arm, while Silas, who also goes to war, does not lose an arm. Felix seems to sacrifice more for this new country than Silas did, which promotes and highlights the importance of an immigrant's ability to assimilate to and "become" American. Although Felix and the Fejevary family come from extraordinary wealth, the family still seems to conform or assimilate to the working-class lifestyle that is privileged by the Morton family. Yet, at the same time, the eugenics movement privileged education and an upper middle-class life. This discrepancy may seem problematic for Glaspell (1921), however, the adoption of education by the Mortons shows their upward ascent into a different sort of life. In this adoption of what the Fevejary family values, the Mortons accept this new family into their own sense of values. Furthermore, since Felix II studies at Harvard, and the Fevejary wealth allows for their family to better assimilate into the United States, and become more Westernized, which is ultimately what the United States was attempting to achieve throughout the eugenics movement. Their wealth, education, and desire to assimilate into this "patriotic" culture and ideal, allows for their success in the *Inheritors* (1921).

However, despite the good that the immigrants have done for and with the Morton family, Ira's fears and anxieties continue the othering of immigrants. While the play does not directly address this fear, it is contained within Ira; indicating a shift in feeling toward immigrants in the

final generation of Mortons, Ira holds rage against Emil Johnson, an "Americanized Swede." (Glaspell, 1921,106). Instead of the resentment of Eastern European immigrants, Ira has this deep hatred toward the Johnson's, who are Northern European, and are generally more associated with Western Europe. In switching who this resentment is toward, Glaspell's (1921) play seems to be shifting its political agenda from the one that is represented in mainstream political conversations—ethnicity, to a political agenda that is more focused on class, and if a family can survive on their own merit.

For instance, Ira's wife and daughter, both named Madeline, are taken from him by an "ignorant Swede" (Glaspell, 1921, 186), and since this Swedish family cannot survive on their own, they become dependent on those who have already adjusted and assimilated to mainstream United States culture. Furthermore, Ira, while telling Madeline about her family's downfall, complains about the changing nature, that he is not able to keep anything for himself, not his family or corn. This moment is particularly important in the connection between white ethnic immigration and eugenics, Ira says:

> I want it to stay in my field. It goes away. The prevailin' wind takes it on to the Johnsons—them Swedes that took my Madeline! I hear it! Oh, nights when I can't help myself—and in the sunshine I can see it—pollen—soft golden dust to make new life—goin' on to *them*,—and them too ignorant to know what's makin' their corn better! I want my field to myself. (Glaspell, 1921, 189)

Here, Ira clearly expresses his anger toward the Swedish immigrants. However, on a broader level, Ira struggles with a sense of lack of control over his seed, representative of both his corn plants and his own reproduction. Since he is no longer able to keep what he and his ancestors worked for, he becomes cold, and leaves Madeline before she can leave him. Ira embodies the national value placed on individualism over community. Immigration therefore challenges conventional "American" identity. Ira projects his fear of loss onto the Swedish immigrants who for him pose a danger to his way of life.

This lack of control over identity and property is dangerous, and kills the Morton family line, as it only leaves Ira who presumably will not breed anymore. However, this frees his daughter Madeline, who says: "Nothing is to itself. If America thinks so—America is like father. I don't feel alone anymore. The wind has come through—wind rich from lives now gone" (Glaspell, 1921, 190). Her realization shows a cultural difference from her "native" father and her Hungarian mother, who gave her life to save the Johnson family. Her freedom from the United States expectation of self and individuality marks Madeline as a character who rebels against the nation's eugenic ideology. But this liberation comes at a cost: she is exiled from her family.

The European immigrants survive on a ledge that both "others" them, and also allows for them to assimilate into the mainstream white culture. Although these immigrants are not exactly Anglo-American or Western

European, they are still able to blend into the American culture that Glaspell's (1921) play is creating because they have a whiteness that can be reproduced and reconstructed with the values that the play has set forth. However, there still seemed to be this anxiety that this would not be truly transferrable, and eugenicists worried that the national stock would deteriorate. There is a concentrated fear that these "invisible" (Wolff, 2009, 59) beings would be able to dramatically change the dominant culture in the United States, and that suddenly, the citizens would no longer be the hard working, proud, Western European descendants they once were. This is played out in the *Inheritors* (1921), as demonstrated by Ira's own concerns for the status of his country, and without being able to control the reproductive decisions of others, he seems to believe his children Madeline and Fred both inherited a "defective" trait from their mother:

> [I] told him about his mother—to show what come of running to other folks. And he said—standing right there—*(pointing)* eyes all bright, he said, 'Golly, I think that's great!' And then *he*—walked out of this house. (Glaspell, 1921, 189)

In using their mother as an example, Ira hopes to convince his son and daughter to behave. However, they take inspiration from their mother's actions instead. Madeline presumably has the same inherited "undesirable" and reckless traits from her immigrant mother. Glaspell's (1921) selfless and brave women ultimately fail and lose their lives to causes they deem worthy—ending in deportation and resentment. The seemingly biological drive of the Morton-Fevejarys prove they are "unfit" to survive and reproduce in the United States.

In writing the European immigrants as a second category of "other," Glaspell (1921) assigns what makes a true patriotic citizen, and what those values are according to "good" citizens of the United States. Yet the play molds and adapts to which group, or set of immigrants, get to be considered part of the United States, which can be seen in not only the reproduction of certain groups, but also the disappearance of racial "others" such as the Indian students and the Native Americans. The play further lays out a racial and ethnic hierarchy of adaptability to changing values, and therefore which groups can survive in the nation. Glaspell (1921) flips nativism on its head with Ira, showing that the principles that once mattered—such as community, freedom, and honesty—have not been on the forefront of citizens minds since the first and second generations of Mortons. This may appear anti-eugenic, yet a large component of Social Darwinism focuses on a person's or group's ability to live in their environment. People incapable of adaptation then go extinct. Madeline, her mother, and Fred will not survive or reproduce, and this is because of the infectious and damaging nature of the "bad" immigrants unable to adjust to American individualism.

Although the Mortons' biological legacy is unable to live on, their physical legacy continues through Morton College. In this sense, the

Morton family takes the biological laws of inheritance and genetics, and inadvertently transfers their inheritance and legacy to an institution, rather than a person. This transition, however, may seem disconnected with eugenics, as eugenics is focused on the human body, but for the Mortons, it seems as though their own spirits are tied to the college, as Madeline's only real knowledge of her Grandfather is from speeches that others have given to praise his creation and innovative drive (Glaspell, 1921, 162). Furthermore, Felix II prides Morton college of being a place of creation and innovation, and often uses language that ties Silas's personality to the college (Glaspell, 1921, 130).

The connection of Silas's spirit to Morton College not only marks the transfer of how one's legacy can survive after death, but also notes how American eugenics seems to be different from the eugenics practiced in Europe. The Europeans took most of their inspiration from Galton and Stoddard, whereas the American eugenics movement was spearheaded by Davenport, who made eugenics particularly important to all aspects of life, rather than just in the political sphere. This widespread application of eugenics to all aspects of life further demonstrates how one's legacy can be remembered and revered through a college, rather than just from a family. In doing so, there is a connection between innovation and success, and the legacy that one leaves behind. In a certain sense, Glaspell (1921) is giving her audience an opportunity to shift from a eugenic ideology that is only focused on reproduction, to an ideology that is also focused on creating profitable legacies which will go on to benefit society.

Glaspell (1921) further shows the audience that there are multiple ways for one to be beneficial and moral to society: for Silas, it was founding a college, and for Madeline it is going to jail. Both characters feel this excitement and freedom when it is their moment to do what will "benefit" society, and this excitement translates into it seeming as though these characters were destined to perform these actions, and that in the performance of these actions, both Silas and Madeline are doing what they are "best fit" to do.

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