

“The Hour of Eugenics” in Veracruz, Mexico: Radical Politics, Public Health, and Latin America’s Only Sterilization Law

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In December 1932 the state of Veracruz, located in eastern central Mexico, became the only place in all of Latin America to pass a eugenic sterilization law. Considered a “protective measure in the interest not only of the species and the race, but also beneficial for the home” and “salubrious for the family,” Veracruz’s sterilization statute was a critical component of the multipronged reform championed by the Socialist governor Adalberto Tejeda.¹ In her pathbreaking book *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America*, published nearly two decades ago, Nancy Leys Stepan was one of the first scholars to introduce Veracruz’s eugenic legislation to specialists in Latin America and the history of science and medicine. Even as the literature on eugenics and the interrelated fields of maternal and infant hygiene, mental health, and public health in Latin America has grown dramatically since the publication of *The Hour of Eugenics*, Veracruz’s experience has received surprisingly little scholarly attention.

Veracruz’s experiment was a radical expression of an important socio-scientific movement that emerged in earnest in the 1920s, peaked in the 1930s and 1940s, and began to abate in the 1950s. As Stepan and subsequent historians have shown, in Mexico, as in other Latin American countries, eugenics influenced maternal and infant health, ideologies of race and race mixing, and moral and health campaigns against tuberculosis, alcoholism, venereal diseases, and prostitution. Veracruz became an epicenter for eugenics during Tejeda’s second administration (1928–32). Studying Veracruz’s eugenic experiment highlights the ongoing relevance of Stepan’s analytical tools to understanding eugenics in regions beyond Europe and the United States. In particular, her concept of

1. “Ley de eugenesia e higiene mental de Veracruz,” reprinted in *Eugenesia* 23 (1 Mar. 1933): 3–6. Official version published as “Reglamento de la Sección de Eugenesia e Higiene Mental,” *Gaceta Oficial* 28, no. 144 (1 Dec. 1932): 2–4. All translations from Spanish to English are mine.

“preventive eugenics,” which seeks to transcend the binary strictures of “negative” and “positive” eugenics, offers considerable explanatory power in the case of Veracruz.

This essay, written in tribute to Stepan and in recognition of her extensive contributions to the history of medicine and science, seeks to situate Veracruz eugenics in the overlapping context of Mexican, Latin American, and international eugenics. The first section charts how Stepan’s scholarship has challenged and transformed the eugenics literature, largely by Latinizing a phenomenon associated for far too long only with Western Europe and the United States. Building on this background, the next section examines the complex set of factors that placed eugenics at the core of Veracruz politics, and discusses the significance of the sterilization law, which encapsulated Tejeda’s vision of societal perfectibility but in practice resulted in few if any reproductive surgeries.

Latinizing Eugenics

Over the past several decades, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and scholars from many disciplines have studied the breadth and depth of eugenic ideas and policies in countries as varied as Iran, Japan, Switzerland, and South Africa.² Before the 1990s, it was difficult to find any publications on eugenics that did not focus exclusively on the United States, Germany, or England. *The Hour of Eugenics* was instrumental in cracking open this bias, as Stepan convincingly described and analyzed how eugenics was intimately intertwined with nationalism, the state, gender, and race in regions of the world often marginalized by historians of science and medicine.

One of Stepan’s resounding contributions was to show decisively how Latin American countries produced and not only replicated or reengineered new biopolitical knowledge. Stepan debunked the then-prevalent characterization of technology transfers between North and South as unidirectional and proposed a new framework for thinking about nationalism, transnationalism, and science in the modern era. Stepan’s unwillingness to accept conventional periodizations and conceptualizations inspired scholars to analyze eugenics as a flexible movement that could not be relegated to the temporal container of the interwar period, and that intersected with gender and race in complicated and sometimes unexpected ways.

2. For a comprehensive overview and compendium of this scholarship see Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010).

In *The Hour of Eugenics* Stepan revealed a novel eugenics that emerged in Latin countries, which in addition to Latin America, included France, Italy, Spain, and Romania. This was a eugenics in which Catholicism played an important role, neo-Lamarckian theories of the inheritance of acquired traits overshadowed Mendelian tenets of strict heredity, and the scientific networks that Latin American scientists established with French and Italian scientists and social scientists were paramount. Stepan's comparative approach, examining Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil as a triad with significant similarities and differences, provided an enviable model for tracking eugenics across the geography of the Americas. Furthermore, she presented the Pan-American and Pan-Latin incarnations of eugenics as overlapping transnational scientific networks and institutions that stretched from Buenos Aires to Havana and from Mexico City to Rome, thus deepening our understanding of the global variety of eugenics.

Stepan also shook up the entrenched periodization of eugenics by showing that hereditarian ideas and programs did not end conclusively when the world began to gain awareness of the horrific consequences of Nazi Germany's racial hygiene program. With attention to the distinct agenda and portfolios of eugenics in Latin and Latin American countries, she illuminated how eugenics movements remained active into the 1960s.³ In addition, Stepan pointed out the vital role of religion, offering the keen observation that Catholicism generally had more affinity with neo-Lamarckian approaches to eugenics, whereas Protestantism resonated more readily with Mendelian theories and stricter regimens of reproductive regulation and biological control. In short, Stepan helped to pave the way for a more transnationally attuned eugenics literature that takes seriously the co-constitutive variables of race, gender, sexuality, religion, and public health.

One of Stepan's crucial moves was to defiantly disrupt the binary of "negative" and "positive" eugenics in which the negative pole was associated with sterilization, euthanasia, and the heavy-handed control of reproduction and immigration, and the positive pole with scientific motherhood, better baby care, and incentives for increased middle-class reproduction. As an alternative that allowed for overlap and nuance between these two extremes, Stepan proposed matrimonial eugenics and preventive eugenics. Preventive eugenics, in her words, aimed to improve "the nation by cleansing from the milieu those factors considered to be damaging to people's hereditary health." It was con-

3. The Mexican Eugenics Society (Sociedad Mexicana de Eugenesia) published the last issue of its monthly journal, *Eugenesia*, in 1954, and the society's leader, Alfredo Saavedra, published on eugenic themes into the 1970s.

nected theoretically to “flexible neo-Lamarckian notions of heredity (in which no sharp boundaries between nature and nurture were drawn) and practically with public-health interventionism.”⁴ The prism of preventive eugenics helped scholars grasp how Latin America’s neo-Lamarckian philosophy of heredity and human betterment could undergird policies that were just as interventionist, if not more so, than those prevailing in countries such as the United States and Germany, where Mendelian eugenics held sway. Indeed, if according to neo-Lamarckism, traits and conditions considered hereditary—including alcoholism, syphilis, and tuberculosis—were “germs” or “racial poisons” that could be acquired by children of affected parents, then intrusive public health campaigns were imperative in order to halt degeneration.

Since the publication of *The Hour of Eugenics* scholars have continued to document the varying models of preventive eugenics that took hold in Latin American countries, whether in Brazil, against the backdrop of the late emancipation of slaves and the optimistic if naïve multiracialist movement of the 1920s and 1930s, or in Bolivia, where salient issues involved multiple indigenous communities and public investment in mental health programs and institutions.⁵ Several historians, including this author, have applied Stepan’s insights to Mexico, where a thriving eugenics movement was informed by neo-Lamarckism and also influenced by postrevolutionary currents of anticlericalism, as well as by its northern neighbor’s embrace of stricter Mendelian theories of hereditary control. These studies have traced the development of eugenics in Mexico from its early embedding in positivist doctrines of social Darwinism and evolutionism to its growing importance to programs of maternal and infant hygiene (usually called *puericultura*), and finally to its centrality to state projects devoted to popu-

4. Nancy Leys Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), 17.

5. See Jerry Dávila, *Diploma of Whiteness: Race and Social Policy in Brazil, 1917–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2005), and Ann Zulawski, *Unequal Cures: Public Health and Political Change in Bolivia, 1900–1950* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2007). Also see Armando Garcia Gonzalez and Raquel Alvarez Pelaez, *En busca de la raza perfecta: Eugenesia e higiene en Cuba (1898–1958)* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1999); Sarah R. Arvey, “‘Labyrinths of Love’: Sexual Propriety, Family, and Social Reform in the Second Cuban Republic, 1933–1958” (PhD diss., Univ. of Michigan, 2007); Marisa A. Miranda, “Prostitución y homosexualidad en Argentina: El discurso eugenico como substrato teórico de biopolíticas represivas (1930–1983),” in *Darwinismo social y eugenesia en el mundo latino*, ed. Marisa Miranda and Gustavo Vallejo (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2005), 363–74.

lation planning, demography, and ethnic classification.⁶ Because the Mexican Eugenics Society for the Betterment of the Race (Sociedad Mexicana de Eugenesia para el Mejoramiento de la Raza, founded in 1931) and its network of physicians, psychologists, lawyers, and social reformers was located preponderantly in Mexico City, most of the eugenics research has not strayed too far from the nation's capital. Yet the weave of Mexican eugenics cannot be fully understood without examining Veracruz during the postrevolutionary period.

Radical Politics and Preventive Eugenics in Veracruz

For centuries, the hot and humid region of Veracruz had suffered through waves of yellow fever epidemics and outbreaks of many other infectious and tropical diseases.⁷ By the early twentieth century, a concern with personal and public hygiene was well established in Veracruz. Against the backdrop of the Mexican Revolution (1910–17) and during the postrevolutionary decades of the 1920s and 1930s, health activism, from the grass roots to the chambers of municipal government, was easily infused by radical politics, especially in urban areas. For example, in the 1910s and 1920s tenants and prostitutes led vociferous protests against squalid housing conditions and urban blight in the port city of Veracruz, highlighting better sanitation as a key concern. In 1922 the Veracruz City Council issued a report decrying the contravention of public sanitation codes and insisting on their enforcement in order to prevent the spread "of exotic diseases in the country" and to reverse the "degeneration of the race."⁸

6. See Laura Suárez y López-Guazo, "Evolucionismo y eugenesia en México," *Boletín Mexicano de la Filosofía y Historia de la Medicina* 12, no. 1 (2009): 19–23; Suárez y López-Guazo, *Eugenesia y racism en México* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005); Alexandra Minna Stern, "From Mestizophilia to Biotypology: Racialization and Science in Mexico, 1920–1960," in *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, ed. Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Roseblatt (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003), 187–210; Stern, "Responsible Mothers and Normal Children: Eugenics, Nationalism, and Welfare in Post-revolutionary Mexico, 1920–1940," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 12, no. 4 (1999): 369–97; Patience Schell, "Nationalizing Children through Schools and Hygiene: Porfirian and Revolutionary Mexico City," *The Americas* 60, no. 4 (2004): 558–87; Beatriz Urías Horcasitas, *Historias secretas del racismo en México (1920–1950)* (Mexico City: Tusquets Editores México, 2007).

7. Andrew L. Knaut, "Yellow Fever and the Late Colonial Public Health Response in the Port of Veracruz," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 77, no. 4 (1997): 619–44.

8. Andrew Grant Wood, *Revolution in the Street: Women, Workers, and Urban Protest in Veracruz, 1870–1927* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Books, 2001), 76.

Veracruz's long-standing interest in improving hygiene and combating disease led its leaders to accept external funding and direction from the Rockefeller Foundation to launch an ultimately successful campaign against yellow fever. This effort was followed by locally endorsed campaigns to eradicate hookworm and by a marked expansion of maternal and infant hygiene programs inspired by ideas about racial improvement.⁹ Underwritten principally by the Rockefeller Foundation, healthy babies or "niños sanos" contests for children aged two months to six years began to be held throughout the state of Veracruz in the late 1920s.¹⁰ Health officers informed the populace that these contests strove to "encourage Mexican mothers to better educate and prepare their children."¹¹ As described by Dr. Gustavo A. Rovirosa of the Coordinated Sanitary Services of the State, the Veracruz mother needed instruction on how to "fill her home with happiness and prepar[e] a better, stronger, healthier race that has more probabilities of success in life."¹² As in Mexico City, these educational if patronizing programs introduced assumptions about racial and biological betterment into *veracruzano* families.¹³

Veracruz's public health infrastructure and commitment to public health and social hygiene made the state fertile ground for the acceptance of Mexico's burgeoning eugenics movement. And eugenics became even more central to the state when Tejeda returned to the governorship for a second four-year term in 1928.¹⁴ Having first served as governor during the tumultuous years of 1920–24, Tejeda reassumed office even more intent on dramatically transforming his corner of Mexico. At the forefront of his agenda were comprehensive agrarian reform, the empowerment of workers, and the nationalization of foreign-owned

9. Anne-Emanuelle Birn, *Marriage of Convenience: Rockefeller International Health and Revolutionary Mexico* (Rochester, NY: Univ. of Rochester Press, 2006); Armando Solorzano, "The Rockefeller Foundation in Revolutionary Mexico: Yellow Fever in Yucatán and Veracruz," in *Missionaries of Science: The Rockefeller Foundation and Latin America*, ed. Marcos Cueto (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994), 52–71.

10. *El Dictamen de Veracruz*, 2 Feb. 1929; 22 Sep. 1929.

11. "Atenta invitación," 19 Apr. 1935, Archivo Histórico Municipal de Jalapa (AHMJ), 1935, package 23, folder 559.

12. "Concurso del Niño Sano," 17 Apr. 1935, AHMJ, package 23, folder 559.

13. See Stern, "Responsible Mothers and Normal Children," and Schell, "Nationalizing Children through Schools and Hygiene."

14. For an excellent overview of Tejeda's political programs see Andrew Grant Wood, "Adalberto Tejeda of Veracruz: Radicalism and Reaction," in *State Governors in the Mexican Revolution, 1910–1952: Portraits in Conflict*, ed. Jürgen Buchenau and William H. Beezley (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 77–94.

industries.¹⁵ However, for Tejeda, achieving a just and equitable society also demanded far-reaching ideological and moral shifts away from superstition and depravity and toward science and secularism. Like his counterparts in many other Mexican states in the 1920s and 1930s, Tejeda was adamantly anticlerical.¹⁶ He pushed to laicize education, drastically limit the number of clergy and parishes, and deprive the church of its political and popular authority.¹⁷ According to Tejeda, the Catholic Church misguided the people and impeded the progressive evolution of society. In his worldview, religious institutions were analogous to alcoholism and prostitution; all three caused human degeneration and the enervation of robust working-class citizens who held the future of a new and more ideal society in their hands.

Addressing one of these perceived demons, in July 1929 Tejeda issued a law prohibiting the further establishment of bars and cantinas and attacked alcohol as a "cause of degeneration of the human species."¹⁸ In a similar vein, Tejeda condemned prostitution, which, in addition to enslaving and corrupting women, facilitated the spread of dreaded venereal diseases that could cause a wide range of mental and physical disorders. Since the late nineteenth century, Mexican physicians and reformers had cast prostitutes as dangerous carriers of diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea, which in accordance with neo-Lamarckian theories they believed were hereditary, not microbial, in origin. During the revolutionary and postrevolutionary period, many political leaders iterated the same fears and, like their contemporaries in other parts of Latin America, saw prostitutes as the greatest menace to public health and the biological well-being of the population.¹⁹ Somewhat ironically, the flip side of this demonization was

15. Olivia Domínguez Pérez, *Política y movimientos sociales en el tejedismo* (Jalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1986); Eitan Ginzberg, "State Agrarianism versus Democratic Agrarianism: Adalberto Tejeda's Experiment in Veracruz, 1928–1932," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30 (1998): 341–72.

16. John B. Williman, "Adalberto Tejeda and the Third Phase of the Anticlerical Conflict in Twentieth Century Mexico," *Journal of Church and State* 15 (1973): 37–54; Adrian A. Bantjes, "The Regional Dynamics of Anticlericalism and Defanaticization in Revolutionary Mexico," in *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico*, ed. Matthew Butler (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 111–48; Ben Fallaw, "Varieties of Mexican Revolutionary Anticlericalism: Radicalism, Iconoclasm, and Otherwise, 1914–1935," *The Americas* 65, no. 4 (2009): 481–509.

17. Pérez, *Política y movimientos sociales*, 85.

18. Romana Falcón and Soledad García Morales, *La semilla en el surco: Adalberto Tejeda y el radicalism en Veracruz (1883–1960)* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1986).

19. Natalia Milanesio, "Redesigning Men's Sexuality, Resignifying Male Bodies: The Argentine Law of Anti-Venereal Prophylaxis, 1936," *Gender and History* 17, no. 2 (2005):

the passage of new laws and civil codes written after the Mexican Revolution that increasingly empowered women vis-à-vis husbands and fathers.²⁰ The cost for all Mexican women, however, was more extensive scrutiny and vigilance by a patriarchal state that entered into the family unit and household in the name of progressive laws and civil reform. In general, the tension between the expanded rights of wives and daughters in the intimate sphere of the home and the expanding policing of “public” women by state medicine was part and parcel of the rise of the new biopolitical order influenced by eugenics, sexology, and puericulture.²¹

Taking his struggle against prostitution into the statehouse, in 1930 Tejeda signed Law 362, which sought to abolish the commercial sex trade and sanctioned the state to locate and treat veracruzanos diagnosed with venereal diseases.²² Based on this legislation, sanitary officials, the mayor, and the police in Jalapa, the state’s second largest city, launched a concerted effort to round up offending women. Common practice was to imprison these “public women” for 15 days or levy a fine of 20 pesos. Two years after the enactment of Law 362, one prominent Veracruz physician proudly reported that it was being vigorously implemented and represented the application of the principles of preventive medicine toward the goal of prophylaxis and the eventual elimination of prostitutes from the entire state. By 1932, this law had provided the framework for the free, if forced, treatment of over 18,000 sex workers, including over 6,000 in Jalapa and over 3,500 in Veracruz.²³ Dispatches from Veracruz’s state health department and the Section of Eugenics and Mental Hygiene reveal that the antivenereal dispensary, along with the infant hygiene clinic, was one of the most active units. For example, in September of 1932, 737 individuals consulted the anti-VD dispensaries and 102 were deemed syphilitic. Nurses visited 33

463–91; Katherine Bliss, “The Science of Redemption: Syphilis, Sexual Promiscuity, and Reformism in Revolutionary Mexico City,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 79, no. 1 (1999): 1–40; Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2006).

20. Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2005); Stephanie J. Smith, *Gender and the Mexican Revolution: Yucatán Women and the Realities of Patriarchy* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2009).

21. On the expanded rights of women, contingent on what some have called state patriarchy, see Gregory Swedberg, “Divorce and Marital Equality in Orizaba, Mexico, 1915–1940,” *Journal of Family History* 34 (2009): 116–37.

22. “Consideraciones a la ley número 362 del Estado de Veracruz,” *Eugenesia* 12 (1932): 2.

23. *Ibid.*, 3.

homes and injected 12 people with neosalvarsan.²⁴ A weekly report from this section shows that in one week of fall 1933 this section gave 37 consults and treated 11 individuals with mercury.²⁵

This heightened surveillance of prostitutes, and attendant fears about their diseased and defective bodies were justified with eugenic pleas about the need to protect the race from decay. During the early 1930s, eugenic messages circulated throughout Veracruz in bulletins, posters, and broadsheets. For example, one pamphlet issued by officials in Jalapa, "A Cry in Time," warned that the temptations of youth and the lack of willpower among men who succumbed to the lures of illicit flesh and pleasure were "bringing about the degeneration of the race and the weakening of the strength of our fatherland."²⁶

Given his anxieties about social degeneration and veneration of science, it is not surprising that Tejada gravitated toward eugenics, eventually infusing his sweeping political platform with heavy doses of evolutionism and social biology.²⁷ As Heather Fowler Salamini explains in her now classic study of revolutionary Veracruz, Tejada "asserted the primacy of science over party politics" and believed in the pragmatic efficacy of "rational social mechanics."²⁸ Tejada regularly expressed the belief that eugenics promised rationally directed human selection and represented the pinnacle of modern science applied for the common good. His personal library reveals that he was avid reader of European scientists and social scientists who accepted social Darwinism on the condition that racially mixed types be seen as superior specimens of hybrid genetic vigor, a core tenet of Mexican eugenics, which tended to venerate the "cosmic race" mestizo.²⁹ As with Left politicians in other parts of the world who celebrated

24. "Informe general de las labores desarrolladas por el Departamento de Salubridad Pública," Archivo General del Estado de Veracruz (hereafter cited as AGEV), Archivo de Gobernación y Justicia del Estado de Veracruz (hereafter cited as AGJEV), box 3329, folder 926.

25. "Relacion de los trabajos llevados a cabo por el que subscribe, en la Sección de Eugenesia e Higiene," 4 Sep. 1933, AGEV, ACJEV, box 3472, folder 1069.

26. "Un grito a tiempo," August 1933, AHMJ, package 6, folder 204.

27. See Heather Fowler Salamini, *Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz, 1920–38* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1978) and Wood, *Revolution in the Street*.

28. Fowler Salamini, *Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz*, 79.

29. Although half of his book collection was discarded, Tejada's personal archive reveals that he read multilingually and voraciously. Books relevant to eugenics that I found in his library included H. Maudsley, *El crimen y la locura* (Valencia: F. Sempere y Compañía, 1909); Juan Finot, *El prejuicio de la razas* (Valencia: F. Sempere y Compañía, n.d.); as well as various tomes by Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin. This archive is housed at the library of the Instituto de Antropología e Historia, Jalapa, Veracruz.

working-class heroism and had great faith in the potential of the state to remake society, Tejeda melded eugenics smoothly with Marxian theories of solidarity and scientific materialism.³⁰ Tejeda regularly included eugenics and breeding when discussing his glorious vision of Veracruz's future, one in which the state would emulate floriculture by crossing "the best species . . . to produce more aromatic flowers with stronger and more pleasing variants."³¹ His 1932 Civil Code reflected this perspective, particularly in passages on women and family in Veracruz society, which pivoted around the "racial betterment and eugenic selection of the species, within reasonable sociological criteria, and always for the good of the veracruzano proletariat."³²

In the final year of his administration Tejeda signed two important pieces of eugenic legislation. Law 121, passed in July of that year, founded the Section of Eugenics and Mental Hygiene, which was housed in the public health department and charged with studying "the physical diseases and defects of the human organism, susceptible of being transmitted by heredity from parents to children."³³ This law also called for clinical examinations and statistical surveys of criminals, alcoholics, prostitutes, and other "vicious individuals" seen as threatening to the social order. Rather than requiring on-the-ground action on the part of the state and its health authorities, this law trumpeted a clarion call for eugenic research in Veracruz and the close monitoring of the population, especially degenerates and defectives, who ostensibly threatened order and progress.

If Law 121 offered the blueprint for a eugenics program, an extensive addendum passed six months later granted the state much greater authority to pursue the public health interventionism characteristic of preventive eugenics. Its preamble stated that it was time for Veracruz to pursue the goals of Mexico's revolutionary government by ensuring the "conservation and betterment of the physical and mental state of citizens."³⁴ Toward this end, the legislation called

30. See "Informe que Rinde el C. Ing. Adalberto Tejeda, Gobernador Constitucional del Estado, ante la H. Trigesimacuarta Legislatura," in *Estado de Veracruz: Informes de sus gobernadores, 1826-1986*, vol. 11 (Jalapa: Gobierno del Estado, 1986), esp. 6071. Diane Paul was one of the first historians of science to show that eugenics appealed to reformers on all sides of the political spectrum. See her "Eugenics and the Left," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45, no. 4 (1984): 567-90.

31. "Informe que Rinde el C. Ing. Adalberto Tejeda," 6159.

32. *El Nuevo Código Civil del Estado de Veracruz-Llave* (Jalapa: Talleres Gráficos del Gobierno del Estado, 1932), 21.

33. Ley 121, *Gaceta Oficial* 28, no. 82 (9 July 1932): 4.

34. "Ley de eugenesia e higiene mental de Veracruz," 3.

for the "regulation of reproduction and feasible applications of a methodical eugenics," including legal sterilization of "the insane, idiots, degenerates or those demented to such a degree that their defect is considered incurable or hereditarily transmissible in the judgment of the Section of Eugenics and Mental Hygiene."³⁵ After acquiring the medical input of three medical experts, the Section of Eugenics and Mental Hygiene was authorized to identify particular individuals for sterilization. However, this addendum on sterilization stipulated that operations were not intended to nor should result in physical mutilation or scarring.

Sparse historical records make it difficult to discern if any sterilizations were actually performed in Veracruz. The few weekly reports of the Section of Eugenics and Mental Hygiene that exist in boxes at the State Archive of Veracruz do not list "sterilization" as a separate category of clinical intervention alongside procedures such as urethral disinfections or mercury injections.³⁶ It is also unclear where such operations would have taken place, given that outpatient anti-VD clinics were almost assuredly not equipped with sterile surgical equipment or necessary facilities. Furthermore, sterilization statutes passed in US states and in European countries such as Sweden and Germany almost always specified the kinds of institutions, such as asylums or homes for the feeble-minded, where operations could be performed in accordance with the law. Even though Veracruz's sterilization law identified the same groups of "unfit" and "undesirables" that were targeted in other parts of the world, in practice it does not appear to have reached into the state's welfare institutions or involved the input or actions of institutional superintendents of any kind. Nevertheless, the two weekly reports of the Section of Eugenics and Mental Hygiene that I could locate in the archives do cryptically mention several "operations" carried out by state physicians. Although we will never know if these were actually vasectomies or salpingectomies, it is possible that they were, given that it was not unusual for physicians in other parts of the world to conceal sterilizations behind terms such as "appendectomy" or "hysterectomy."³⁷ Furthermore, as Yolando Eraso shows, although sterilization was not a legal procedure in Argentina in the 1930s, eugenically minded physicians in that country performed sterilizations

35. *Ibid.*, 5; also see "Informe que Rinde el C. Ing. Adalberto Tejeda," 6160.

36. "Informe general de las labores desarrolladas por el Departamento de Salubridad Pública," AGEV, AGJJEV, box 3329, folder 926; box 3472, folder 1069.

37. See Alexandra Minna Stern, "'We Cannot Make a Silk Purse out of a Sow's Ear': Eugenics in the Hoosier Heartland, 1900–1960," *Indiana Magazine of History* 103, no. 1 (2007): 1–32.

based on endocrinological rationales of hormonal and sexual imbalances and under the ambiguous rubric of “reproductive therapy.”³⁸

In contrast to US states such as California and North Carolina and nations such as Sweden and Germany, the passage of the law in Veracruz did not result in an active and long-lived sterilization program there. Instead, this legislation enabled Tejeda’s administration to wield the forceful hand of the state behind preventive eugenics in Veracruz, above all to control the lives and bodies of sex workers. In Veracruz, the December 1932 addendum to Law 121 added legal animus for state physicians to take prostitutes or so-called *mujeres publicas* into custody for violating Law 362.³⁹ In several instances, prostitutes held in the local jail complained to local authorities about their unfair and prolonged internment.⁴⁰

Gonzálo Vásquez Vela, Tejeda’s successor, continued the eugenics section for several years after he took office in 1933. The section’s affiliated physicians and nurses carried out a two-pronged campaign of preventive eugenics against prostitutes and venereal diseases and the expansion of infant and maternal hygiene services. In his address before the legislature in 1933 Vásquez stated that “the creation of the Section of Eugenics has begun to bear satisfactory results, through the treatments and medical attention that is being given to pregnant married women and that ensures that newborns avoid hereditary defects.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, after 1934 there was no mention of the section or eugenics in formal addresses, in part because Tejeda was busy with an ultimately unsuccessful bid for the presidency, but also because many of the core tenets of preventive eugenics had been normalized into the broader menu of public health in Veracruz.

The case of Veracruz demonstrates how preventive eugenics gained ground in one region of Mexico during the postrevolutionary period and gradually came to exhibit the most extreme manifestations of Mexican eugenics. There are several reasons that eugenics resonated so powerfully in postrevolution-

38. Yolanda Eraso, “Biotypology, Endocrinology, and Sterilization: The Practice of Eugenics in the Treatment of Argentinian Women during the 1930s,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 81 (2007): 793–822.

39. R. Mancisidor to C. Alcalde de la Cárcel Municipal, 5 Apr. 1933; Dr. R. Ojeda Falcón to Al C. Administrador de Rentas, 3 May 1933, AHMJ, package 204, folder 161.

40. See for example letter signed by 14 jailed women to municipal authorities, 24 Sep. 1933, AHMJ, package 204, folder 161.

41. “Informe que rinde ante la XXXIV H. Legislatura del Estado el C. Lic. Gonzálo Vásquez Vela, Encargado del Poder Ejecutivo, 1933,” in *Estado de Veracruz: Informes de sus gobernadores, 1826–1986*, vol. 11 (Jalapa: Gobierno del Estado, 1986), 6373.

ary Veracruz. First, Veracruz had a long history of experience with both acute and chronic diseases, many of them tropical, and had developed a public health system in response to these infectious challenges. For Veracruz politicians and physicians, eradicating germs and genes were seen virtually as synonymous and as essential to the goal of social and human betterment. Further, by the 1920s Veracruz's health programs were given a financial and operational boost by the Rockefeller Foundation, which was as committed to eradicating hookworm as encouraging infant and maternal hygiene. The Rockefeller Foundation helped to expand health education in Veracruz and create avenues for communicating the importance of better babies and disease control to the populace. The state was home to radical movements and grassroots activism that regularly underscored issues of sanitation and health and demanded public action. Finally, and quite critically, Veracruz's governor, Tejeda, promoted eugenics as a fundamental part of scientific socialism and governance. His radical and animated rhetoric was rich with metaphors and concepts drawn from biology, genetics, and public health. Furthermore, Tejeda's unyielding anticlericalism meshed well with advocacy of eugenics. Indeed, Veracruz's experience suggests that anticlericalism in that state and in Mexico more broadly played a critical and heretofore unacknowledged role in fostering eugenic ideas and policies. In this sense, the case of Veracruz both confirms and challenges Stepan's arguments about Latin eugenics. If Catholicism set the stage for neo-Lamarckism, then the anticlerical fervor that arose in Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s helped to propel this variant of eugenics to a level of interventionist intensity not seen throughout the rest of the Latin America.

When seeking to situate Veracruz's eugenics experiment in a broader context, it is important to note that it shared many characteristics with eugenics movements that developed in countries on more explicitly fascist trajectories. Tejeda's dream of eugenic social engineering was similar to the neo-organicism put forth by some Italian scientists, and his concerns about sexual hygiene were commonly voiced among leading Spanish eugenicists.⁴² Veracruz's experience illuminates the limits of eugenics in postrevolutionary Mexico and suggests that we need further research on the state and local levels in order to understand the varied and complex fabric of Latin eugenics.

42. See David G. Horn, *Social Bodies: Science, Reproduction, and Italian Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994); Thomas F. Glick, "Sexual Reform, Psychoanalysis, and the Politics of Divorce in Spain in the 1920s and 1930s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 1 (2003): 68–97.

