

# What Does Eugenics Have to Do With It? Preserving the Disability History of Lakeland Village and Washington State

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# INTRODUCTION & ACCESS NOTES

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- > **Faculty in UW Disability Studies (DS) Program**
  - I identify as non-disabled
- > **Content of this talk includes:**
  - historical ableist language, forced sterilization and other practices in history of state institutions
  - DS often uses identity-first language
- > **“Remembering nourishes relations, sometimes creating new ties, stories, and futures.”**
  - disability historian Susan Burch



# DISABILITY STUDIES

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- > **Cultural, political, social, economic, historical understandings of disability**
  - Questioning the myth of “normal”
  - Social model and disability pride
  - UW DS Program – started 25 years ago, with undergrad degrees and a graduate certificate now
- > **“Unlearning” ableism**
  - Anti-ableist history considers power, archival absences, accountability, accessibility
    - > Disability historian Susan Burch



# HISTORY OF LAKELAND VILLAGE (MEDICAL LAKE)

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- > **1905 “State Institution for Feeble-Minded”**
- > **1910 Superintendent advocated for forced sterilization**
- > **1917 “State Custodial School” - expanded into segregated residential cottages and vocational training**
- > **1937 second custodial school at Buckley (Rainier)**
- > **1947 “Lakeland Village”**
- > **1970s Disability Rights Movement – moves towards independent living**



# LAKELAND VILLAGE HISTORICAL PRESERVATION

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- > **SSB 6125, signed into law March 2024**
  - “Preserving records and artifacts regarding the historical treatment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Washington state”
  - Project team: UW, State Archives, DSHS
- > **Materials:**
  - 4000 boxes of documents including resident files and photos, as well as artifacts and administrative materials



# EUGENICS IN DISABILITY HISTORY

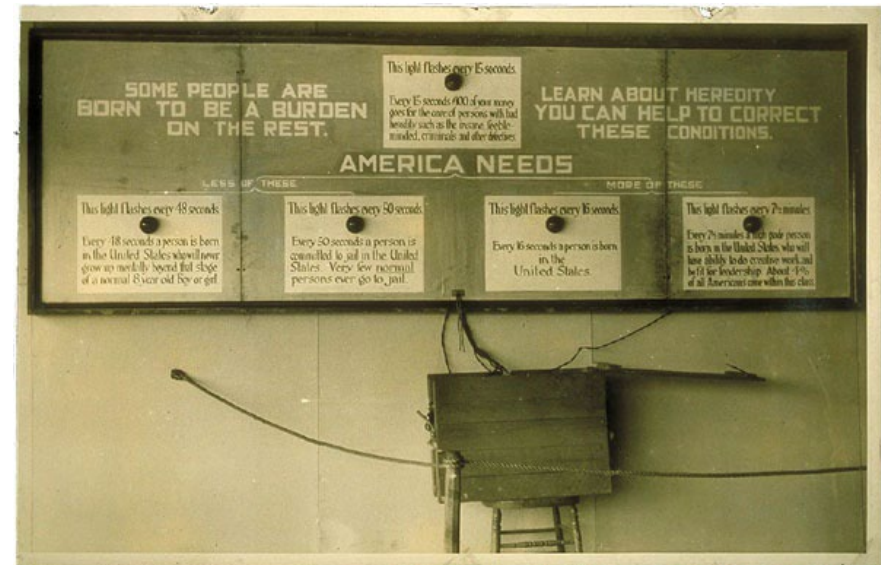
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- > **US eugenics movement (circa 1900-1970)**
  - Eugenics means “well-born”
  - Controlling human heredity & reproduction
  - Valuing and devaluing of certain attributes and people
- > **Underlying eugenic ideologies that shaped the story of Lakeland Village:**
  - Individuals with disabilities as lesser, burden & unproductive, pitiable & helpless.
  - Forced sterilizations (685 disabled people total in WA state, officially)
  - Long-term confinement and system of parole in exchange for labor.



# STERILIZATION IN WASHINGTON

- 1909 “Prevention of Procreation,” was the nation’s second sterilization law RCW 9.92.100
- 1921-1942 compulsory sterilization law: “For the betterment of the physical, mental, or psychic condition of the inmate, or to protect society from the menace of procreation by said inmate.”



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# ELLIS ISLAND MENTAL TESTING

- Eugenecists as expert “moron detectors”
- Immigrants were marked for negative characteristics & concept of disability was applied to entire racial and ethnic group.
- 1924 Immigration Restriction Act for quotas co-sponsored by WA’s Senator Albert Johnson





# HISTORY THAT MATTERS

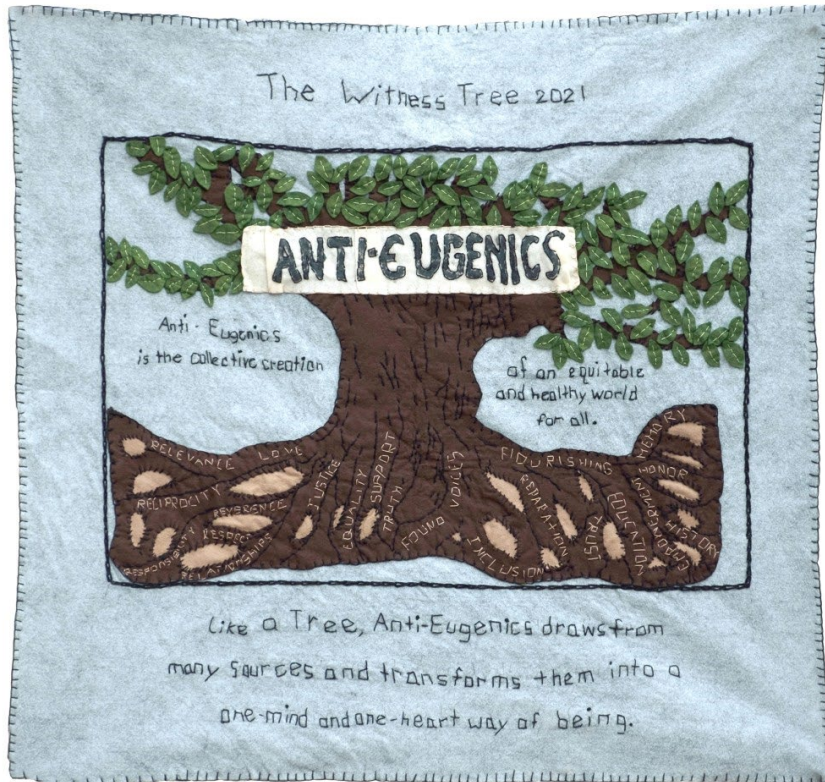
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- > **Ableism: “A system of assigning value to people’s bodies and minds based on socially constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness.... You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.”**
  - Lawyer and disability justice activist Talila (TL) Lewis
- > **At the same time, disability histories must center the lived experiences of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.**
  - “Criticizing eugenics for everything except its ableism reproduces eugenic evaluations of fitness and human value.”
    - > DS scholar Maren Linett



# NEXT STEPS: ANTI-EUGENICS

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- Apologies for eugenics
- Commemorations & renaming
- One Out of Five: Disability History and Pride K-12 curriculum

# NEXT STEPS: STATE ARCHIVES OF LAKE LAND AND DISABILITY HISTORY

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## > Appraisal, appraisal, appraisal

- What are the needs and uses for preserving these materials?
  - > Residents & family genealogy – lost relatives
  - > Research & teaching: marginalized voices/stories vs power, histories of labor, policies, eugenics, sexuality & race, local history, staff
- Funding to store & digitize a collection in State Archives

## > Access & restrictions

- Balancing privacy & archival research
  - > Developing policy recommendations in DSHS, researcher, and community dialogs – input from people with disabilities and families



# LAKELAND PROJECT IN NATIONAL CONTEXT

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- > **Massachusetts 200 years of institutional histories and lost documents studied by state commission:**
  - *Boston Globe*, June 3, 2025 “Mass. failed to properly preserve records for thousands of former residents at state-run institutions, report says”
- > **Pennhurst PN Asylum and State School**
- > **Central State Hospital VA – mass digitization**
- > **Northern State Hospital WA**
  - “Lost Patients” *Seattle Times*



# THANK YOU!

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- > Email: [jwoiak@uw.edu](mailto:jwoiak@uw.edu)
- > Disability Studies Program
  - <https://disabilitystudies.washington.edu/>
- > SBB 6125
  - <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=6125&initiative=false&Year=2023>
- > Eugenics and Disability in Washington, materials from the 2009 symposium
  - <https://disabilitystudies.washington.edu/eugenics-and-disability-history-and-legacy-washington>

# RESOURCES ON DISABILITY & EUGENICS

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- > [Substitute Senate Bill 6125](#)
- > [Maren Linett, "Eugenics Was Wrong Even When It Got It Right," \*Nursing Clio\*, Jan. 17, 2023](#)
- > [Eli Clare, "Yearning toward Carrie Buck," \*Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies\*, Vol. 8, 2014](#)
- > [Julie Sullivan, "Eugenics Records Shredded," \*The Oregonian\*, July 30, 2002](#)
- > [Dave Reynolds, "The Eugenics Apologies: How a pair of disability rights advocates scored the first state apology for eugenics, and what they have planned next," \*Ragged Edge Magazine\*, Nov/Dec 2003](#)
- > [Governor John Kitzhaber, "Proclamation of Human Rights Day, and Apology for Oregon's Forced Sterilization of Institutionalized Patients," Dec. 2, 2002](#)
- > [Alexandra Minna Stern, "Eugenics and Historical Memory in America," \*History Compass\*, Vol. 3, 2005](#)
- > [California Senate Resolution No. 20, Relative to Eugenics, June 30, 2003](#)



# RESOURCES CONTINUED

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- > ["The History of Eugenics at Puget Sound and Beyond," University of Puget Sound](#)
- > [Emma Fox, "Compensation for Forced Sterilizations in California Ends Soon. Here's How to Apply," Los Angeles Times, Aug. 4, 2023](#)
- > ["The Witness Tree," Confront Eugenics](#)
- > [The Anti-Eugenics Project](#)
- > [One Out of Five: Disability History and Pride Project](#), Washington State Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds
- > [Sterilization and Social Justice Lab](#)
- > Claudia Malacrida, "Contested Memories: Efforts of the Powerful to Silence Former Inmates' Histories of Life in an Institution for 'Mental Defectives'," *Disability & Society*, Vol. 21, 2006
- > Johanna Schoen, *Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005)

