[Recommending the Inclusion of California's History of Eugenics into the California High School Curriculum]

Resolution urging the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors to join the Youth Commission in supporting the inclusion of the history of eugenics and forced sterilizations in California into the California high school curriculum.

WHEREAS, California has a heavy history with eugenics and forced sterilization that is little known and rarely spoken of; and

WHEREAS, In 2003 the San Francisco Chronicle explored California's role in the eugenics movement in an article entitled “Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California connection” in which it was stated that eugenics “was created in the United States, and cultivated in California, decades before Hitler came to power. California eugenicists played an important, although little-known, role in the American eugenics movement's campaign for ethnic cleansing;”¹ and

WHEREAS, In 2003 the San Francisco Chronicle published another article entitled “State's little-known history of shameful science / California's role in Nazis' goal of 'purification'” in which it was stated that California “practiced a form of eugenics that helped inspire Hitler's Nazis;”² and

WHEREAS, This article goes on to state that “California was such a prominent practitioner of forced sterilization that it was held up as a model by the Eugenics Record Office, the Long Island think tank that was the movement's unofficial headquarters. The

Eugenics Record Office, in turn, had links to the Nazi party during the 1930s;”³ and
WHEREAS, The California’s Senate Resolution No. 20, passed in 2003, “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;”⁴ and
WHEREAS, Resolution No. 20 presents no specific outline for how this idealistic
“urging” is to become a reality; and
WHEREAS, In an official letter acknowledging California’s legacy of eugenics State
Attorney General Bill Lockyer stated, “At the Dawn of an era when cloning and genetic
engineering offer both great promise and great peril, we must learn from our history, teach our
children about our past and be mindful of our future;”⁵ and
WHEREAS, In contrast to California’s Senate Resolution No. 20 and Attorney General
Bill Lockyer’s admiral sentiments, California’s school curriculum does not currently focus on
educating young adults so that they can become familiar with the disturbing history and legacy
of eugenics in our state and union; and
WHEREAS, The 2012 FAIR (Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, Respectful) Education Act
established a precedent for teaching tolerance by addressing the contributions made to our
society by the LGBT community;⁶ and
WHEREAS, The FAIR education act also highlights the contributions of people of color
and people with disabilities; and
WHEREAS, FAIR provides a structure for teaching the history of eugenics in California,

³ Ibid.
which would both educate the populace and provide redress to the victims of this somber history; and

WHEREAS, It is vital for young people to learn about California’s history with the eugenics movement and forced sterilization, as sterilizations in California lasted until the 1980s with over 20,000 sterilizations in 1983 alone;⁷ and

WHEREAS, Education as a form of redress is constructive and looks to create positive change in the future, while other forms of redress such as monetary compensation and public displays of apology are often polarizing and messy or simply ineffective; and

WHEREAS, Educational reform reaches a larger and more open population than such forms of redress, and moves toward achieving the goal originally stated in the California Senate Resolution No. 20; and

WHEREAS, Citizens of California need to know the truth about the role that California played in the eugenics movement, just as the victims of sterilization deserve to have their stories heard; and

WHEREAS, The greatest service the state of California can do for the victims of compulsory sterilization at this belated hour is to enact substantive educational measures that will help prevent anything like this from occurring in the future, while respectfully acknowledging the injustices of the past; and

WHEREAS, A petition was submitted on Change.org entitled “High School Students for the Incorporation of the History of Eugenics into California Curricula” that outlines a specific plan for changing U.S. history textbook standards and the language of California educational code to include curriculum on sterilization and eugenics in public high schools;⁸ and

WHEREAS, The petition includes five basic recommendations for the structure of the curriculum:

- "Potential guiding question: 'Why was sterilization seen as a viable option for solving a diverse array of societal problems in California?'
- A concise background on the origins of eugenics and its prominent role in US History
- Identify the unique motives and circumstances underlying the two distinct eras of eugenics in California: the forced sterilization of those who were deemed ‘unfit’ by state hospitals and clinics, and the continued Eugenics through the mid-1900s into the 1970s such as the forced sterilization of Latin American women in Southern California up until the late 1970s.
- Highlight the links between the history of sterilization in the US and California and the eugenic atrocities committed by Nazi Germany by showing how American scientists supported eugenics long before and after ‘racial betterment’ in Nazi Germany. Eugenics is a part of our history in California and the US, not some distant European legacy.
- Actively address contemporary issues to which questions of eugenics are still relevant and examine the power and danger of advancements in genetic technology in modern day California;” and

WHEREAS, Under the outlined plan California public high schools would be required to choose U.S. history textbooks that include the history of eugenics in America with a spotlight on California, but adequate educational reform of the history of eugenics could also be achieved with additional instructional material that would supplement and expand on current California textbooks; and

WHEREAS, The curriculum outlined would follow the four goals of FAIR by accurately detailing California’s involvement in the Eugenics movement while remaining respectful to the
victims; and

WHEREAS, The eugenics curriculum would seek to advance the goals of the state by preparing students for the challenges of the future through a thorough and complete examination of the past; and

WHEREAS, Jessica Cussins in her Biopolitical Times article “High School Students' Campaign to Spread Awareness of California's Eugenic History” states that “The student petition is one of the most uplifting and creative ways to grapple with this painful history that I have seen;” now therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Youth Commission supports the inclusion of the history of eugenics into the California high school curriculum; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Youth Commission urges the Mayor, the BOS and SFUSD to join the Youth Commission in support of this proposal; and be further

RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Youth Commission supports a better understanding of the history of eugenics in California, so that the lessons of the past will not be forgotten in working towards a more tolerant and educated society.

Mia Shackelford, 2012-2013 Youth Commission Chair

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