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Nancy L. Gallagher

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Nancy L. Gallagher : Breeding Better Vermonters: The Eugenics Project in the Green Mountain State (Revisiting New England) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Breeding Better Vermonters: The Eugenics Project in the Green Mountain State (Revisiting New England):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Shining an important, hopefully healing light on Vermont historyBy

The Old Professor
With our Town Meeting Day coming up soon, I am sure we will see the often used images of men in red and black plaid shirts and women knitting in the audience (or vice versa). They exemplify a projected image of inherent Vermont virtue. It is time we get beyond that rather mythologized and errant view of Vermont life. There are two passages in Nancy Gallagher's excellent and courageous book that chill my soul:-- page 174 -- "It would appear that the best defense against fascist eugenics in 1946 was to expand the American version of it."-- page 176 -- (describing the early post-World War II period) "The entire world was silent on the topic of eugenics in the early 1950s. Americans were perhaps too preoccupied with defining themselves in opposition to totalitarianism and celebrating their freedom through honoring those who had fought for it. They preferred the Norman Rockwell visions of happy, wholesome, American families and peaceful communities than reflections on social justice. Tragically, there were war veterans who would not share in the sentimental scenarios depicted in Norman Rockwell's Four Freedoms and his nostalgic celebration of small-town Vermont life. While they had been found sufficiently fit to fight in 1941 for the freedom and security of 'tomorrow's children,' either they or their wives had been deemed unfit to conceive or raise them, according to the scientific and medical consensus of the interwar years." Highlighting these concluding passages is not meant to be a "spoiler" for those who are interested in this book. It is to shine a light on conclusions that make the prior 174 pages essential and important reading.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.
Horrible
By 42As an alumna of the University of Vermont, I was aghast to discover that Vermont had been on the cutting edge of the eugenics movement, thanks mainly to the work of a persuasive professor who wanted to improve the human race. He persuaded the gov't to forcibly sterilizing the mentally ill, Abenaki Indians (nearly exterminated the tribe), and French Canadians, the last for the high crimes of being poor and (gasp!) Catholic. Vermont wasn't alone in this, but was progressive. The university and the prof. behind the eugenics movement were lauded as progressive - until the 1930s, when, like other Americans, Vermonters began to see how such efforts to improve humanity would lead to unspeakable dehumanization in Germany and beyond. It was chilling to realize I'd studied in a building that still bears the name of the Vermont professor who was the famous leader of this movement. This is book a real page-turner: it is meticulously researched scholarship but written in clear, compelling prose. There's so much to learn here. It helps one understand how good intentions can produce evil outcomes, even in this lovely and generally wonderful state.
2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.
Abenaki in hiding
By Jo S. This is one of the few and best research books available on the eugenics project in Vermont. There were studies going on in Vermont as to why there were so many Vermont men signing up for the draft who had depression, drug or alcohol dependence, and diabetes. Approximately 60 or more poor families were targeted for the study. Many of these families lived near Lake Champlain or other areas of water, and they were called "Pirates or River Rats of Lake Champlain". Native American Indians were also included in this study. Many of the Natives had already left their reservations due to persecution and went to work for neighboring white farmers. Many of them eventually "adopted" themselves into these white families to erase all trace of their past. They would send the lightest skinned child to the store to avoid being noticed. They also stopped talking or handing down their heritage, which has made it a real travesty for anyone trying to do genealogy work. You may have heard someone say that Great Grampa was full blooded Native, but everything in your research indicates that your family tree is white. It is thought that the Vermont Eugenics Project was how Hitler got his idea for the Nazi persecution of the Jews, although I am not sure that he needed any extra ideas. The only reason that I did not give the book a five star is that I was hoping it would have had more photos.

Eugenics -- the study of human racial progress through selective breeding -- frequently invokes images of social engineering, virulent racism, immigrant persecution, and Nazi genocide, but Vermont's little known adventure in eugenics shows the inherent adaptability of eugenics theory and methods to parochial social justice. Beginning with genealogies of Vermont's rural poor in the 1920s, and concluding in the 1930s with an exposé of ethnic prejudice in Vermont's largest city, this story of the Eugenics Survey of Vermont explores the scope, limits, and changing interpretations of eugenics in America and offers a new approach to the history of progressive politics and social reform in New England. Inspired and directed by Zoology Professor Henry F. Perkins, the survey, through social research, political agitation, and education campaigns, infused eugenic agendas into progressive programs for child welfare, mental health, and rural community development. *Breeding Better Vermonters* examines social, ethnic, and religious tensions and reveals how population studies, theories of human heredity, and a rhetoric of altruism became subtle, yet powerful tools of social control and exclusion in a state whose motto was "freedom and unity."

Those involved today in genetic engineering designed to eliminate genes that produce certain diseases might do well to consider the eugenics experience that occupied many Vermonters and others in the 1920s and early 1930s. The movement was thoroughly researched in *Breeding Better Vermonters*, by Nancy L. Gallagher, published in 1999 by the University Press of New England. Bennington Banner