

ARTICLES

CLARA BOW IN *FREE TO LOVE* (1925): FEATURE FILMS AND EUGENICS IN THE 1920s

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ABSTRACT *This essay uses the 1925 silent film, *Free to Love*, starring Clara Bow, to illuminate the history of eugenics in the United States during the 1920s. Other scholars argue that, despite achieving its greatest political and social impact in the period, eugenics was not a significant theme in the movies during the 1920s and early 1930s. But *Free to Love* is shown to be eugenically sound, reflecting the two key emphases of eugenic thought: the prevention of reproduction by ‘defectives’ or the ‘unfit’ and its promotion among the ‘well born.’*

‘No one wanted me to be born in the first place,’ silent film icon Clara Bow declared in an autobiographical sketch published in *Photoplay* magazine in 1928. Although she referred only to the fact that her impoverished parents had not wanted a child, Bow’s comment was more accurate than perhaps she knew. In the early-twentieth century many American eugenic scientists, or ‘eugenists’ in the parlance of the period, tried both to encourage marital unions and large families among those they considered genetically ‘fit,’ and to discourage and if necessary prevent reproduction by persons they considered ‘unfit.’ The latter included the physically, intellectually, and—often—the morally impaired; alcoholics, epileptics, and prostitutes were routinely classed among the unfit, as sometimes were the poor. Clara Bow’s biographer describes her father, Robert, as a ‘hyper-sexed loser’ and possibly ‘mentally retarded;’ he was also an alcoholic who regularly beat his wife and daughter and who raped Clara when she was sixteen. Her mother, Sarah, had epilepsy as well as a family history of mental illness. Further, when Robert Bow went on one of his periodic boozing sprees, Sarah sometimes worked as a prostitute, locking Clara in a closet while she entertained various ‘Uncles.’ One wonders what contemporary eugenists thought about this woman with such a seriously deficient genetic inheritance becoming one of the biggest stars of the silent film era and Hollywood’s original ‘it girl.’¹

Scholarly interest in American eugenics has increased in recent years, in part due to the emergence of the field of disability studies in the humanities. Particularly since the mid-1980s an increasingly active and visible cohort of historians and other humanities scholars have been arguing that, despite its (frequently) physically apparent manifestations, disability is socially

constructed in the same way that race, gender, class, and other signifiers of power in western societies are constructed. Disability scholars in the humanities reject the medical or rehabilitative models which continue to guide the approach to disability in fields such as medicine and education. The medical/rehabilitative literature typically conflates disability with impairment and presents it as a problem — a defect, a sickness, or even a pathology—possessed by an individual. The focus then becomes how doctors, educators, and policymakers can *cure* or *fix* the individual. In contrast, new disability scholars emphasize the experiences of the disabled themselves and describe the ways impairments become disabilities. To make a long story short, impairments do not disable people; society, culture, economics, politics, and law create the category of people known as the disabled.²

Within a disabling culture, the movies represent a significant medium for shaping society's response to impairments. Disabled characters are seemingly everywhere in the movies, and scholars have identified certain common stereotypes of the disabled in films. These include, among others, innocents, frequently disabled children; savants, whose impairment in one area is compensated in another; maladjusted or self-pitying individuals; and criminals and monsters whose 'Deformity of body symbolizes [their] deformity of soul.' Further, disabled characters in films generally face one of three ends: cure, death, or acceptance and overcoming. Cures for the disabled in films are sometimes miraculous, but often doctors play a vital role, mirroring society's generally medicalized perspective on disability. Death is typically the end for evil or criminal disabled characters but is not reserved for them alone; sometimes innocents also must perish in the interest of narrative closure. Regardless of how the films end for the disabled characters, however, the basic stereotypes isolate the disabled and individualize disability. This affects both how the non-disabled view the disabled as well as the way the disabled view themselves.³

Although well-developed in many areas, the existing scholarship on disability in feature films largely omits eugenics, a scientific and popular fad during the 1920s and one with important implications for the disabled and their place in society.⁴ Similarly, the most extensive analysis of eugenics and film in the period emphasizes educational and public health films rather than more purely entertainment-oriented films.⁵ This scholarship omits eugenics because of the belief that under the influence of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA; established 1922), the Production Code (implemented in 1930), and various state and local censorship boards, eugenics became a 'problematic' subject for feature films in the 1920s and 1930s—despite achieving its greatest political success in those decades. Even if overt eugenic references

‘virtually disappeared,’ however, implicit eugenic themes remained commonplace in feature films.⁶ Indeed, the standard ‘cure or kill’ dichotomy which, according to historian Martin Norden, was imposed upon disabled characters in the 1920s is eugenic: either way disability is removed from the nation’s ‘germ-plasm.’⁷ And those disabled characters in the 1920s who managed to avoid the seemingly inexorable logic of ‘cure or kill’ still almost always ended the film alone; disabled characters rarely found love before the end of the film, for example.⁸ In sum, far from being absent, eugenics remained a powerful theme in movies throughout the 1920s.

The continuing presence of eugenics in feature films of the 1920s can be seen in several films starring Clara Bow. Although primarily remembered for romantic, flapper comedies such as 1927’s *It*—the film which more than any other defined her as a sex symbol—Bow made movies from a wide range of genres and portrayed more than just flappers in a career spanning fifty-six feature films. By the late 1920s, Bow received fan letters at an unprecedented rate, and theatre owners hailed her as their biggest box office attraction. Four of Bow’s films—*Black Lightning* (1924), *Parisian Love* (1925), *The Keeper of the Bees* (1925), and *Free to Love* (1925)—are implicitly, and come very close to being explicitly, eugenic.⁹ This article focuses on the last of these films, *Free to Love*, but in each film the disabled characters behave in ways broadly consistent with recognized film stereotypes for such characters. The films go further, however, reflecting both emphases of eugenic thinking in the period: the forced sterilization of ‘defectives’ as well as the encouragement of reproduction among the ‘well-born.’ Locating the eugenic themes in Clara Bow’s films reveals just how thoroughly eugenics had permeated the American consciousness by the 1920s. Her films, moreover, helped to reinforce the popular belief in eugenics.¹⁰

Behind its eugenically suggestive title, *Free to Love* is deceptively complex, and a disabled character occupies a key place in the narrative. Hunchbacked and clubfooted Tony (played by Raymond McKee) works as a jewel thief, part of a gang run by Jack Garner (Hallam Cooley), proprietor of a speakeasy called the Crow’s Nest. But Tony also regularly visits a nearby settlement house operated by John Crawford (Donald Keith), a Christian minister, and his girlfriend Marie Anthony (Clara Bow, in a non-flapper role). Marie is a former orphan who a few years earlier had been convicted of an unspecified crime and sent to a reformatory. After being released she was adopted by Judge Winthrop Orr (Winter Hall), who had presided at her trial, and presented to society as the ‘daughter of an old friend.’ Hence most of the other characters—most importantly Tony and Crawford—do not know her history.¹¹

Under the influence of Marie—also known as ‘the Slum Angel’ in the film—hunchbacked, clubfooted Tony is beginning to have pangs of conscience. When Garner orders him to perform another heist, Tony refuses, and after Garner smacks him a few times with a blackjack, Tony decides to go to the police. He tells them when to raid the Crow’s Nest to nab ‘the whole works.’ Before the raid, however, Tony learns the identity of the gang’s ‘mysterious master mind’—he is none other than Kenton Crawford (Charles Mailes), the young preacher’s father. Wishing to spare the preacher any embarrassment, Tony tells Marie what he knows, and together they go and warn the criminals of the impending raid. While Tony and Kenton Crawford slip out the back way, Garner, who has tried before to seduce Marie, blocks her escape and tries to force her to hide in the cellar with him. Wondering what became of her, Tony returns to fetch Marie. He then shoots Garner and climbs into the cellar himself. But Garner has just enough strength left to block Marie’s access to the cellar, slamming the trapdoor shut before collapsing on top of it, meaning Marie cannot get in and Tony cannot get out. The police burst in just in time to hear Garner implicate Marie before dying. They promptly arrest Marie for jewel theft and murder.¹²

Marie willingly takes the blame to protect her boyfriend’s reputation. She tells Judge Orr she is guilty and refuses to see John Crawford, who begins to doubt her innocence and her purity. Then when the police try to break her down with ‘the dreaded Third Degree,’ she replies ‘I won’t talk—[even] if you kill me!’ All the while she prays: ‘Dear God, keep Tony silent.’ For his part, Tony is wracked with guilt. ‘You did it—you dirty rat,’ he tells his reflection in the mirror, ‘you did it! Why don’t you go and tell ‘em?’ Screwing up his courage, Tony finally does go and tell the police that he shot Garner, but he withholds the information about the preacher’s father being part of the criminal gang, much to Marie’s relief; she promptly faints. Unbeknownst to Tony, Marie, or the police, however, Kenton Crawford has committed suicide, leaving a note confessing his crimes. As a result of Tony’s and Crawford’s confessions, Marie is released, but so is Tony; the police decide Tony killed the unarmed Garner in self-defense. At the end of the film, despite his obvious love for Marie, Tony helps her reconcile with John Crawford, leaving his own future loveless and uncertain as he resolves to abandon his life of crime.¹³

The question of the success of Tony’s rehabilitation is an issue for another time, though it does diverge from the stereotypical end of disabled criminals in the movies, who commonly die. But from a eugenic perspective it was entirely appropriate that Tony should pursue his future alone.

Eugenic science achieved its greatest influence in the United States during the period from 1905 to 1935—or from the year Clara Bow was born to shortly after the birth of her first child in December 1934. But the First World War acted as a catalyst making the decade of the 1920s a particularly fertile period for eugenic ideas. During the war, the results of physical examination and intelligence testing of men entering the military seemed to indicate that the country had serious problems in both areas. Nearly one-third of the men aged 21 to 31 called to military service were rejected as physically unfit. Intelligence testing of those who made the grade physically yielded even more startling results: of those inducted into the army, nearly half of white and almost ninety percent black soldiers had mental ages of less than 13 years. Many thoughtful people who cared about the nation's future concluded that something needed to be done to improve both the physical and mental health of the United States.¹⁴

Eugenic science then became one weapon in the fight to correct the apparent problems revealed during the war. Eugenics—the word comes from the Greek for 'well-born'—would accomplish the goal of improving the race by managing human reproduction in the same way horticulturalists and animal breeders managed their stocks, producing more plants or animals with the desired traits and fewer—eventually none—without those traits. American eugenicists held a range of views on just how far the science should be implemented in human reproduction. Some proponents, for example acting U.S. Surgeon General Claude C. Pierce in 1927, argued that it would be possible and desirable to create 'a race of super-men.' Others, Dr. Lawrence Kolb of the U.S. Public Health Service among them, rejected the Nietzschean potential of eugenics, insisting that the goal should be simply to produce a more 'normal race—something the world has never known.' Regardless of the ultimate goal, an editorial writer for the *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune* confidently predicted in 1927 that 'Eugenics in days to come will be the greatest, most important, of all sciences.'¹⁵

The rising popularity of eugenic science can be measured in several ways. Fewer than fifty colleges and universities in the United States offered eugenics classes before World War I, for example, but by 1928 nearly four hundred such institutions offered eugenics courses with roughly twenty thousand tertiary students enrolled in eugenics courses nationwide. Perhaps a more important measure, however, is the widespread acceptance of compulsory sterilization laws in the 1920s and early-1930s. Sterilizations of 'defectives' had occurred in the late-nineteenth century, but in 1907 the state of Indiana became the first to pass a specific eugenic sterilization statute. By 1921 fifteen states had enacted similar sterilization laws, although five of the fifteen—including Indiana—repealed their laws or saw them declared unconstitutional in state courts before the end of 1921.

During the 1920s, however, interest in sterilization revived, and by 1935 one count shows twenty-eight states—Indiana once again among them—with sterilization statutes on the books. That number comes from Harry H. Laughlin, Superintendent of the Eugenics Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor, New York, who also reported that the number of legal, eugenic sterilizations performed nationwide jumped from a little over three thousand before 1921 to over twenty-one thousand by the end of 1934. Of course, not all states with such laws pursued sterilization as aggressively as others. Some states allowed their sterilization laws to pass completely into disuse, and only five states had sterilized as many as one thousand people by 1935, with California—where films such as *Free to Love* were made—the unrivalled leader, having performed nearly half of the statutory sterilization operations.¹⁶

The earliest sterilization advocates targeted any persons with disabilities, whether the impairment was physical (blindness, deafness, ‘deformity’) or intellectual (epilepsy, insanity, ‘feeble-mindedness’). Telephone inventor Alexander Graham Bell, for instance, ominously warned in the 1880s that if deaf people were allowed to reproduce without restraint, the nation risked creating ‘a deaf variety of the human race.’ By the 1920s, however, eugenicists focused particularly on the intellectually impaired; Harry Laughlin’s survey of sterilization laws in effect in 1935 yielded none which included physical disabilities while all covered the ‘feeble-minded,’ the ‘insane,’ or the ‘mentally defective.’ The laws in many states also covered criminals, even though the nature versus nurture debate raged without resolution in scientific journals and the popular press.¹⁷ Some proposals went further still. Laughlin wrote a ‘model law’ in 1914 which he recommended to states as one which would pass constitutional muster. His law included the ‘dependent’ as well as ‘orphans, ne’er-do-wells, tramps, the homeless, and paupers’ among those to be sterilized. Similarly, a bill proposed in March 1927 to amend the state of Nebraska’s existing sterilization law (passed in 1915), would have covered ‘all persons’ deemed ‘socially inadequate.’ That broad term was abandoned, however, and Laughlin’s 1935 state-by-state survey noted that Nebraska’s law applied only to the ‘insane and feeble-minded.’¹⁸

According to the Mendelian understanding of genetics which prevailed early in the twentieth century, most eugenicists recognized that any couple could produce an impaired child, because even unimpaired individuals still may carry recessive genes that might cause impairment. The real danger lay in allowing impaired parents to breed; such a coupling would surely yield children with the same condition, particularly if the impairment was an intellectual one. Quantitative pedigree studies supplied the evidence to support this contention; researchers sought especially to trace the family

trees of asylum inmates and encouraged other people to conduct and submit surveys of their own family histories. Though the research was seriously flawed, and increasingly recognized as such in the period, the appearance of science attached to eugenics easily beguiled the lay public. Perhaps Charles B. Davenport, Laughlin's boss at the Eugenics Record Office, was right when he told the Second International Congress of Eugenics in 1921 that the public 'will not dispute quantitative findings in any science.' That was essentially the case in Nebraska in 1927. In the debate over the new sterilization bill in the state, one state senator admonished those of his colleagues who were 'not scientifically qualified' that they 'should take the word of the scientists who ... believe that sterilization is the proper method of dealing with mental deficiency.' The bill passed.¹⁹

More significantly, the science also seems to have blinded the U.S. Supreme Court. In May 1927, only a few months after the release of *It* cemented Clara Bow's sex symbol status, the Court gave constitutional sanction to forced sterilization laws in the case *Buck v. Bell*. The state of Virginia wanted to sterilize Carrie Buck, an inmate of the state asylum for 'epileptics and feeble-minded,' after she gave birth to a child out-of-wedlock. The state invited experts to examine Buck's daughter, Vivian, when she was only seven months old, and they declared that Vivian had subnormal intelligence. Historians have since uncovered strong indications that the state was punishing the Bucks for being poor, of mixed race (part Native American), and promiscuous; for one thing, Vivian Buck's subsequent primary school teachers considered her a very good student, equal in intelligence to most and brighter than many. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court accepted the scientific evidence presented by the state and ruled eight-to-one in favor of the Virginia sterilization statute. Writing for the Court's majority and referring to the fact that Carrie Buck's mother was also an asylum inmate, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. memorably opined that 'Three generations of imbeciles are enough;' the lone dissenter in the case, Justice Pierce Butler, did not issue an opinion. Carrie Buck was sterilized in October.²⁰

Editorial writers around the nation applauded the *Buck* decision. Indeed, a search of various newspapers from around the country yielded just one, the *Decatur [Illinois] Herald*, which criticized the decision.²¹ The *Herald* cited 'the increasing uncertainty as to whether heredity plays any very important part in the production of defectives'—in other words, the *Herald* thought the science was moving away from eugenic sterilization. Few other newspapers agreed, however. Readers in Decatur, for instance, needed to look no further than the city's other newspaper, the *Review*, to find a contrary, pro-*Buck* view; that paper called sterilization 'a relatively small sacrifice' enforced upon people 'virtually certain to become a menace to the

community because of their idleness and lack of moral stability.’ The ‘menace’ imagery recurred in editorials throughout the nation, and Justice Holmes made a similar point in his written opinion: ‘It is better for all the world if, instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind.’²²

The Supreme Court’s *Buck* decision stimulated a flurry of eugenic legislation. Seventeen states enacted new or modified existing sterilization laws in the years 1928-1932. But American eugenics was not simply about sterilizing those deemed unfit. Eugenists also stressed greater reproduction among the genetically ‘fit’; nothing less than the fate of the nation depended upon it. Too many of the country’s ‘well-to-do and better educated families’, according to one eugenicist interested in marriage and reproduction patterns, ‘would rather care for one or two parrots, ... a couple of lapdogs, or one or more pet cats ... than bring up children’, leaving the task of raising the next generation to the ‘millions of farmers, miners, laboring men, and especially bootblacks.’ For many Americans, experience with so-called ‘positive eugenics’ came in form of Better Baby and Fitter Family contests which became staples of county and state fairs in the decade—and for decades thereafter. Judges evaluated the babies and families in these contests on a range of characteristics—physical, mental, genetic, and psychological—‘comparable to the way in which stock and other fair exhibits are judged.’ The American Eugenics Society endorsed the Fitter Family idea because it encouraged completion of pedigree studies more broadly ‘to certify families and individuals from a eugenic and health standpoint.’ As a writer for the journal *Science* envisioned it in 1926, the day would come when ‘fond and careful parents’ would ask their daughters’ suitors one simple question: ‘Is your family “certified?”’²³

The question of ‘certification’ causes some apparent problems for the film *Free to Love*. First, though, it is important to stress that Tony does not get the girl—any girl—in the film. Early in *Free to Love*, Tony tries to woo a woman in the Crow’s Nest with a pearl necklace withheld from his latest heist. For his troubles, he gets pummelled and laughed at by Garner, who sends another gang member to take the necklace away from the woman. Further, despite his obvious love for ‘the Slum Angel’, Tony seems to understand implicitly that he has no chance with her. In short, although unlike most disabled criminals in the movies he is ‘free to live,’ he—like most disabled characters—is *not* ‘free to love.’ Even after he has pledged to end his life of crime, Tony recognizes the impossibility of a relationship with Marie and helps her reconcile with young Crawford rather than trying to replace him in her affections.²⁴

Though one may sympathize with Tony for his loveless future, the relationship between Marie and John Crawford initially seems little better, from a eugenic perspective, than a match between Marie and Tony. Marie is an orphan and ex-convict, while John is the son of a criminal, remembering that the jury was still out on the heritability of a criminal disposition. But in its melodramatic fashion, the film absolves both young lovers of any criminal or other taint. *Free to Love* clears Marie's criminal taint at its beginning. After finishing her time in the reformatory, Marie goes to the house of Judge Orr intent on killing him but finds she cannot do it. Orr then declares that he has recently discovered she was innocent and adopts her to make amends. Although her biological parentage is unclear, her innocence, her willingness to work in John Crawford's settlement house—plus time spent living in Orr's household and her selfless actions throughout the film—help to establish Marie's eugenic fitness.

John Crawford's certification is more difficult to achieve. His father is a criminal—and more. He admits in his suicide note that he is 'crazy', that he has a 'mania' for jewels; in other words, he is criminally insane. Thus *Free to Love* actually has two disabled criminals, Kenton Crawford as well as Tony. On the one hand, then, Kenton Crawford's death is a good thing, eugenically speaking, since it means he is no longer in a position to pass on his mental defect, although it does send a harsh message about the possibilities of living with a disability. On the other hand, this admission of insanity calls John Crawford's eugenic fitness further into question. But in his suicide note Kenton Crawford also declares that he is not John's biological father, only his 'foster father', something the younger man never knew. Although this means that John Crawford, like Marie, is potentially an orphan (no mention is made of his mother or his biological father in the film), his actions throughout the film similarly establish the essential goodness of his character.²⁵

But, in fact, the audience did not need to rely on good acts to certify the fitness of these two (apparent) orphans. While eugenists worked to prevent reproduction among the unfit and promote it among the fit, they often identified the fit simply through their outward appearance. Albert Wiggam, who perhaps more than other American eugenists wrote for a popular audience, captured the idea in his 1924 book, *The Fruit of the Family Tree*: 'good-looking people are better morally ... than ugly people.' But even academic eugenists, despite their scientific trappings, believed that fitness could be distinguished by sight. For his seminal pedigree study *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness* (1912), for example, Henry H. Goddard did not administer intelligence tests—flawed as they might be—to determine the mental abilities of the subjects of his investigation; instead, he trained his research assistant to determine through

observation which subjects were feeble-minded. Indeed, the very pseudonym Goddard invented for his subject family revealed his aesthetic bias. The name 'Kallikak' combined the Greek words for 'beauty' (*kallos*) and 'bad' (*kakos*). The book itself details two branches of the pseudonymous Kallikak family descended from a single American Revolutionary War soldier who had children by two women, one a 'good Quaker'—the *kallos* branch—and the other 'feeble-minded'—the *kakos* branch.²⁶

Thus, beauty is synonymous with goodness, and goodness with fitness. And since both Marie and John Crawford in *Free to Love* are physically attractive individuals, their relationship is eugenically sound—they are 'free to love.' Clara Bow's beauty was the stuff of Hollywood myth. Her movie career began after she won a fan magazine beauty contest, and by the late 1920s, as one newspaper story put it, her 'sex appeal ranked with food, clothing and shelter as one of the staples of public existence.' Actor Donald Keith, who played John Crawford, had a brief moment of prominence in the mid-1920s, largely thanks to his connection with Clara Bow. Including *Free to Love*, the two appeared together in three films released in 1925 and two more early in 1926; perhaps inevitably they were also linked romantically off-screen for a time. Although Keith never broke through to stardom, contemporaries described him as a 'tall, handsome lad' who 'makes an excellent hero.'²⁷ In contrast, although according to *Variety* Raymond McKee 'bagged' all the acting honors' in *Free to Love*, his Tony appears physically unattractive even beyond his disabilities. Through most of the film, his clothes are dark and shabby, while his face seems set in a permanent sneer. After he reforms for the end of the film, his countenance brightens as does the hue of his clothes, but he then becomes comical—another common disabled stereotype—his new suit tight in all the wrong places and his straw hat more appropriate for a young swain.²⁸

As the eugenic science of the time demanded, therefore, *Free to Love* effectively prevents its disabled characters from procreating. One is killed, while the other is free to live, but not free to love. Moreover, the film goes further, ending by sealing a marital relationship between two physically attractive and intellectually unimpaired characters. Perhaps in part because of this eugenic soundness, reviewers stressed that *Free to Love* worked as a love story. Similarly, local censorship boards and the MPPDA, which other scholars argue helped to keep explicit eugenic themes—whether positive or negative—out of the movies during the 1920s, seem to have missed the eugenic content in *Free to Love*. The New York State Motion Picture Commission which licensed all films shown in the state, for instance, demanded cuts to the scenes where Garner knocks Tony around and did not want any scenes containing a desk-top model of the electric chair to appear,

but they ignored the implicit eugenics; even the title failed to arouse their suspicion.²⁹

Free to Love and other films of the 1920s may not have been explicitly eugenic, in deference to the demands of local censorship boards and the MPPDA, but eugenic ideas nevertheless—and inevitably—continued to find expression in feature films of the period. Like books and essays by Wiggam, Goddard, and other eugenists, the Supreme Court's decision in *Buck v. Bell*, and various health films, a number of feature films in the 1920s promoted eugenic ideas. When the film's star was Clara Bow, moreover, a large audience was all but guaranteed; it should also be noted in this context that once Bow became the biggest star in Hollywood in the late-1920s, her earlier films—such as *Free to Love*—made the rounds of the nation's theatres again, giving audiences additional opportunities to absorb their messages.³⁰ Finally, although it goes beyond the limits of this article, *Free to Love* fits within a long history of the disabled in film and fiction—romantic leads are almost always physically attractive individuals, and the disabled rarely get the girl (or the boy). This pattern is not unique to the 1920s; it appears in the old English epic *Beowulf*, in various adaptations of the Hunchback of Notre Dame story, and elsewhere. As the new disability scholarship suggests, however, this merely demonstrates the extent to which eugenic thinking and bias against the disabled are embedded in Western culture and should not diminish *Free to Love* as a eugenic text and a product of its time.³¹

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ENDNOTES

¹ Clara Bow, 'My Life Story' as told to Adela Rogers St. Johns, 3 parts, *Photoplay*, Feb., Mar., and Apr. 1928, <<http://members.tripod.com/~theclearabowpage/clarabowlifestory/clarabowlifestory.html>> (accessed 6 Mar. 2006)—quote from part 1, Feb. 1928; David Stenn, *Clara Bow: Runnin' Wild*, New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000; orig. 1988, pp.5-12 and 264-266 (quotes about parents from, in order, pp.7, 5, 264).

² For an introduction to disability studies see, e.g., Susan Burch and Ian Sutherland, 'Who's Not Here Yet? American Disability History,' *Radical History Review* 94, Winter 2006, pp.127-147; Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, eds., *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, New York: New York University Press, 2001.

³ For common film stereotypes of the disabled see, e.g., Paul K. Longmore, 'Screening Stereotypes: Images of Disabled People,' *Social Policy* 16, Summer 1985, pp.31-37 (quote from 32); Martin F. Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the*

Movies, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994, esp. pp.20, 26, 33, 41, 51, 52, 131-132, 292-293, 298-299 for some key stereotypes.

⁴ Both Longmore, 'Screening Stereotypes', and Norden, *Cinema of Isolation*, ignore eugenics as an element of the portrayal of disability in feature films. Norden's omission of eugenics is particularly notable, given the almost encyclopaedic nature of his book; he cites a remarkable number of American films involving disability, from the beginning of the industry to the 1990s. See also, Stephen P. Safran, 'The First Century of Disability Portrayal in Film: An Analysis of the Literature,' *Journal of Special Education* 31, Winter 1998, pp.467-479, which also omits eugenics.

⁵ Martin S. Pernick, *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of 'Defective' Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures Since 1915*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, p.160, argues, for instance, that only one feature film on eugenics was made 1921-1930.

⁶ Karen A. Keely, 'Scientific Selection on the Silver Screen: Madcap Eugenics in *College Holiday*,' in *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*, Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds., Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006, p.309, for 'problematic'; Pernick, *The Black Stork*, p.160, for 'virtually disappeared.' *College Holiday*, the focus of Keely's essay, was produced in 1936 and is explicitly about eugenics.

⁷ 'Germ-plasm' was the term frequently used in the early-twentieth century to refer to the basic material determining genetic inheritance; it had broader implications than the more modern term 'genes.' For use of the term see, e.g., W.E. Fernald, 'The Burden of Feeble-mindedness,' *Journal of Psycho-Asthenics*, March 1912, paragraph 9, at Disability History Museum on-line, <<http://www.disabilitymuseum.org/lib/docs/1208.htm>> (21 August 2006); Arthur H. Estabrook, *The Jukes in 1915*, Washington, DC: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1916, p.85. For emphasis on 'cure or kill' in the movies, especially in the 1920s, see Norden, *Cinema of Isolation*, pp.105-108 (quote p.107). On the other hand, Norden misses the eugenic implications of 'cure or kill.'

⁸ For an exception see *Enemies of Women*, dir. Alan Crosland (Cosmopolitan Productions, 1923)—in this film a disabled soldier (who lost an arm in World War I) does get the girl, but she is already beyond her child-bearing years; Clara Bow has a bit part in this (her third) film.

⁹ For fan mail, see Stenn, *Clara Bow*, pp.158-159; and *Reno Evening Gazette*, 16 June 1928, p.6; for theatre owners and box office, see *Bismarck [North Dakota] Tribune*, 21 Aug. 1929, p.2; *Appleton [Wisconsin] Post-Crescent*, 22 Feb. 1930, p.17; also Stenn, *Clara Bow*, p.130. Citations for the films mentioned are (in order): *It*, dir. Clarence Badger (Famous Players-Lasky, 1927); *Black Lightning*, dir. James P. Hogan (Gotham Productions, 1924); *Parisian Love*, dir. Louis J. Gasnier (B.P. Schulberg Productions, 1925); *The Keeper of the Bees*, dir. J. Leo Meehan (Gene Stratton-Porter Productions, 1925); *Free to Love*, dir. Frank O'Connor (B.P. Schulberg Productions, 1925)—it might be added that none of Bow's four eugenic films are the one feature film on eugenics in the 1920s cited by Pernick, *Black Stork*, p.160.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Angela Marie Smith, 'Monsters in the Bed: The Horror Film Eugenics of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*,' in *Popular Eugenics*, Currell and Cogdell, eds., pp.333-358, for another essay which reads eugenics in films not explicitly eugenic in content.

¹¹ *Free to Love*, intertitles.

¹² *Ibid.*; see also *San Mateo [California] Times and Daily News Leader*, 21 Oct. 1926, p.6, for 'mysterious master mind.'

¹³ *Free to Love*, intertitles.

¹⁴ Ruth Hubbard, 'Abortion and Disability: Who Should and Who Should Not Inhabit the World?' in *The Disability Studies Reader*, Lennard J. Davis, ed., London: Routledge, 1997, p.189 (peak years); physically unfit cited in Wilmer Krusen, 'National Efficiency through Health,' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 78, July 1918, p.60; for intelligence test results, see Robert M. Yerkes, *Psychological Examining in the United States Army: Memoirs of the National Academy of Sciences*, Washington, DC:

Government Printing Office, 1921, vol.15, p.790. See also Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995; orig. 1985, pp.79-84 for army testing and pp.79-128 for eugenics more generally.

¹⁵ Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race*, New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003, p.16, for the Greek origin of the term and pp.21-41 for a general introduction to American eugenics; Leonard Darwin, 'The Aims and Methods of Eugenic Societies,' *Science*, new series, 54, 7 Oct. 1921, p.322. For links to animal breeding see, e.g., Mazyck P. Ravenel, 'The Trend of Public Health Work: Is It Eugenic or Dysgenic?' *Scientific Monthly* 23, Oct. 1926, p.335; *Coshocton [Ohio] Tribune*, 5 Jan. 1927, p.4. *Danville [Virginia] Bee*, 5 May 1927, p.5, quotes Pierce and Kolb; *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, 9 May 1927, p.1.

¹⁶ The other states which had sterilized as many as 1000 people by 1935 were, in decreasing numerical order, Michigan, Kansas, Virginia, and Minnesota. Hamilton Cravens, *The Triumph of Evolution: American Scientists and the Heredity-Environment Controversy, 1900-1941*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978, p.53, for eugenics in universities; James W. Trent, Jr., 'To Cut and Control: Institutional Preservation and the Sterilization of Mentally Retarded People in the United States, 1892-1947,' *Journal of Historical Sociology* 6, March 1993, pp.60-61, 63, for early legislation; 'The Second Indiana Sterilization Law,' *Eugenical News*, 15, 1930, pp.74-75, on-line at The Eugenics Archive <<http://www.eugenicsarchive.org>>, images 1889-1890 (23 Aug. 2006); 'Legislative Status of Eugenic Sterilization in the Several States of the United States, January 1935,' Lantern Slides, Black Case, Section 12, The Harry H. Laughlin Papers, Truman State University, on-line at The Eugenics Archive <<http://www.eugenicsarchive.org>>, image 949 (28 states in 1935); 'Cumulative Record of Operations for Eugenic Sterilization in the United States from 1907-1935,' *ibid.*, image 952 (totals at beginning of 1921 and 1935); 'Legislative Status of Eugenic Sterilization in the United States,' *ibid.*, image 951 (numbers of sterilizations by state).

¹⁷ Alexander Graham Bell, *Memoir upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race*, Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences, 1885; 'State Criteria for Legal Eugenic Sterilization [ca. 1935],' Laughlin Papers, Eugenics Archive, image 948. For contemporary nature v. nurture debate see, e.g., Lancaster D. Burling, 'Stages of Evolution and Relation to Crime,' *Scientific Monthly* 24, May 1927, pp.431-439 (pro-nature); H. J. Muller, 'The Dominance of Economics over Eugenics,' *Scientific Monthly* 37, June 1933, pp.40-47 (pro-nurture); *Burlington [North Carolina] Daily Times*, 9 May 1927, p.4; also discussion in Cravens, *Triumph of Evolution*, pp.157-265.

¹⁸ Paul Lombardo, 'Essay 8: Eugenic Sterilization Laws,' Eugenics Archive (19 Nov. 2005) quotes Laughlin's model law; *Lincoln [Nebraska] Star*, 16 March 1927, p.1 (initial Nebraska bill); 'State Criteria for Legal Eugenic Sterilization [ca. 1935],' Laughlin Papers. According to other sources, the term 'socially inadequate' covered 'the mentally diseased, the mentally defective, the criminal, the blind, the deaf, the crippled, the germ diseased, the degenerative diseased, and all other dependents;' see, e.g., J.H. Landman, 'Eugenic, Cacogenic and Socially Inadequate Tendencies in Our Population,' in *A Decade of Progress in Eugenics: Scientific Papers of the Third International Congress of Eugenics*, Baltimore: The Williams and Wilkins Company, 1934, p.271 (citing a 1928 source).

¹⁹ Charles B. Davenport, 'Research in Eugenics,' *Science*, new series, 54, 28 Oct. 1921, p.391; *Lincoln Star*, 16 March 1927, p.10. For emphasis on inheritance of intellectual impairments, see Fernald, 'The Burden of Feeble-mindedness;' also Henry H. Goddard, *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness*, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1912, a classic example of a pedigree study.

²⁰ *Buck v. Bell*, 274 US 200, p. 207 (1927) for Holmes; see also Henry H. Goddard, 'Who Is a Moron?' *Scientific Monthly* 24, Jan. 1927, p.41. For full description and analysis of *Buck v. Bell*, see Black, *War Against the Weak*, pp.108-122.

²¹ I searched for opinions on the *Buck* decision using The Newspaper Archive, <<http://www.newspaperarchive.com>> (13 May 2006), an on-line database containing full texts of over 2000 different newspapers—primarily U.S. papers—from various regions and periods. I do not intend to say or even to imply that the *Decatur Herald* was the *only* paper to oppose the *Buck* decision; my search results merely point to the fact that the editorial opposition to *Buck* was a distinct minority nationally. I also want to stress that my search focused on the more-or-less immediate reaction to the decision; I did not try to sample opinions on eugenics as an idea.

²² *Decatur Herald*, 12 June 1927, p.6; *Decatur Review*, 6 May 1927, p.10; *Buck v. Bell*, 274 US 200, p. 207 (1927). For the geographic range of pro-*Buck* editorial opinion see, e.g., *Birmingham [Alabama] Age-Herald* editorial reprinted in *Modesto [California] News-Herald*, 9 June 1927, p.14; *Davenport [Iowa] Democrat and Leader*, 3 May 1927, p.6; *Helena [Montana] Daily Independent*, 8 May 1927, p.14. James W. Trent, Jr., *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, ch.5—‘The Menace of the Feebleminded’—discusses the prevalence of the ‘menace’ image with respect to the intellectually impaired.

²³ J. H. Landman, ‘The Human Sterilization Movement,’ *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* (1931-1951) 24, July-Aug. 1933, pp.404n21 covers law changes 1928-1932; D. George Fournad, ‘Eugenics and Eugenic Marriages,’ *Journal of Educational Sociology* 3, Nov. 1929, p.179 (‘parrots’ and ‘bootblacks’); Lester F. Ward, ‘Eugenics, Euthenics, and Eudemics,’ *American Journal of Sociology* 18, May 1913, pp.738-739 (‘positive eugenics’); ‘Science News,’ *Science*, new series, 63, 29 Jan. 1926, pp.xxxii (‘certified’ quotes and fitter families idea more generally). And see, Steven Selden, ‘Transforming Better Babies into Fitter Families: Archival Resources and the History of the American Eugenics Movement, 1908-1930,’ *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149, June 2005, pp.199-225.

²⁴ *Free to Love*, intertitles—the title preceding the final, reconciliation, scenes of the film reads ‘Free to Live—Free to Love,’ with Tony clearly the one ‘free to live’. For death and sexless existences for disabled characters more generally, see discussion in Longmore, ‘Screening Stereotypes,’ pp.32-33 and 35-36.

²⁵ *Free to Love*, intertitles.

²⁶ Albert Edward Wiggam, *The Fruit of the Family Tree*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1924, p.279; Goddard, *Kallikak Family*, p.99 (‘good Quaker’) and p.19 (‘feeble-minded’). Martin S. Pernick, ‘Defining the Defective: Eugenics, Aesthetics, and Mass Culture in Early-Twentieth-Century America’ in *The Body and Physical Difference*, David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, eds., Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997, pp.89-110, persuasively argues the case that aesthetic judgments permeated the American eugenics movement; Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1981, pp.168-171, criticizes Goddard’s Kallikak study as well as his aesthetic sense.

²⁷ Other Bow-Keith collaborations include: *Parisian Love*; *The Plastic Age*, dir. Wesley Ruggles (B.P. Schulberg Productions, 1925); *My Lady of Whims*, dir. Dallas M. Fitzgerald (Dallas M. Fitzgerald Productions, 1926); and *Dancing Mothers*, dir. Herbert Brenon (Famous Players-Lasky, 1926). For Bow and beauty contest, see Stenn, *Clara Bow*, pp.16-19; quotes, in order, from *Kansas City Star*, 26 Nov. 1933, sect. D, p.1; *Appleton Post-Crescent*, 15 Nov. 1926, p.11; and *Elyria [Ohio] Chronicle-Telegram*, 26 Nov. 1927, p.4. For romantic link between Bow and Keith see, e.g., Blake McVeigh, ‘A Comedy of Errors,’ *Photoplay* 29.4, March 1926, pp.42 and 128; Stenn, *Clara Bow*, 56.

²⁸ *Variety* 83, 7 July 1926, p.17; for comic stereotype, see Norden, *Cinema of Isolation*, pp.20 and 125-129.

²⁹ For reviews of *Free to Love* see, e.g., *Charleston [West Virginia] Gazette*, 2 Oct. 1927, pt.3, p.6; *Film Daily*, 29 Nov. 1925, p.7; for New York Film Commission response to the film, see letter, Motion Picture Commission to Commonwealth Film Corp. (distributor), 16 July 1925, Box 5549, Folder 2652 (*Free to Love*), License Application Files, 1921-1965

(A1418), Motion Picture Division, New York State Archives, Albany, New York; and see Keely, 'Scientific Selection on the Silver Screen,' pp.309-310.

³⁰ The re-circulation of *Free to Love*, for instance, explains the *Charleston Gazette* review from 1927 cited in the previous note.

³¹ *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*, Michael Alexander, trans., London, Penguin Books, Ltd., 1973, (Grendel, the 'monster,' is killed). There are many versions of the Hunchback of Notre Dame from which to choose including, among others: Victor Hugo, *Notre Dame de Paris*, Paris, Gosselin, 1831, where Quasimodo disappears after Esmeralda's conviction and execution for murder, and his skeleton is found later entwined with hers inside her tomb; *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, dir. Wallace Worsley (Universal Pictures, 1923), where Lon Chaney's Quasimodo dies fighting for Esmeralda's honor; *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, dir. William Dieterle (RKO Radio Pictures, 1939), where Charles Laughton's Quasimodo survives, but remains an outcast living in the cathedral; and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, dir. Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise (Walt Disney Pictures, 1996), where again Quasimodo lives, and although Esmeralda marries another man, this time at least Quasimodo is invited to join the community—perhaps that's progress. For further discussion of this point see, e.g., Leslie A. Fiedler, 'Pity and Fear: Images of the Disabled in Literature and Popular Arts' (orig. 1982), in Fiedler, *Tyranny of the Normal: Essays on Bioethics, Biology, and Myth*, Lincoln, MA: David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., 1996, pp.33-47.