

StreamBox

Eugenics in California and the World: Race, Class,
Gender/Sexuality, and Disability

Panel IV

irioslava: I'll turn it over to Susan.

Susan: Let's go to Marcy and let her blow our minds.

We need to turn on the sound on sharing screen.

Isidro: It was muted.

Video [On screen.]

Miroslava: That was really informative. I will tur it over to
Milton.

Milton: I am a local educator, author and equity practitioner.
I'm excited about the conversation immie going to be in
with Osagie. We're going to enter into a conversation that
will lead to a Q&A session.

Osagie: I'm a professor of bioethics at UC Berkeley. I work
with Marcy on IVF and other developments to design future
children with specific traits to align with our imaginations.
That desire is not new. It is how America has emerged over
the past decades. It led to genocide, the Holocaust, etc. This
happens when you try to have control over traits such as
intelligence, height, phenotype, etc. I look forward to having
this conversation with Milton.

Milton: We spent a fair bit of time looking back at eugenics.
Why is it important to reclaim or revise our understanding
of eugenics?

Osagie: As someone who teaches mostly graduate students
at Berkeley, it's close to silicon Valley, where lots of health
science [unclear] What do you know about the eugenics
movement? Most of our students can't even have a
conversation about it. They haven't had a conversation
about it in class. Our society has given eugenics a very
broad understanding. It continued to persist after WWII. We
were supposed to have moved past this in regards to

medicine. History is crucial for us to understand what is at stake that science, technology and medicine can be used to intervene and discourage those people who are burdens. This is being approached as a "New" approach. We run the risk of harming the same population who were harmed before.

Milton: That's spot on. In my experience, it's a little bit different. I've worked around environmental rights as well. I've encountered people who felt that eugenics was a fringe etiology that's in the past. The current misunderstanding is that of behavioral traits, rather than sustained subjugation and normalizing of hierarchies, which there are none. Racialization requires the history. There are notions that there are discernible and distinct differences in the population.

These ideas have been normalized for so long that they don't question things continually in a deep way. Without having access to the history, it's hard to get into that process. Everybody brings value to the table.

We often encounter that eugenics is in the past. Why is that a problematic framing and how science works today?

Osagie: There is a tendency to think about science and technology as efforts to improve human life. We think of these as free from politics. We have been taught to think there are professionals who are working that are only looking at the numbers and that drives their work. Many professionals do embrace their work with seriousness and should be applauded. Which populations should be able to reproduce and which ones shouldn't? It limits the ability as a society to understand how science and technology engage this history. We need to understand how these attempts have happened in the past and go forward.

What does it mean to have some democratic oversight so we can embrace the opportunities and limit those ideas that are deeply entwined with newer ideas.

Milton: When you say intertwined, in many cases, different disciplines have different challenges. These ideas can be normalized from different arenas.

Osagie: A big part is we have this assumption that eugenics was problematic because of the government. Today, the state is not involved and it is free choice. I like to think at drove eugenics is the market and industry, not the state itself.

We can go back to Marcy's comments how choice to individuals[unclear]

This focus on the state being the definitive aspect being lifted can show liberal sensibility.

Milton: I think back to yesterday's session. The state wasn't affected in promigation. The US engagement is revealing the same problems were here in the past as well. The prior administration has made that clear.

Why is it important to expand beyond the state? Why is the market a particular point of inquiry?

Osagie: Rather than framing this as individual states getting involved, it's important to keep in mind what this means for our leaders to be able to create what they believe to be a population to drive their political success.

Milton: Some of those technologies were about honing perfection. The idea that industries and academic domains would change course so rapidly just seems to defy reality.

One of the things I've become more aware of is this preoccupation with perfectly [unclear]

Would you elaborate on some of your social justice concerns?

Osagie: It reinforces the ideas that [unclear] Once we move toward the place that somehow places the responsibility of health on these interventions that are made during conception or prior to birth, it places a huge burden on families to make decisions before a person is born, instead of putting families in a position to raise healthy children.

Milton: It seems to be profoundly inefficient.

Osagie: Scientists understand if you take eugenics, it's difficult to say what it's going to achieve. This is part of the everyday violence. Not only is it part of a broader conversation, it's also part of conversation that can allow money is prestige to flow in one direction and not to others. Deeper investments in community can have tremendous impacts on healthy lives. What can individuals do? [unclear]

Milton: Several of the other panelists brought up how individuals are part of space, it's important in reconnecting eugenics which was tied to [unclear] Let's say being incarcerated in a community, we know narratives can be constructed around those communities, resources are limited.

I was thinking about immigrants being racialized and narratives and policies being put forward to extract labor.

We see this promise of overdelivering. What's the gap between eugenic inspirations and the ability to manifest these ideals? Do you think it's too late to get in front of this juggernaut?

Osagie: Technology is moving forward. People are getting closer to the ability to screen for various traits and produce certain outcomes that align with political cooperatives. It's not actively happening now. There's very little regulation. It's not going to happen tomorrow. I believe it's never too late to be involved.

I think it's important for people to grasp these concepts and educate themselves on.

Milton: I appreciate the emphasis on education. Whiteness is normed, not named. We need historical understanding. There's a comment by Han. [Reading question in chat]

We see is fitness and entitlement about who gets resources is positioned.

Miroslava: What have you learned about eugenics at Berkeley?

Osagie: The faculty were notified there was a fund available for faculty members who wanted to engage in research. I was surprised and looked into this and disturbed and shocked. A trust that was developed for eugenic research had been available for several years. When I learned about it, I partnered with other faculty members. We suggested the fund be suspended until we found out where the money came from, how it's been used, etc. I'm thankful for how campus has taken this seriously and look at this and how we should address this issue.

We're now in the process of engaging in a school wide conversation about how these funds should be used. My hope is that sometime this summer there will be an announcement of the activities of these funds.

Miroslava: Can they discuss the afterlife of eugenics? [Reading from Q&A]

Milton: For me, what helped me was to situate the nation state as a racial project. Fitness is an imposed sense of normalcy. One of the challenges as population demographics are shifting, military conflicts, etc. the reemergence of eugenics is helping us understand different [unclear] at the crux of it.

We look at these different domains as isolated from each other rather than intertwined. They were systemic effort of

everything from fit or famine contests to sustained efforts with an education to identify people who are fit and deserving and those who are not fit.

I say we go back to the schools and make some efforts to surface the counternarratives that have always been present.

Osagie: I agree. We need to understand the US is not unique in this effort. We can have this conversation in a way the [unclear]

Milton: Other questions?

Susan: Do you think your efforts are having some success?

Milton: Locally yes. We partnered with Dozier High School hosts students interested in entering the medical profession. I worked with Stacy to develop a medical eugenics class. Stacy got a text from a former student, now a physician, to tell her they were in a conversation about eugenics. There's something powerful and profound about that. The work I've found most satisfying is the way we can shift which students are fit and which are not.

I think education is a critical side of racialisation. They elevate some is subjugate others. Understanding this helps me recognize it's not a gliche, it's a design feature. We can begin to reclaim the capacity of schools to illuminate this.

Susan: Reading question from Q&A.

Osagie: There is nothing inconsistent with supporting women's rights while demanding that science, medicine and technology benefit us at the same time and support our commitment to women's rights. All of this can be thought of as an inclusive society.

Susan: Other questions?

Milton: There is a big movement in ethnic studies right now in California. I don't think they should be ghetto-ized.

Students and educators are engaged over time. They normalize interrogation. When we create education for meaning making, we're going to be more respective of the goal. The timing is proper. I see more efforts that are informative. We should use artists, the opportunities are sweet.

Susan: we have time to discuss ourselves a little bit. Now is a good time to bring more general questions and answers.

Milton, did you want to say anything more?

Miroslava: It doesn't look like it.

Milton: I'm often reminded of words to me, that even if

we're not interested in history, history is interested in us. We are being pulled back into our past because we've never thoroughly interrogated it. We can't move forward without moving through our past through reckoning.

We've oversimplified this history, so now we need to honor the history. Big thank you to all the work being done. I think it's the right work that needs to be done.

Osagie: My deep appreciation for Milton's work and conversations at school, as well as in the community. Our children need to understand our history. As we leave this conference and go back to our daily lives, we can continue these conversations with our family, friends, etc. so people can have a stronger understanding.

Miroslava: Thank you for your questions and discussions.

Sue, anything else? We have one last short panel on our reflections and moving forward.

Susan: There is one more question. We could leave it for the final session. We'll come back to that one and resume at 4.

[Session break]