

## SELLING EUGENICS: THE CASE OF SWEDEN

by

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This paper traces the early (1910s to 1920s) development of Swedish eugenics through a study of the social network that promoted it. The eugenics network consisted mainly of academics from a variety of disciplines, but with medicine and biology dominating; connections with German scientists who would later shape Nazi biopolitics were strong. The paper shows how the network used political lobbying (for example, using contacts with academically accomplished MPs) and various media strategies to gain scientific and political support for their cause, where a major goal was the creation of a eugenics institute (which opened in 1922). It also outlines the eugenic vision of the institute's first director, Herman Lundborg. In effect the network, and in particular Lundborg, promoted the view that politics should be guided by eugenics and by a genetically superior elite. The selling of eugenics in Sweden is an example of the co-production of science and social order.

**Keywords:** Sweden; eugenics; networks; media

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### INTRODUCTION

The fact that Sweden was the first country where a government-funded eugenics (or 'race biological') institute was created has been considered a stain on the reputation of the emerging welfare state, made worse by the fact that a law that legitimized the forced sterilization of thousands was enacted in the 1930s. Historical research on this topic has focused mainly on the processes that led to the sterilization law and on its implementation.<sup>1</sup> Some research has been done on the eugenics institute, also in a comparative context.<sup>2</sup> This paper adds to the existing literature by analysing the emerging eugenics movement in Sweden, focusing on social networks and their 'backstage' lobbying activities as well as 'front-stage' media strategies. By 'media' we imply a broad notion common in cultural studies that includes not only mass media but also exhibitions, for example.<sup>3</sup> The term 'social network' is derived from historical scholarship as well as economic sociology and business studies in which networks are seen as semi-stable associations between individuals or groups, based on mutual interests in economic or other resources, the meaning of which might vary for different members of the network.<sup>4</sup> The science of eugenics was such a resource that, although not given a consistent

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interpretation, for a while constituted the foundation for a network that was eventually institutionalized. Social networks have not previously received much attention in the history of eugenics. By studying the Swedish network and its strategies, a clearer understanding of how scientists themselves set the eugenic agenda and influenced government policy is reached.<sup>5</sup>

The paper discusses not only how Swedish eugenics was launched and in time institutionalized with the help of consciously devised media strategies and lobbying practices but also aspects of the biopolitical message contained in these campaigns. The newspaper articles, pamphlets, books and exhibitions in effect eulogized the very network that produced them. As in Germany, the eugenics movement in Sweden promoted not only research and social reform but also the eugenicists themselves—their professional agenda and their right to exercise power by virtue of representing a ‘natural aristocracy’. Also as in Germany, the politicized agenda of the eugenics movement was not imposed by politicians but rather evolved within, and was marketed by, the ‘biomedical’ community.<sup>6</sup>

The Swedish eugenics network may have been relatively small but it was nevertheless historically significant because of its intimate ties with that part of the German eugenics movement that would shape Nazi biopolitics. Leading members of the Swedish network had close contacts with, among others, Erwin Baur, Fritz Lenz, Ernst Rüdin and Hans Günther. Baur was a friend of several Swedish geneticists<sup>7</sup> and from time to time visited the country, sometimes lecturing on eugenics; Lenz likewise made lecture tours in Sweden; Rüdin had close connections with Swedish eugenicists, some of whom were visiting researchers at his Munich institute; Günther lived in Sweden for some years in the 1920s and lectured at the Swedish institute.<sup>8</sup> Not all early supporters of eugenics in Sweden subscribed to the radical ideas that we associate with these scientists, but the fact that some of its most influential promoters did—not least the director of the race-biological institute—would in effect make Swedish eugenics in the 1920s an important contributor to the right-wing flank of ‘mainline’ or ‘orthodox’ eugenics that would eventually become a pillar of Third Reich biopolitics.<sup>9</sup> The Swedish race-biological institute was in fact the model for the corresponding Kaiser Wilhelm Institute founded in 1927 with Fritz Lenz as Director; after 1933 the Swedes Herman Nilsson-Ehle, Herman Lundborg and Torsten Sjögren would support Nazi interests in international organizations such as the International Federation of Eugenic Organisations.<sup>10</sup>

A main ambition of the network and its central character, the physician Herman Lundborg (1868–1943), was to institutionalize eugenics. With the creation of the Government Institute for Race Biology (*Statens institut för rasbiologi*) in Uppsala in 1922, the network, of which Lundborg became director and other leading figures in the network board members, was also in a sense institutionalized. These developments may be described using what Sheila Jasanoff has called the ‘idiom’ of co-production.<sup>11</sup> This is a blanket expression for ideas underlying much work in the history and sociology of science over the past decades, in which the interconnectedness of scientific thought and practices on the one hand and of social order on the other is highlighted. We use it to emphasize that the successful promotion of eugenics around 1920 simultaneously effected changes in science, in which mainline eugenics became established as a component of a broader genetic discipline formation, and politics, in which its tenets were to some extent integrated into welfare policy. Furthermore the interconnection of eugenics and policy was underpinned by ideology production within the eugenic discourse.

It must be said that the particular form of co-production that we discuss here was not successful in the longer run, at least not judged by the far-reaching ambitions of the radical eugenic enthusiasts. Theirs was a technocratic vision in which politics was an area to be colonized by science, and this was not tolerated by the Social Democratic hegemony that emerged in the 1930s. As social engineering, rather than technocracy or extreme biopolitics, became the preferred model for relations between science and politics, the mainline eugenic vision faded into the less radical (although in certain respects still oppressive and offensive) practices of reform eugenics.<sup>12</sup>

#### THE NETWORK

The Swedish eugenics network has been identified mainly through private correspondence between members and also through the study of archival sources from the Mendelian Society in Lund and the Swedish Society for Racial Hygiene in Stockholm (the latter being the first non-German national society to join the *Internationale Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene*).

In Sweden, Mendelian genetics was first practised in plant breeding, in which Herman Nilsson-Ehle achieved international renown for theoretical results publicized in his doctoral dissertation in 1909. Nilsson-Ehle's work also showed great practical promise, namely for the production of a hardy variety of winter wheat. Theoretical and practical breakthroughs such as these stimulated interest in genetics among not only botanists but also zoologists, physicians and anthropologists.<sup>13</sup> Nilsson-Ehle, who became a great advocate of eugenics and whose views were in line with the 'agri-eugenics' of his good friend Erwin Baur, claimed that results similar to those achieved in plant breeding could also be expected if Mendelism were to be applied to human beings.<sup>14</sup>

The Mendelian Society was founded in 1910 on the initiative of Robert Larsson, amanuensis at the Botanical Institution. The core members of the society were connected to this department. Besides Larsson, the plant breeders Nils Heribert-Nilsson and Birger Kajanus belonged to this group, of which Nilsson-Ehle—first chair of the society—was the intellectual leader. At the society's meetings various genetic topics were dealt with, and among these eugenics was prominent.<sup>15</sup>

In 1909 the Swedish Society for Racial Hygiene was formed—the third of its kind in the world. It also endorsed Mendelism as a 'solid ground' on which to build eugenic reform.<sup>16</sup> The society's goal was to influence public policy as well as public opinion by spreading knowledge about eugenic methods and results, and to support research. It was said that one wished to encourage 'general support' for eugenic reform, independently of political affiliation.<sup>17</sup>

The members of the society were aware that eugenics was politically a tricky subject. They tried to solve the dilemma of mixed political reactions by addressing members of all parties and social groups, emphasizing that questions about biology and social reform were above political or scientific differences. That this strategy was successful is shown by the membership lists, which included a broad spectrum of ideological affiliation from the far right to the moderate left, and also a variety of scientific professional groups, but with physicians dominating.<sup>18</sup>

Like contemporary eugenicists in the USA, the UK and Germany, the Swedes promoted both 'positive' and 'negative' measures. The positive measures were directed at increasing

procreation among 'fit' elements of the population. Negative measures sought to 'stem the flow of notoriously worthless individuals'.<sup>19</sup> Sterilization was put forth as a superior tool to achieve the latter goal. It was, however, controversial and it was said that legal changes necessary to implement sterilization on eugenic indicators would have to be grounded in 'popular opinion', and that a pressing task for the society was therefore to influence general attitudes. That the strategy to systematically influence public opinion through the media had been used with some success abroad was noted by the Swedes.<sup>20</sup>

Several of the society's board members were left-leaning liberals with a strong commitment to social reform. Among these were the society's secretary, Johan Vilhelm Hultkrantz, a physician and a professor at Uppsala University with a long-standing interest in physical anthropology who became a leading figure in the eugenics network. However, the central characters in the network, Herman Lundborg and Herman Nilsson-Ehle, were not liberals but radical conservatives. Hence, although the ideological interpretation of eugenics may have varied among its members, by choosing to promote Lundborg as director of the institute the network in effect promoted a right-wing interpretation of the emerging discipline.

The network was helped in its effort to legitimize eugenics by the establishment of genetics as a genuine academic discipline. This happened with the creation of a personal chair and an institute in 'inheritance research' (*ärflihetlära*) for Nilsson-Ehle in 1917.<sup>21</sup> In 1920 the plant breeders in Lund started a scientific journal, *Hereditas*, thus further strengthening the academic credentials of genetics. As Lundborg was put on its editorial board, the academic legitimacy of eugenics was strengthened as well. The Mendelian Society also functioned as a gateway to continental eugenics, for example by inviting Baur and Lenz to lecture on racial hygiene and population policies.<sup>22</sup>

Lundborg also became a good friend of the above-mentioned Robert Larsson, a science writer and the network's foremost media strategist. He was an influential promoter of genetics in southern Sweden, became the first editor of *Hereditas* and published a Swedish translation of the famous eugenics textbook by Baur, Fischer and Lenz. The relationship soon became personal, in a way typical of social networks. Larsson read, commented on and translated manuscripts for Lundborg and boosted his self-confidence by heaping praise on him and his work. Lundborg reviewed Larsson's books, paid him for referee work and gave him extra money when needed.

Other important persons in the network were the physicians and professors of medicine Frithiof Lennmalm and the above-mentioned Hultkrantz. The former was Rector at the Karolinska Institute and a member of the Nobel Committee for Medicine and had been Lundborg's teacher. Another scientist central to the network from the end of the 1910s was the Uppsala zoologist Nils von Hofsten. He was pioneering genetics teaching at Uppsala University, publishing his lectures in 1919 as the country's first genetics textbook. Hofsten sent the book to Nilsson-Ehle and Heribert-Nilsson and asked them to review it, which they both did, favourably.<sup>23</sup> Soon Hofsten met Robert Larsson, a contact that also proved to be useful.<sup>24</sup> In this way new members were introduced to the network, benefiting from its established channels of communication and mechanisms of producing public recognition, in turn helping older members with similar services.

The network's cause was helped by the war. Nilsson-Ehle's professorship was established because of the wartime need to make Sweden self-sufficient with respect to the production of grain. The war also put eugenic questions in the spotlight. In 1918 von Hofsten concluded

that the eugenic effects were thoroughly negative: 'Modern warfare cuts down the best and spares the worst elements'.<sup>25</sup> Other members of the network argued that the war proved the necessity for stronger eugenic policies. Sweden, it was claimed, had been spared the worst effects of the war and could become a forerunner in eugenic matters, not least because leading politicians now seemed to realize that the question was urgent. In the final analysis this was a matter of maintaining the hegemony of western European civilization that—if eugenic measures were not implemented—risked being 'overrun by other peoples'.<sup>26</sup> Alarmist arguments about racial decline and economic arguments about the enormous costs caused by the 'unfit' became the two most important rhetorical elements of eugenic campaigning during the war and immediately afterwards. As in Germany the eugenics movement in Sweden stressed 'technocratic logic and cost-benefit analysis'.<sup>27</sup>

#### EUGENIC PAMPHLETS

One campaign was the publication of a series of pamphlets in 1919–23 by the Society for Racial Hygiene. Eight titles edited by Lundborg were produced, discussing various aspects of eugenics and its importance for social and economic issues. The pamphlets were cheap, and many copies were given away free of charge; a notice printed on their back stated: 'School teachers, clergy, doctors, and others are urged to distribute these publications.'

Among the authors we find leading members of the network. The first booklet gave an exposé of the goals and means of racial hygiene; the next focused on the importance of genealogical investigations; the third introduced modern genetics. Other volumes dealt with social and medical issues, closely associated with the eugenic movement—for example fertility, sterilization, and juvenile delinquency.<sup>28</sup> Lundborg wrote a pamphlet about degeneration, and this topic was treated also by the famous Lund historian Martin P. Nilsson, a close friend of Nilsson-Ehle's, who put the matter into the Spenglerian context of declining civilizations.<sup>29</sup> Nilsson translated presumed eugenic problems during antiquity into a contemporary nationalistic context, thus making historical scholarship an underpinning of genetic determinism.<sup>30</sup>

Although the pamphlets dealt with a variety of subjects, they focused on two main problems and offered two main solutions. The problems were those of degeneration and of the economic burdens of caring for the unfit. Sterilization was favoured, as a 'vaccine' that would help bring down social and medical costs associated with low genetic quality in a more humane way than internment.<sup>31</sup> Several pamphlets argued for a parliamentary investigation concerning the sterilization question that one hoped would lead to legal changes.<sup>32</sup> As for tracking the effects of degeneration, research based on Mendelian genetics, performed in specialized institutes, was offered as the only viable solution.<sup>33</sup> The Swedes argued that (unlike in Great Britain and America) the government should finance such an effort and that this would soon pay off because costs associated with caring for the unfit would dwindle.<sup>34</sup>

The reception of the pamphlet series was very positive, not least because members of the network tended to review each other's publications favourably. This was true not only of the pamphlet series; such reviewing practices were also part of the network's media strategy in general.<sup>35</sup> The popularizer Larsson was important in these dealings. He kept in the background but guided his friend Lundborg from a distance, giving advice and offering

various services such as writing news articles, reviews or political documents to promote the eugenic cause.<sup>36</sup> A typical comment from Larsson regarding media matters shows how he operated:

Of course I shall gladly review both of your works that are being printed. As soon as I have copies of them I will write to the editorial office of SvD [the conservative daily *Svenska Dagbladet*]. You can most certainly count on Heribert-Nilsson. You will get good reviews [*artiklar*] by M. Phil. Erhard Bäckström in Social-Dem. [the Social Democratic daily *Social-Demokraten*]. Lännart Ribbing in Stockholms Dagblad [conservative] [and] Olof Swedeberg in Dagens Nyheter [liberal] may also be counted on.<sup>37</sup>

Of those mentioned, at least Heribert-Nilsson and Ribbing belonged to the eugenics network. The reviews were used for promoting the idea of an institute and of Lundborg as the perfect director of such an outfit.<sup>38</sup> The production of promotional writing *and* the staging of a favourable reception of such writing were both central to the network's media strategy. This is also seen in the use of another medium of propaganda, namely the eugenic exhibition that was organized in 1919.

#### THE 1919 EXHIBITION

In the last years of World War I and the early 1920s, when universal suffrage was adopted in Sweden, public opinion would have become even more of a strategic issue for the network than previously. The exhibition 'Swedish racial types' (*Svenska folktyper*) in 1919, organized by Lundborg, seemed to show conclusively that eugenics had extensive popular support. The exhibition visited five Swedish towns, starting in Stockholm in March and ending in Gothenburg in September, displaying genetic and anthropological materials using photography, sculpture and portrait painting.<sup>39</sup> According to Lundborg it was visited by 40 000 people.<sup>40</sup>

Private individuals, publishing companies and newspapers donated money to help finance the exhibition. They represented a political spectrum from the liberal left to the conservative right and included the publishing company Albert Bonnier AB and its liberal broadsheet *Dagens Nyheter*, owned by the Jewish Bonnier family. The exhibition subscribed to the common notion that the Jewish 'race' was almost on a par with the Nordic 'race', qualitatively speaking. In private, Lundborg expressed anti-Semitic views, including the typical complaint about persecution by the 'Jewish press'.<sup>41</sup> As anti-Semitism was a somewhat controversial stand in Sweden at this time, the downplaying of this aspect of his eugenic views should be seen as part of the media strategy of, if not the network, at least Lundborg himself.<sup>42</sup>

The exhibition presented anthropological material on 'the Nordic type' in Sweden including the distribution of long skulls and eye colour, seen as crucial racial characteristics. One part of the exhibition focused on individual members of the social elites, such as scientists, politicians and military men. Some academics put on display there were members of the eugenics network. Examples of low-quality race traits were also exhibited, for example criminals, gypsies and vagabonds, illustrating that '[m]oral degeneration is often accompanied by physical degeneration.'<sup>43</sup>

The motto of the exhibition was 'Know thyself, thy family, and thy people.'<sup>44</sup> In accordance with this, the visitors were given the opportunity to construct their own family tree. In a broader sense the audience was invited to reflect on the future of the nation and their own families, their own identity and future opportunities, and to see all this in a 'scientific' framework. This construction of public support for eugenics was further enhanced through public lectures by Lundborg and other members of the network and also by book publication.

The exhibition was a public display of eugenic ideas and ideals staged by Lundborg with the help of some network colleagues as well as wealthy supporters from the Swedish middle class. Media coverage paralleled that of the eugenic pamphlets: it was overwhelmingly positive, not least because of friendly reviews from members of the network that endorsed the eugenic cause in a broad sense.<sup>45</sup> Nilsson-Ehle wrote, in the leading conservative broadsheet *Svenska Dagbladet*, that the policies of a nation ought to be founded on eugenics and that only physicians could handle these matters in an expert and humane way. He finished this article—allegedly about the exhibition but in reality about the necessity of eugenic research and policies—by praising Lundborg and arguing that an institute should immediately be created with him as a leader.<sup>46</sup>

#### LOBBYING THE RICH AND MIGHTY

The process of creating a eugenic research institute went through several phases before succeeding. In 1916 a failed attempt was made to obtain political support for the creation of an institute; in 1918 the network tried but failed to establish an association for Swedish culture with a eugenic agenda. Thereafter the network put great effort into the idea to create a eugenic Nobel institute. Finally a second attempt to create a government-sponsored institute eventually succeeded.

Throughout this campaign the professional and cultural affinity between the network—dominated by academics and in particular biologists and physicians—and members of politically influential elites was of the greatest importance. When Larsson drafted a parliamentary bill proposing an institute in 1916, the initiative came from an MP who was the manager of an insurance company.<sup>47</sup> The idea of creating a cultural association was promoted by Hultkrantz and others, who lobbied MPs, church leaders and academics at the universities. At least two right-wing MPs, K. G. Westman and Nils Wohlin—both professors at Uppsala University—promised to support the project. The university chancellor, a right-wing politician, was also in favour, as were the rector of Uppsala University and the archbishop (also a professor). After these initial successes Hultkrantz commented, 'Negotiations with the "mighty" have thus been successful; let's hope things will go well also with the "rich"!'<sup>48</sup>

Apparently the rich were less enthusiastic, however, and the association came to naught. In 1919 plans to create a eugenic Nobel institute took shape, probably on the initiative of Lennmalm at the Karolinska Institute, the body that awards the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. Again Hultkrantz organized the campaign, this time focusing on the media. In the end the matter was decided by the professorial staff at the Karolinska, with nine voting against the proposal and eight for it.<sup>49</sup>

When the vote had been decided, Hultkrantz immediately sent material concerning the discussion to Lundborg so that he could use it for a newspaper article. Hultkrantz asked

Lundborg to check with Lennmalm what papers were strategically the most suitable. 'To me it now seems important,' he wrote, 'to choose the right tactics and the right organs.'<sup>50</sup> He suggested that the idea of a Nobel institute should be shelved and that one should instead focus on gaining support for a government institute. This would still require a media campaign, for which it would be important to choose what newspapers to publish in, so as to reach specific audiences. If one were seeking to influence the government, the campaign should be carried out in the main liberal broadsheet, *Dagens Nyheter*. If it were still important to influence the professoriate at the Karolinska, the conservative *Svenska Dagbladet* was the right media channel. To gain influence with the public opinion among *hoi polloi*, another Stockholm newspaper would probably be best, but Hultkrantz thought this to be of little consequence for the cause: the political and scientific leaderships were more essential.<sup>51</sup> The importance of the media and of public opinion was emphasized also by Nilsson-Ehle, himself an ardent eugenic propagandist in the press, who sent reports to Lundborg gauging the public support for eugenics.<sup>52</sup>

To gain government support, Lundborg and Larsson turned again to Parliament, using political contacts to make an MP write a bill proposing an institute. This time the network met with success, and in 1920 the bill was finally put forward by the psychiatrist and Social Democratic MP Alfred Petrén, a member of the Society for Racial Hygiene.

The bill was prepared by several members of the network besides Petrén. Lundborg, Hultkrantz and Larsson had, together with the zoologist Wilhelm Björck (also a politician and a high-ranking civil servant in the educational sector), worked out what arguments to use.<sup>53</sup> As we have seen, Larsson ghosted the aborted bill in 1916 and when the new bill was to be written he again offered his services, recommending Lundborg to produce testimonies regarding the necessity of founding a eugenics institute by quoting experts that had written about the matter.<sup>54</sup> Hence the bill contained extensive passages from the writings of several professors belonging to the network, including all the main characters mentioned above, recommending that an institute be created with Lundborg as director.<sup>55</sup> The publishing of such testimonials was a central component in the network's media strategy, because they gave a powerful impression of authoritative scientific support. In effect the network was now summoned collectively to appear on the political stage, presenting its case for eugenic reform under Lundborg's leadership. The same was true of the 'general public', whose support had been stage-managed through the 1919 exhibition and other media exhortations by the network. The bill referred to the public's sense of 'self preservation' that had led to a mounting 'public opinion' in favour of political action to counter the threat of 'degeneration' by supporting eugenic research.<sup>56</sup>

Political support was as strong as that from science. When the bill was put forward, in January 1920, it was signed by some of the country's most powerful politicians, including the leaders of the Social Democrats and the Conservative coalition, Hjalmar Branting and Arvid Lindman. Several politicians who were also scientifically well respected signed the bill. Wohlin, a professor of statistics, and Petrén have been mentioned above. The bill passed both chambers without much opposition. The Government Institute for Race Biology opened on 1 January 1922, with Lundborg as its director. Among the board members were those in the network who had been most involved in campaigning for the institute: Lennmalm, Nilsson-Ehle, Hultkrantz and Hofsten.<sup>57</sup>

## LUNDBORG'S EUGENIC VISION

This section focuses on Lundborg's eugenic views rather than on the network. It cannot be said that the members of the eugenics network shared all aspects of Lundborg's thinking; on the contrary, there is evidence that they did not. In Nilsson-Ehle Lundborg had an important ideological ally, but otherwise he was probably more extreme than many network members with his strong anti-modernist and racialist convictions. But by making Lundborg a professor and institute director the network had in effect made him the legitimate spokesman for eugenics in Sweden. Hence Lundborg's eugenic vision became, for more than a decade, the officially sanctioned eugenic vision in Sweden. Furthermore, there is evidence that it was shared by some influential members of the network that continued to evolve around the eugenics institute, for example the physicians and Nazi sympathizers Gösta Häggqvist (a member of the institute's board) and Torsten Sjögren (whom Lundborg wanted as successor).

After the institute had been founded, Lundborg continued to promote the scientific and professional standing of eugenics on both a national and a Nordic level. An early example of this was the campaign to wedge eugenics into the programme of the traditional Scandinavian science meetings. At the 1916 meeting in Copenhagen, genetics (*arvelighetsforskning*) was introduced on the agenda and drew large crowds.<sup>58</sup> At the next meeting in Gothenburg in 1923 the genetics section included eugenics ('race biology'), with Lundborg as the Swedish chair. This arrangement, which gave eugenics a more prominent role than earlier, depended on the support of Nilsson-Ehle, whose enormous scientific prestige again proved vital for the eugenic cause.<sup>59</sup>

In the mid 1920s Lundborg wished to create some kind of royal academy for eugenics, an idea that was criticized within the network, not least because Lundborg thought that membership should be limited to those of Nordic descent and Christian faith.<sup>60</sup> In 1925 Lundborg managed to organize a Nordic conference that resulted in the creation of a Nordic Association for Anthropology. The meeting at Uppsala became a manifestation of Nordic eugenic supremacist propaganda and of the political aspirations of the emerging profession.<sup>61</sup> However, the association was a failure and did not reconvene.<sup>62</sup>

Lundborg's efforts to organize Swedish and Nordic eugenics therefore had mixed results. Unlike Nilsson-Ehle, who was a charismatic leader with several devoted disciples, he never managed to create a strong research school or stable organizations (the institute itself turned out to be rather ineffective). Lundborg was, however, an untiring propagandist who continued to publicize the eugenic vision by extravagant means throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. For Lundborg, as for foreign colleagues from Galton to Günther, eugenics was something akin to a world view, a science deeply coloured by political ambition and ideology.

In Lundborg's case the world view was radically right-wing, and he emphasized the genetic superiority of the 'Nordic' race and of social elites within that race (believing proletarians, for example, to be degenerate).<sup>63</sup> As we have seen he was careful not to appear anti-Semitic, but in private he did flaunt anti-Semitic opinions and was, as early as 1924, clandestinely supporting a National Socialist group in Sweden, explaining to its leader that the only reason he had kept pretty 'neutral' so far was that he had consciously avoided the Jewish question for 'tactical reasons'.<sup>64</sup> In the 1930s both Lundborg and Nilsson-Ehle supported the Hitler regime. With his strong belief in the racial superiority of the Nordic peasant stock, and his antipathy to industrialism, Lundborg may be placed in the blood-and-soil tradition promoted by Walther Darré and Erwin Baur.<sup>65</sup>

The idea of the racial superiority of social elites, including scientists, and of the peasant stock was promoted in what may be called 'eugenic coffee-table books'. These books, adhering to an established anthropological tradition, were directed at a middle-class audience and were also given away during campaigns to summon support and funding for the cause. Several of them were published in English and German so as to reach an international audience, including potential donors (Lundborg hoped to attract philanthropists such as Henry Ford).<sup>66</sup>

The eugenic coffee-table books were patterned on similar works, with plates displaying national culture or nature. His own publications, Lundborg claimed, only took this genre to the next logical level by displaying the population itself with focus on its racial characteristics.<sup>67</sup> In these large books were images of people representing various racial mixtures and accompanying texts in which eugenics was explained and promoted. In *Swedish racial types (Svenska folktyper)* from 1919 (using imagery from the exhibition) Lundborg explained that eugenics had shown that there was a hierarchy among races, that the Nordic race was of better quality than the others, and that the Nordic element was more prominent in Sweden than in other countries.<sup>68</sup> In this, Lundborg drew not only on popular eugenic conceptions from Britain, the USA and Germany but also on the chauvinism that was an integral part of national romantic Swedish culture. The emphasis on the special racial strength of the peasantry was nourished by the folkloristic elements of contemporary nationalistic clichés (see below). Furthermore, Lundborg's claim that the Swedish peasants constituted the racial backbone of the nation resonated with political sensibilities in the newly democratic state.<sup>69</sup>

But Lundborg's views were mostly far from democratic. Time and again he returned to his theory of the biological evolution, in Sweden, of 'a natural aristocracy . . . , a middle class, and a lower class'.<sup>70</sup> The images of the rich and the mighty, and also of scientists and artists, that were displayed in the exhibition in 1919 (later also at the so-called Stockholm exhibition in 1930) and in the eugenic coffee-table books catered to political and economic benefactors and to academic colleagues by portraying them as members of a genetic and social and/or intellectual elite: 'a natural stratification occurs everywhere in the world. Those individuals who have profited from a more favourable combination of genes tend to rise, whereas those who have less favourable genes sink deeper.'<sup>71</sup> Lundborg saw this group, to which he himself belonged, as constituting a political leadership, proclaiming that 'it behoves us to become *advisers and helpers to races and peoples*'.<sup>72</sup>

This was what Lundborg *wrote*, but he also used imagery to promote his ideas, constructing a visual and textual discourse about the Swedish nation and its biological stratification. Photographic images were in a sense the bread and butter of Lundborg's research programme—he produced large number of them, using them as a complement to the biometric data also collected.<sup>73</sup> In the eugenic coffee-table books such photographs were used to illustrate various racial groups, or (presumed) hereditary afflictions such as criminality or alcoholism. But in addition Lundborg used images in a more subtle way. The images are a running visual commentary on the texts, broadening the message beyond what was actually said in words.

Figures 1 and 2 show images illustrating differences between racial groups, with some social categorizations mixed in as well. In figure 1 we see Nordic racial types and in figure 2 mixed racial types. These are represented by, on the one hand, a male and a 'lady' student, a 'scientist', and a 'manufacturer'; and, on the other, a 'manly' woman 'of

## NORDIC (TEUTONIC) TYPES



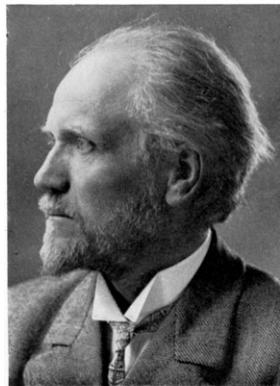
Student from Gottland.

Photo. H. Ljungkvist, Visby.



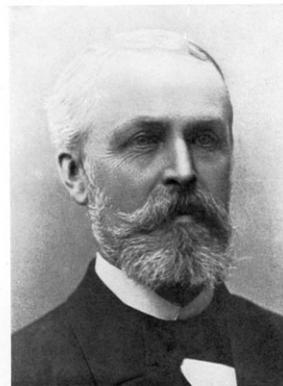
Lady-student.

Photo. H. Lundborg, Uppsala.



Swedish scientist.

Photo. Gerda Söderlund, Leksand.



Manufacturer.

Private collection.

Figure 1. These Nordic racial types are distinctly middle class. The 'scientist' is Professor Gustav Cassel, a well-known economist. (From Herman Lundborg and J. Runnström, *The Swedish nation in word and picture* (1921), plate IV.)

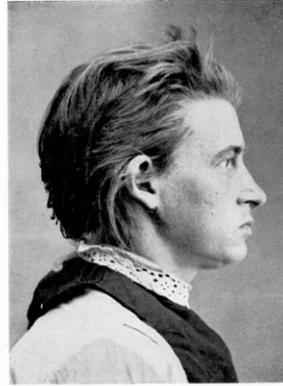
low standing' and two men of mixed race—one a 'workman' and the other a 'criminal'. The difference in race corresponds to a difference in class, detectable not only in the verbal descriptions but in the subjects' general appearance, in which the Nordic types are presented in typical middle-class portraits and the mixed types in 'mug shots' characteristic of the tradition of eugenic photography. This correlation between race and class was in line with Lundborg's eugenic model that included the dogma that mixture between 'higher' and 'lower' races produces degenerate offspring. Hence the images *show* what the verbal descriptions and the genetic theory *say*.<sup>74</sup>

Figures 3 and 4 exemplify the glorification of peasants in the national romantic style common in early twentieth-century Swedish art. We see a fisher girl from the south and an old man and two young women from Dalecarlia, a part of Sweden with emblematic status in the national romantic tradition. This national romantic view was expressed visually not least in the paintings by Anders Zorn, who was perhaps the best-known artist

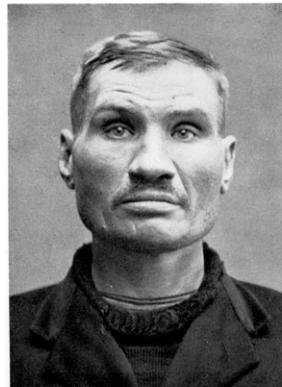
## SWEDISH MIXED-RACE TYPES



Woman of manly type, socially of low standing.  
Collect. of the Race-biological Institution, Uppsala.



The same.  
Collect. of the Race-biological Institution, Uppsala.



Workman, strongly race-mixed, of Finnish type.  
Collect. of the Race-biological Institution, Uppsala.

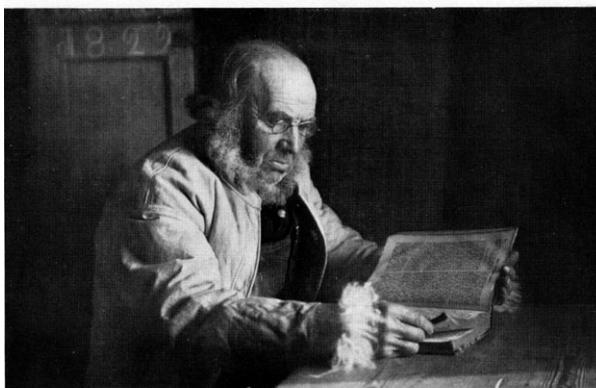


Gipsy with Finnish blood. Criminal.  
Collect. Thesleff.

Figure 2. The mixed-race types presented in Lundborg's work belonged to lower social strata and were sometimes, as in this case, ambivalent as to gender. (From Herman Lundborg and J. Runnström, *The Swedish nation in word and picture* (1921), plate X.)

in Sweden in the early twentieth century (and who happened also to be the most generous individual economic supporter of the 1919 exhibition). Art historians of the time liked to portray Zorn as the embodiment of the particular Swedish qualities that found expression in his many folkloristic paintings.<sup>75</sup> In a more general sense art was identified with a 'national spirit' in which Swedish art critics in the 1920s tended to identify rural subjects with the 'true' character of the nation and urban subjects with twisted artificiality.<sup>76</sup> This was also the view of the blood-and-soil eugenicist Lundborg, and his images of racial types made use of the visual rhetoric preferred by conservative art critics.

These images show how the visual discourse managed to convey more information and broader connotations than the verbal descriptions. The pure Nordic types appear not only as thriving and strong individuals, from a salt-of-the-earth type of rural stock, as one would expect given the eugenic presuppositions. They also convey images of cultural



Gammal dalkarl.

Dalarnes hembyggsförbunds samlingar.



Leksandskullor. Olika typer.

Foto. G. Heurlin, Stockholm.

Figure 3. Farmers or peasants are sometimes presented folkloristically by Lundborg. Such images alluded to positive values associated with Swedish national romanticism. (From Herman Lundborg, *Svenska folktyper* (1919), p. 95.)

heritage and national or regional tradition, in effect saying that the superior qualities of the Nordic race are reflected in its history and its culture.

Figure 5 shows examples of solid peasant and fisherman stock from the south of Sweden, the province of Scania (*Skåne*), conveying an image of brawny strength more than culture. Here, however, an interesting thing has happened: among the fishermen and the peasants, Nilsson-Ehle—indeed of peasant stock—appears, representing not himself or his science but the finest elements of his race. This very same photograph was used also in a publication edited by Lundborg, illustrating Nilsson-Ehle as a *scientist*.<sup>77</sup> The same man, even the same image, thus served the double purpose of illustrating the Nordic race and of lending scientific legitimacy to the eugenic cause. The subtext of this visual discourse is that eugenics was legitimate because it was supported by scientists with the finest racial qualities. The logic was as circular as the rhetoric was powerful. Portraits of other scientists were used in a similar fashion.<sup>78</sup>



Fiskarflicka från Skåne. Nordisk typ.

Foto. Alfr. B. Nilson, Malmö.

Figure 4. This 'fisher girl' illustrates the iconographical connection between eugenic and national romantic imagery. (From Herman Lundborg, *Svenska folktyper* (1919), p. 83.)

Historically it has been common to emphasize the disembodied and ascetic character of the scientist, with science deriving its authority from the world of spirit rather than that of the flesh.<sup>79</sup> However, Lundborg and other mainline eugenicists tended, in the tradition from Galton, to identify scientific prominence with biological supremacy, making genius a bodily trait that would legitimize not only the very science that explored human biology but also its ambition to guide social developments.<sup>80</sup>

The most elaborate example of eugenic portraiture in Lundborg's oeuvre was a book—the first in a planned series of which only one volume materialized—that he and a portrait artist produced towards the end of his career. *Swedes today* was a luxury edition produced in 450 numbered copies in a large folio format. It portrayed 45 men who represented various national elites, with short biographical notes containing biometric data, indicating racial characteristics.

Again, the pedagogic purpose of the collection was to convince the reader of the national importance of eugenics. The people portrayed were of the kind that Lundborg constantly lobbied for resources, for instance the banker and Conservative politician Knut



Typer från ett skånskt fiskläge.

Foto. Alfr. B. Nilson, Malmö.

Professor H. Nilsson-Ehle, bördig från Skåne.  
Enskild samling.Odalman från norra Skåne.  
Foto. O. Nilsson, Kristianstad.

Figure 5. The geneticist Herman Nilsson-Ehle appears among anonymous fishermen and a farmer from southern Sweden as a representative of the Nordic race. (From Herman Lundborg, *Svenska folktyper* (1919), p. 84.)

Wallenberg, who together with his wife was also the country's most important private financier of scientific research, including Lundborg's institute. There are several scientists in the book, among them Nilsson-Ehle, who now appeared simultaneously representing his race and his science, with the following description accompanying his portrait (figure 6): 'Blue eyes. Soft, straight, light blond hair. Body height 1695, length of head 197, breadth of head 158, breadth of zygoma 145 mm.'<sup>81</sup> The same measures were given for each of the subjects portrayed. Their accomplishments in science, art, politics, and so on, were thereby given a eugenic gloss that affected the visual message conveyed by their countenances. The imagery was depersonalized, not so much showing individual genius as genetic superiority, naturalizing the power of social and intellectual elites—to which many members of the eugenics network themselves belonged—in a manner similar to how national culture was naturalized in more folkloristic eugenic image production. This is as fine an example as any of the co-production of science and social order.



Figure 6. In this portrait Nilsson-Ehle again represents the Nordic race, but now in company with other members of Sweden's cultural, political, economic and scientific elites depicted in the same volume. (From Herman Lundborg and Ivar Kramke, *Svenskar i nutiden* (1934), plate 31.)

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Swedish eugenics network sought to establish the legitimacy of the new specialty simultaneously in both a scientific and a political sense. In doing so it aimed to legitimize and naturalize the biopolitical power of eugenics and eugenicists. We may identify some important factors behind the network's initial success. First, it was situated at the interface between political and scientific elites, two groups whom Lundborg courted with his notion of 'natural aristocracy'. Not only were most members of the network scientifically well respected and well connected, but they also had a number of colleagues in parliament and other high places whom they could approach on an equal social footing (probably exploiting established personal ties). This made it possible for the network's members to influence both science and politics simultaneously—in an attempt to reshape both.

A second important factor was the skilful use of media strategies. Backstage political lobbying was supplemented by various forms of front-stage media exposure—sometimes directed towards the 'general public', sometimes towards more limited audiences. The meaning of the concept 'general public' in this case is complex. Obviously the

network was interested in influencing the views and behaviour of the middle class. At the same time it is clear that the very *idea* of popular support was as important as gaining 'actual' popular influence (which was anyway not measurable). The exhibition in 1919, the press reports regarding this event and the network's publications all evoked the impression that there existed a popular demand for eugenic reform. This impression was translated into *political* demands through the bill in 1920, in which it was said that physicians and researchers who insisted that a eugenics institute be created were backed by 'a strong public opinion that cannot be silenced in the long run'.<sup>82</sup>

Third, the academic legitimacy of eugenics was strengthened with the creation of academic platforms nationally and on the Nordic level—mostly with the help of a close association with genetics, on which eugenics was riding piggy-back. This connection was made possible by the fact that leading geneticists—most importantly Nilsson-Ehle—were firm supporters of the eugenic cause and acted as pillars of the eugenics network. Here, however, the eugenicists were less successful once the institute had been founded and they had to prove their own organizational capabilities.

Fourth, although this is as hard to measure as popular support, Lundborg and some network colleagues provided a coherent ideological framework exalting the racial qualities of the middle classes and parts of the rural population and naturalizing the power position of various mostly professional elites. However, full acceptance of Lundborg's vision would have entailed subsuming politics under biology, and in Sweden eugenics never came close to such a position.

With the establishment of eugenics, science and policy simultaneously changed their aspects. Science now included mainline eugenics within its boundaries, whereas welfare policy could use eugenic concepts as scientifically legitimate foundations for reform. However, in the longer run Lundborg's eugenic vision became politically problematic, not least because of the developments in Germany. Continued political support was assured only after 1935, when Lundborg retired and was replaced by a left-wing geneticist opposed to mainline eugenics. This was a (Social Democratic) government decision overriding an academic evaluation committee that had recommended Torsten Sjögren, the Nazi sympathizer, as a successor to Lundborg.<sup>83</sup> The Third Reich utterly changed the political meaning of eugenics; only after ideological reinterpretation was it possible for its co-production with welfare policies to continue. In Sweden this meant, among other things, a rejection of policies founded on the idea of the racial superiority of the academic middle class ('tasting of Nazism') and a continued support of forced sterilization on eugenic grounds.<sup>84</sup>

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- 77 Lundborg and Runnström, *op. cit.* (note 63), plate opposite p. 96.

- 78 Oscar Montelius is another case. See Lundborg and Runnström, *op. cit.* (note 63), plate opposite p. 8; Herman Lundborg and F. J. Linders, *The racial character of the Swedish nation: anthropologia suecica* (Almqvist & Wiksell, Uppsala, 1926), plate 6.
- 79 Christopher Lawrence and Steven Shapin, 'Introduction: the body of knowledge', in *Science incarnate: historical embodiments of natural knowledge* (ed. Christopher Lawrence and Steven Shapin), pp. 1–19 (University of Chicago Press, 1998); Steven Shapin, 'The philosopher and the chicken: on the dietetics of disembodied knowledge', in *ibid.*, pp. 21–50.
- 80 Benoît Godin, 'From eugenics to scientometrics: Galton, Cattell, and men of science', *Social Stud. Sci.* **37**, 691–728 (2007).
- 81 Herman Lundborg and Ivar Kamke, *Svenskar i nutiden* (P. A. Norstedt & Söner, Stockholm, 1934), p. 27.
- 82 *Op. cit.* (note 55), p. 12.
- 83 Broberg 1995, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 60–72.
- 84 Broberg and Tydén, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 81–82; Tydén, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 97.