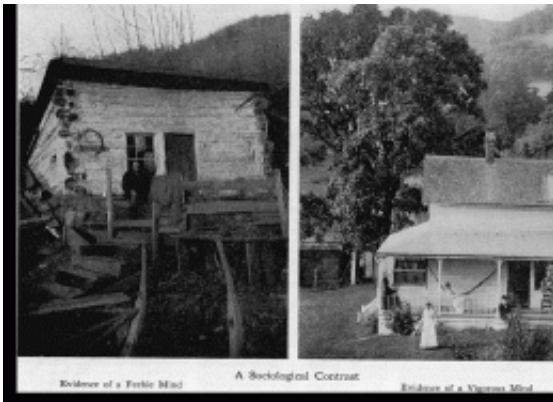


UNH researcher discovers research manipulated to support pro-eugenic beliefs

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Gesell's unflattering photo of Abraham Schmocker, depicted as "evidence of feeble mind," that was contrasted with unidentified photo as "evidence of vigorous mind" that residents said appeared to be the Gesell home.

A University of New Hampshire researcher has discovered that a former Yale professor who espoused pro-eugenic beliefs manipulated his research findings so he could conclude that his Wisconsin home town was overflowing with mentally and morally "unfit" people.

Benjamin Harris, professor of psychology and affiliate professor of history at UNH, has found that Yale psychologist Arnold Gesell manipulated the photographic record by selectively choosing photos to make his pro-eugenic case in his piece "The Village of a Thousand Souls." Published in 1913 in "The American Magazine," the widely read

article accused Gesell's hometown of Alma, Wisc., of being overrun with "hereditary defectives."

Harris's discovery of Gesell's deception is detailed in the most recent issue of the journal *History of Psychology*, published by the American Psychological Association.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Gesell was widely regarded as the nation's foremost authority on child rearing and development, and developmental quotients based on his development schedules were widely used as an assessment of children's intelligence, according to the Encyclopedia of Psychology. "Until Benjamin Spock emerged in the late 1940s as an advice-giver, Arnold Gesell's guides to child development were the manuals of choice for the nation's mothers," Harris said.

In "The Village of a Thousand Souls," Gesell called for the observation and segregation of the "unfit" as a eugenic measure. Harris discovered that Gesell manipulated the photographic record to support his thesis, even substituting a photo of a different town because it showed a "saloon" sign that was lacking in Alma.

Gesell's research relied on his father's collection photographs documenting decades of life in Alma, Wisc. Gesell's father, Gerhard Gesell, owned photo studio in the town for many years, and his collection included images of streets of respectable-looking buildings, parades of automobiles on those streets for holidays, and groups of children and adults enjoying everyday life in a riverside town.

"What Gesell selected, however, were images selected to support his thesis that the town was degenerate," Harris said.

For example, Gesell juxtaposed two photos. One shows a seeming tramp in front of a shack, identified as "Evidence of a Feeble Mind." The

second photo is of a tidy frame house, well-kept yard, and four well-dressed people enjoying leisure time. The second photo is captioned "Evidence of a Vigorous Mind."

Harris discovered that the first photograph alleging "evidence of a feeble mind" was actually a photo of one of Alma's early settlers, Abraham Schmocker, taken in the mid-1800s.



Main Street of The Village of a Thousand Souls

"Main Street of the Village of a Thousand Souls" that actually was Reeds Landing, Minn. The photo was used because Reeds Landing's Main Street had a saloon. Alma, Wisc., did not.



Close up of "Main Street of the Village of a Thousand Souls" that shows the Saloon on Main Street in Reeds Landing, Minn.

"An alternate view of Schmocker also was available, showing him holding what appears to be a pet cat. That photo shows a bucket, washtub and washboard, making Schmocker seem to be taking care of himself. Because it's more of a close-up, one can also see more easily that it is a roughly made cabin—rather than a neglected house. But Arnold used the less humanizing photo and placed it next to one of a more urban family, taken 20 to 25 years later," Harris said.

Moreover, the unidentified home in the second photo that purported to show "evidence of a vigorous mind" was apparently thought to be the Gesell house, which infuriated local residents.

In another instance of research manipulation, Gesell used a photo of a neighboring town, Reeds Landing, Minn., that was purported to be

"Main Street of the Village of a Thousand Souls."

"Why substitute a photo from another town if the article is about Alma's qualities? The mystery of this photo substitution lasts only long enough for one to see the sign above the heads of the groups on the right side of the street: SALOON," said Harris, who could not find a single photo of Alma that showed a saloon in the Gerhard Gesell photo collection at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

"Thus Arnold Gesell manipulated the photographic evidence to fit the sociological message that saloons were both a symptom and a cause of feeble-mindedness," he said.

Although Gesell did not advocate eugenic sterilization, Harris said, his article spoke to the discussion taking place in states over possible eugenic legislation. These included Wisconsin, where Gesell grew up and where the legislature debated and passed two eugenic restriction laws in 1913. One mandated medical exams for those wishing to marry, which was challenged in court but took effect the following year. The other authorized the sterilization of the institutionalized mentally retarded and state prison inmates.

Provided by University of New Hampshire

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