

21ST CENTURY EUGENICS

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow, www.disabilityisnatural.com

In *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (www.waragainstheweb.com), author Edwin Black describes in horrific detail, "How American corporate philanthropies launched a national campaign of ethnic cleansing in the United States, helped found and fund the Nazi eugenics of Hitler and Mengele—and then created the modern movement of 'human genetics.'" Of course, these efforts weren't called "ethnic cleansing," but "cure and prevention," "strengthening society," and other acceptable euphemisms. American eugenicists targeted a variety of groups—including people with disabilities—in the first half of the 20th Century. And while millions were being exterminated by the Nazis, the Americans continued their work, as they admired Hitler's success. The American Eugenics Movement died a very slow death—it was discounted only after the Nuremberg Trials exposed the "science" of eugenics as the basis for mass murder.

Published in 2003, this book is an eye-opening window into the past *and* the future. In one of the last chapters—"Eugenics Becomes Genetics"—Black writes: "The world is now filled with dedicated genetic scientists ...[who] fight against genetic diseases [and] help couples bear better children...Most of the twenty-first century's genetic warriors are unschooled in the history of eugenics...Few if any are aware that in their noble battle against the mysteries and challenges of human heredity, they have inherited the spoils of the war against the weak."

Black's book is sadly prophetic, as evidenced by the Combating Autism Act signed by President Bush in December 2006 and the January 2007 recommendation from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) that "all pregnant women, regardless of their age, should be offered screening for Down syndrome."

Known in polite circles as "cure and prevention," these acts essentially represent 21st Century eugenics: an effort to *eliminate* people with autism and Down

syndrome. These frightening developments represent the unabashed devaluation of men and women and boys and girls—our fellow citizens—who happen to have these particular medical diagnoses.

Is all genetic research potentially harmful? No—finding a cure for a fatal condition can save lives. But autism, Down syndrome, and most other developmental disabilities are not diseases, nor do they cause death. If asked, most people with life-threatening conditions would probably say they support the cure/prevention of their condition.

But were people with autism or Down syndrome *asked if they wanted to be cured or if their births and/or conditions should have been prevented?* Probably not—because the "experts" would most likely say

If there is anything that we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves.

C. G. Jung

people with autism or Down syndrome couldn't understand the question, much less provide an intelligent response! How *do* people with autism and Down syndrome feel about this—to

have others (including your own parents, perhaps) believe you're not okay the way you are, and they want you to be different? *Shouldn't we care how they feel?*

The Combating Autism Act was the result of energetic advocacy by autism groups, parents, and others, and it authorizes nearly \$1 billion over the next five years for research, prevention, and treatment. Children and adults with autism may soon be subjected to "new and improved" treatments *they never asked for*, while researchers, scientists, laboratories, and others will reap financial rewards.

But how else could that nearly \$1 billion be spent? How about providing children and adults with autism with communication tools, educating teachers on how to include and teach kids with autism in the real world of general ed classrooms, training employers on appropriate accommodations for employees with autism, and/or providing individualized supports for people with autism and their families? Why don't we change the way *we think*, instead of trying to change people with autism?

2 - 21st Century Eugenics

The Combating Autism Act is also a response to the “epidemic” of autism. But in *Unstrange Minds: Remapping the World of Autism*, author Roy Richard Grinker, an anthropologist and the father of a child with autism, examines whether a broader definition of autism, school data collection, “relabeling,” and other factors have contributed to the “epidemic” status.

It wasn't hard to see how this Act was so easily passed: parents of children with autism have been portrayed as grieving, sad, unable to cope, and more, while children and adults with autism have been portrayed in ways that generate pity and other negative attitudes. Who's responsible for these portrayals? Advocates and parents! But *adults with autism* are speaking out against these assaults, including the demeaning “puzzle” logo used by autism groups. People with autism are *not* like a jigsaw puzzle with a missing piece!

Back to the Down syndrome issue: ACOG does not include *justification* for its recommendation. The organization must assume parents wouldn't want a “defective” baby, which probably reflects the *personal* bias of physicians. And since the test is estimated to cost at least \$1,000 per patient, those who manufacture and administer the tests must be jumping for joy!

While the major autism groups support the Combating Autism Act, at least one of the major Down syndrome groups has come out *against* the ACOG recommendation. Why the difference? Because autism is “so different” from Down syndrome? No. It seems this has more to do with the *attitudes* of parents about their child's condition. (But several parents of children with autism have shared their *anger* that our government will be waging war against their children!)

Can raising a child with a disability be difficult at times? Yes, but so what? Aren't our children worth whatever difficulties we might face? Most parents

recognize the *benefits*: my 20-year-old son with a significant developmental disability has taught me so much—he's made me a better human being!

My heart aches for all those who are marginalized and devalued under the guise of “cure and prevention.” It's hard to fathom how deeply this must hurt. How can we be so insensitive to others' feelings? But I'm also concerned about the reactions of the general public. For example, if a general ed teacher thinks a child with Down syndrome *shouldn't have been born* (due to the availability of testing), will she see much

value in teaching the child? And with the Combating Autism Act, teachers, employers, or others may now have all the justification they need—authorized by the federal government, no less—to exclude, marginalize, and devalue children and adults with autism.

Disability advocates have justifiably screamed their disgust at the recent news about the “growth attenuation treatment” of Ashley, the “Pillow Angel.” But are those who support the Combating Autism Act and the ACOG recommendation very different than Ashley's parents?

During the American Eugenics Movement, some experts targeted people who wore glasses, as it was thought this “genetic trait” could

lead to blindness, an “undesirable” characteristic in the gene pool. Today, people with autism and Down syndrome are being targeted. *Who will be next?* We must speak out and take action against the devaluation, marginalization, and the *genocide* of people with disabilities that are perpetrated under the guise of “cure and prevention.”

Would the world be a better place if there were no more people with autism or Down syndrome? No, it would not. We would be a *careless* society. And we would lose the precious smiles, loving hearts, and unique gifts of each and every human being who happens to have Down syndrome or autism. We would also lose a part of our own humanity.

First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Communist.
Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for me
and there was no one left
to speak out for me.
Pastor Martin Niemöller