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ABSTRACT

James Alfred Field's enthusiastic survey on the "Progress of Eugenics," published in 1911 on the Quarterly Journal of Economics, is usually referred to as evidence of the pervasiveness of eugenic and biologically deterministic arguments among Progressive Era social scientists. Over the years, however, Field substantially changed his position and in a series of subsequent articles and addresses, posthumously collected in the volume Essays on *Population and Other Papers* (1931), he revealed an increasing uneasiness towards the claims of the eugenists. The aim of this note is to offer a reconstruction of his intellectual path, from his early advocacy of eugenics to his mature and disenchanted views on eugenic selection, population planning, and birth control.

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> [I]n his more mature years the idea of a "science" of eugenics had been put to enough critical tests, and the eugenics movement itself had embodied enough vagaries, to give even those most cordially inclined towards it some pause. (Wolfe 1931, 786)

1. The issue

Virtually every scholarly account of American eugenics during the so-called Progressive Era includes a reference to James Alfred Field's monograph-length survey on the "Progress of Eugenics," published in 1911 on the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.[1] Field, then a professor of economics at Chicago, made his stance on the matter crystal clear from the outset. Eugenics, he wrote (1911, 1-2) in the opening paragraph, "is [one of the most] hopeful application[s] of science in social reform," and he was pleased to announce that the "popular apathy" which the discipline encountered in the past had now given way to a movement of "widespread attention and interest." Field was part of this movement. He was responsible for introducing

CONTACT Luca Fiorito luca.fiorito.1967@gmail.com Luca Fiorito, University of Palermo, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Via Maqueda, 324, 90134, Palermo, Italy.
This paper draws and expands upon section III of Fiorito and Erasmo (2022a, 2022b), which mostly focuses on the relationship between Field and Thomas Nixon Carver at Harvard. This paper analyses more systematically Field's contribution and his evolving views on eugenics, also placing him in the context of the department of economics at the University of Chicago. I thank two anonymous referees for comments that helped me to improve the manuscript. The usual disclaimers apply.
[1] See, among several others, Hasian 1996, Rosen 2004, Lombardo 2008, and Luczak 2015.

the teaching of eugenics into the department of economics at Chicago and, outside academia, he was an active member of the Committee on Immigration of the Eugenics Section of the American Genetic Association.[2] It is not surprising, then, to see Field's name enlisted among the eugenic enthusiasts of the period and to find his 1911 literature review cited regularly as evidence of the influence of eugenics on Progressive Era reform impetus (Leonard 2005a, 2005b). This, however, it is only a part of the whole story. Over the years, in fact, Field substantially changed his position and in a series of subsequent articles and addresses, posthumously collected in the volume Essays on *Population and Other Papers* (1931), he revealed an increasing uneasiness towards the claims of the eugenists. The aim of this note, so to speak, is to do justice to Field, by offering a reconstruction of his intellectual path, from his early advocacy of eugenics to his mature and disenchanted views on eugenic selection, population planning, and birth control.

2. Early contributions

James Alfred Field was born in Milton, Massachusetts, on May 26, 1880. He was the second of three brothers, the sons of James Alfred Field and Caroline Leslie (Whitney) Field. After attending Milton Academy, Field entered Harvard College in 1899, receiving in 1903 an A.B. degree, summa cum laude in economics. The following year he was appointed Austin Teaching Fellow in Economics. In addition to the teaching of the introductory course in political economy, Field was assigned the assistantship to Thomas Nixon Carver's biology-infused course on social problems. A fine theorist and a charismatic teacher, Carver was the one who introduced Field to the literature on population and eugenics—an intellectual debt which Field acknowledged throughout his life (Fiorito and Erasmo 2022a).[3] In August 1905 Field followed the path of many young scholars of the time and left Harvard for a year-long study tour of Europe. He first stayed in Berlin, where he attended the lectures of Georg Simmel, Gustav Schmoller, and the polymath historian Kurt Breysig. He then travelled through Germany, France, and England. Once in London Field found the opportunity to visit Karl Pearson, English eugenicist and founding father of modern statistical theory, at the Eugenics Laboratory at the University of London (Field 1931, xxii). In the autumn of 1906, Field returned to Harvard to pursue graduate work under Carver. Although he had been first attracted by "discussions of eugenics" (149), he eventually decided to devote his research efforts to the history of population debates, a topic that had been suggested by Carver himself. What came out of Field's pen was a lengthy manuscript on "The Malthusian Controversy in England," an essay prepared with the idea of using it as a doctoral dissertation and which was only posthumously published.[4]

[2] In addition to Field, the Committee included Alexander E. Cance (Amherst), Irving Fisher (Yale), Robert DeCourcy Ward (Harvard, and the prominent Boston lawyer Prescott F Hall—all committed eugenists and anti-immigration activists.

[3] On Carver's commitment eugenics see Fiorito and Orsi 2017.

[4] See Field (1931, 1-87).

In the summer of 1908, when he had abandoned the idea of completing his PhD, Field was offered a position in the Department of Political Economy at the University of Chicago, which he immediately accepted. Upon his arrival at Chicago, Field took over the newly established course on "Population Theory," one of the first specifically devoted to the topic to be offered in the US.[5] The university catalogue described it in 1908 as a "study of population as the basis of economic society" with a specific focus on "such present-day phenomena as the relatively slight propagation of the well-to-do classes [and] the eugenics movement" (Fiorito and Nerozzi 2018). The following year the course changed its name to "Population, the Standard of Living, and Eugenics," and so remained until 1924. At Chicago Field was also the author, along with his department colleagues Leon C. Marshall and Chester W. Wright, of the introductory textbook *Outlines of Economics* (Marshall, Wright, and Field 1910). The book had a section on population, plausibly written by Field, which invited students to discuss aspects explicitly related to eugenics and the biological quality of population:

> In general, is it disadvantageous for society that the educated, successful, and well-to-do classes should be characterized by a comparatively low marriage-rate and an extremely low birth-rate? Why? Can strictly hereditary human characteristics be distinguished from the influences of parental example, education, and the environment in general? In the interest of social reform is it important that we should be able to make the distinction? Why? The new science of eugenics 'deals with those social agencies that influence, mentally or physically, the racial qualities of future generations.' In practice, eugenic reform may attempt primarily either (a) to encourage the increase of the best elements in the population, or (b) to prevent the increase of the worst. Which policy seems to you more likely to be successful?" (Marshall, Wright, and Field 1910, 23–24)

The *Outlines* were shortly complemented by another volume, *Materials for the Study of Elementary Economics* (1913), a collection of primary sources intended to "acquaint the student with economic principles as they are manifested in the tangible facts of economic life." The section on "Human Beings as Economic Factors" was made up of excerpts from the eugenic literature of the period, such as Richard Dugdale's famous study on the Jukes family (1877), and Irving Fisher's report on "National Vitality" (1909). Incidentally, it is worth noting that, like Field, both Marshall and Wright had been students of Carver at Harvard, although Field was the only one who stayed in touch with his mentor over the years. There is an interesting episode in this connection. In 1909 Field had reviewed Alfred P. Schultz's *Race or Mongrel* (1908), a blatantly racist contribution to the anti-immigration cause, for the *Journal of Political Economy*.[6] In his anonymous four lines review, Field (1909, 238) had dismissed Schultz's study as "a negligible book which advocates with hysterical fanaticism and without scholarship the familiar view of the extreme anthropologists that racial impurity is the source of all evil."[7] The following year, Carver, then secretary of the American Economic Association, wrote Filed in regard to a proposed

[5] According to Albert B. Wolfe (1928, 532), the first courses on population in the US were offered "at the University of Chicago by the late J. A. Field, at the University of Wisconsin by E. A. Ross, and at Oberlin College by the present writer.".

[6] The long subtitle of the book left no doubt as to its overt racist content: "a brief history of the rise and fall of the ancient races of earth: a theory that the fall of nations is due to intermarriage with alien stocks: a demonstration that a nation's strength is due to racial purity: a prophecy that America will sink to early decay unless immigration is rigorously restricted.".

symposium on immigration. In that occasion, Carver suggested his pupil a more cautious attitude towards Schultz's book, on the ground that there was a "good deal of confusion and a great many conflicting opinions on this question [race and immigration], and there are doubtless some people who think that such a book as 'Race or Mongrel' has some scientific basis."[8] Field eventually declined the invitation to join the forthcoming round table on immigration but a few weeks later he was willing to accept Carver's proposal to write a survey on eugenics for the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.[9]

3. Surveying eugenics

Quite predictably, Field's review of eugenics scholarship opened with the work of Francis Galton.[10] Writing on the same year of Galton's death, Field praised the father of modern eugenics for having elevated the discipline to the status of a fully recognised and rigorous science. In Hereditary Talent and Character (1865) and in later works, he reconstructed, Galton had laid down the methodological foundations of his approach. To derive inferences as to the transmissibility of certain traits, one should measure them as accurately as possible and then compare the measurements between individuals of known degree of kinship using statistical methods. Accordingly, Galton "went on to show by a mass of biographical evidence how strikingly the frequent occurrence of able sons of able men indicates that mental qualities, quite as much as physical traits, are subject to the principles of natural inheritance" (Field 1911, 4-5). This procedure did not contain the potential for unveiling the "theory of heredity," but appeared to grant a role for the entire history of a family line in influencing the traits of the present generation. Galton, Field concluded (23), "had been given the rare experience of foreseeing and announcing a new branch of knowledge in advance of his generation," and yet, "of living to see a subsequent generation overtake his idea and gratefully adopt it." Among this new wave of eugenic research, Field distinguished between Mendelism and biometry as two distinct and opposing ways of explaining inheritance and evolution. For the disciples of Mendel, who had been rediscovered in or around 1900, the cardinal principle of heredity was the segregation of discrete "unit characters" that either appear completely or not at all in the "bodily make-up" of an individual. "In so far as inheritance is in this way alternative," Field

[7] Field attributed to himself the authorship of the review in his correspondence with Carver. See James A. Field to Thomas N. Carver, May 12, 1910. American Economic Association Records, 1886: Box 12. Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library.

[8] Thomas N. Carver to James A. Field, June 3, 1910, American Economic Association Records, 1886: Box 12. Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library.

[9] The idea of a survey on eugenics came from Carver, who at the time was associate editor of the Quarterly Journal of Economics, but it also must have had the consent of its charismatic editor, Frank W. Taussig. Like Carver, Taussig had in several occasions expressed public approbation for eugenics and its practices. On the eugenics network at Harvard see Fiorito (2019).

[10] While Field (1911, 8) associated Galton to the beginning of the "modern eugenic movement," he also discussed at some length the contribution of a few pioneers of eugenics, in particular that of William Rathbone Greg. In 1868 he responded to Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) with an article in *Fraser's Magazine*, "On the failure of 'Natural Selection' in the case of Man" (Greg 1868). Darwin referred to Greg's article, and responded, in The Descent of Man (1871, 173). Significantly, Field included an extract from Greg's article in the Materials for the Study of Elementary Economics (Marshall. Wright, and Field 1913, 112-118).

(32) noted, "the intermediate blending of unit characteristics is precluded." Biometricians, instead, predicated an actuarial approach to eugenics, based on the assumption that traits are incremental variations from an intermediate norm which could be computed along normal frequency distribution curves. Unlike the follower of Mendel, the biometrician "does not ask questions to be answered by 'yes' or 'no,' [but] by 'to what extent?' and expresses his answer numerically in a coefficient of correlation."

Field did not express a definite preference for either one of the two competing approaches. He was willing to concede that the work of the biometrics school, led by Pearson and his associates at the Galton Laboratory in London, is "that which most closely links itself with Galton's inquiries." Specifically, Field singled out Pearson's (1904) attempt to extend the use of the correlation analysis Galton had adopted for the inheritance of physical traits (such as height), to show that heredity was at work also in the transmission of mental and moral characteristics.[11] Although the statistical test Parson devised was problematic on grounds of bias and incompleteness, the evidence he provided was in the main convincing and "still further shifted the burden of proof toward those who denied the transmissibility of mental endowments" (26)[12] Ultimately, Field (32-33) noted, biometrics may yield results broadly corresponding to those of the Mendelians, but only when the characteristics under scrutiny are complex groups of "undistinguished" traits which can be treated as statistical averages. Conversely, correlation methods afford at best a "blind and clumsy" way of dealing with single unit characters. "If the unit-character theory continues to gain ascendency, as now seems likely," Field warned, the "authority of the biometricians will decline," and the research produced from the Galton Laboratory will shortly come into disrepute. Yet, even if biometrics were to succumb, "it will have served a useful purpose by its example of quantitative work … at a time when the scientific pretensions of eugenics had still to be established."

The survey continued with a nonpartisan review of the most recent literature on eugenics. Field found that the task of systematic research along Mendelian lines had been largely left to American eugenists. Accordingly, he indulged in an extended discussion of *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* (1911) by Charles B. Davenport, director of Cold Spring Harbour Laboratory and founder the Eugenics Record Office in 1910.[13] The author, Field (1911, 53) opined, "is so committed to the current Mendelian interpretation of heredity … that the characteristic view-point of the Galtonian school is almost ignored." Field did not deny the significance of the results presented in the volume, but he felt that Davenport's propagandist zeal had overshadowed many of the methodological difficulties inherent in Mendelism. He recognised

[11] On Pearson's statistical approach to eugenics and on his biased explorations in human heredity see the discussion in Peart and Levy 2005.

[12] Pearson had obtained teachers' estimates of the mental and moral characters of school children, as well as their physical measurements, and then he studied the degree of inheritance indirectly through "fraternal" resemblance. "My argument," he explained (1904, 133), "was of this kind. Regarding one species only, then if the fraternal resemblance for the moral and mental characters be less than, equal to, or greater than fraternal resemblance for the physical characters, we may surely argue that parental inheritance for the former set of characters is less than, equal to, or greater than that for the latter set of characters.".

[13] Davenport's volume appeared in print only in late 1911 and Field's discussion was based on a "reading of advance sheets kindly furnished by the publishers.".

that the unit-character approach, based on the assumption of a one-to-one relationship between a phenotypic character and a Mendelian gene, has successfully explained many phenomena of inheritance. Nevertheless, where the unit characters themselves cannot be adequately disentangled—as in the case of Davenport's complex notion of "general mental ability"—then the results appear to be of "very much less scientific credibility" (55). This cautious attitude becomes more pronounced in the conclusions, showing that Field's advocacy of eugenics was not as uncritical as standard historiography implies. Eugenics, he conceded (63), has reasserted the "privilege of birth," and it is by no means surprising to find its leading advocated, from Galton down, to propose an "aristocratic social order" of a novel kind. In Field's view (64), to put it in modern jargon, the problem is that biological competition is fundamentally a zero-sum game—to the extent that "every preferment of the abler members of a community is tantamount to a degradation of the less gifted." In the search for a more "humane method of social amelioration," Field (67) concluded with a tone of hope, the biologist and the economist must work side by side: "health and strength and intellect work out the good or ill fortunes of their possessors according to the ways of economic civilization, and not by process of brute struggle for existence." In the end, "eugenics is not mere biology … the problems of eugenics are problems of human society."

4. The unmaking of an eugenist

Field's survey had a significant impact in academia, especially within the social sciences. Suffice it to say that it was included, in abridged form, both in Walton Hale Hamilton's Current Economic Problems (1914), and Albert B. Wolfe's Readings in Social Problems (1916)—two then popular collections of readings for students in economics and sociology. As anticipated, Field's position on eugenics changed substantially over the years and, even if he never went so far as to oppose eugenics in toto, he became more and more sceptical about its underlying principles and actual practicability. To be sure, this change in perspective was gradual. In a 1912 address on "Eugenics and Demography," for instance, Field (1931, 204) admonished his audience that much of the eugenist's claims rely too heavily on the "old-fashioned stock in trade of our ordinary compiled population statistics," and should not, therefore, "be received unquestioningly." Only through a closer "interchange of good offices" between demographers and eugenist, Field continued (205), will the latter be in a position to "contribute the results of their pioneering labors and share the promise of a new idea." A few years later, we find Field joining (with some caution) the chorus of those who had expressed concern for the dysgenic consequences of the war. "If there is any truth in the contention that modern warfare accomplishes an adverse selection through the slaughter of the physically bravest and best," he wrote (1917, 233), "then the new generation and through it posterity must be the continuance of an impoverished breed." As to the possible remedies, however, Field (237) did not believe in any sort of planned effort to rebalance fertility between classes: "the more recent eugenic ideal of race betterment is too abstract to appeal with practical force to the populace." It was in a 1924 paper entitled "Eugenic Worth and Economic

Value," read before the British Association for Advancement of Science in Toronto, that Field's disillusionment with eugenics most clearly came to the surface.

Field started with the "trite observation" (1931, 236) that the lower classes were reproducing at a higher rate than the middle and upper classes, with the consequent depopulation of the fittest elements of society relative to the less. "So we find salvation by eugenics preached like a new evangel," he went on, "in the hope that the able, the enterprising, the economically successful may thereby be induced to mend their ways and desist from a manner of life so opposed, seemingly, to the best interests of the race in the future." To Field's eyes, this assumed correspondence between economic success and biological superiority stems from an uncritical acceptance of Galton's "great-man theory of eugenics"—the idea since genius is scarce by definition, and since there can be no market value without scarcity, eugenic and economic incentives must be perfectly aligned. The flaws of such a theory, Field objected (240), are to be found in the difficulty of its application and in the "biological problem" it posed. First, if the eugenist succeeded in multiplying genius, he would cheapen its market price and destroy the "cult of greatness" associated with it. This would obviously make the "great-man formula of eugenic excellence … incompatible with exchange-value theory." But even if this were possible, and Field seems persuaded of the contrary, the problem of deciding which among the several individual qualities defining excellence should be bred would still confront the eugenist:

> There are all kinds of superlatives. Could a single race, actuated by a single eugenic ideal, breed to separate perfection all sorts of genius at once? Galton himself seems to have fallen into perplexity at this point, and to have made only a lame escape. "The aim of Eugenics," he concluded, "is to represent each class or sect by its best specimens; that done, to leave them to work out their common civilization in their own way" [1904, 2]. The proposal to represent each class by its best comes very near to a meaningless begging of the whole question. Perhaps Galton was tacitly thinking of types already somewhat defined in other ways—as types of economic specialization, for example. At all events, if these were left to themselves to work out their own destiny—intermarrying, and changing their standards as time went on—the result would probably be biological mediocrity as confused as the intentions that first set the experiment in motion. (240–241)

With his criticism of positive eugenics, the possibility of breeding a caste of biological excellence, Field sought to debunk the elitist pretensions of Galton and his followers, reducing the whole the eugenic discourse to its negative side, the elimination of the unfit.[14] The aim of a "more tenable conception of eugenics," he clarified (241), is the eradication from each future generation of "the most glaring and unquestioned defects of its predecessors." Such a negative eugenic program, he significantly added,

[14] Field even contemplated, half provocatively, to make "parenthood a separate vocation," suggesting that certain individuals, possessing desirable transmissible traits, should be delegated and economically compensated to engage in procreation for the benefits of society. In his view, however, this utopic plan would face two kinds of difficulties: "If we assume that eugenic merit lies in outstanding excellence of any one of many different sorts, specifically inherited and specifically transmitted by inheritance, then how can a few individuals, specifically fitted to be breeders, recruit the ranks of all the other diverse specialists? If on the other hand we propose to breed an all-around, versatile stock, and to train up specialists anew in each generation, on what inducement in the form of competitive economic remuneration can we depend to assure a due quota of breeders?".

"discards a defective minority to achieve a sound majority. Its preferred group is not a distinguished few, but a normal many."

In a subsequent paper, entitled "Paradoxes of Population Problems," Field decided to further distance himself from the biological determinism of most of his contemporaries, taking issue with the very notion of "race suicide"—the American eugenists' cry par excellence. Properly speaking, Field stated (275), the expression denotes the failure of the best population stock to perpetuate itself, either by "absolute non-propagation" or by "relatively slight increase," but according to a now "prevalent misconception" it has come to designate the non-reproduction of "successful" types. In the first sense, "the fact is of uncertain validity but of obvious significance;" in the second, "the fact is obvious but the significance is uncertain." This time, in addition to reiterating his critique of positive eugenics, Field did not spare the claims of negative eugenics either. While a consistent agenda of positive eugenics is "inconceivable in the world as we know it" (281). he now wrote, in many respects, "the ease of establishing a negative eugenic policy is illusory" (284). This for several reasons. First, he observed, in targeting a minority to be expunged, the eugenist is not immune from the taint of "invidious comparison" (285), an element which he considered inherent to human nature and fundamental in the chain of culture.[15] "We are all willing to admit that we are better than the poor wretches we desire to see cut off," Field sagaciously pointed out, but "it is not so easy for us to agree upon certain persons who are superior to ourselves." Eventually, "we are likely to favor types which have the virtues of our own class." Second, contrary to some oversimplified versions of Mendelism based on the segregation of independent and alternate unit characters, "certain dysgenic traits may be correlated with other characters of a highly desirable nature" (285), so making their eradication counterproductive. Third, no sound policy of negative eugenic reform can be framed independently of a positive eugenic ideal. Without a widely accepted standard of fitness, "it is quite possible that one may discover that qualities have been thrown out which later have been declared to be desirable" (285-286). Finally, eugenic reform is by definition a long-term program and as a consequence the "results which were sought after by one generation are likely to be unappreciated by the generation which enjoys them" (286).

Field was then ready to attack the views of those "protagonists of quality" who go so far as to contend that population quality is prior to its quantity, or, as he put it (289), that the "desirable number is that which makes it possible to realize desirable results in terms of quality." This could well be so, Field admitted, but a strong case can be made for the contrary view. Quantity may be of primary importance in struggles between groups in which quality, if it is to be perpetuated, must be backed up by a sufficient number of offsprings contributed to the next generation. "Unless the group can be protected in the process of evolution," Field wrote (290), "it may have to sacrifice quality to numbers." Nor he believed that a reduction in numbers,

[15] The expression "invidious comparison "seems to be directly associated with Thorstein Veblen, who made ample use of it in the Theory of the Leisure Class (1899). Veblen had already left Chicago at the time of Field's arrival and there is no evidence of a direct contact between the two. There is, however, the possibility of an indirect influence. Field was very close to Robert F. Hoxie, Veblen's most devoted pupil, who served as professor of Political Economy at Chicago from 1906 to 1916, the year of his sudden death. Field delivered an address at Hoxie's Memorial Meeting on December 11, 1916 (University Record 1917, 69-77).

especially among the lower segments of society, may bring a more equitable distribution of wealth. Field, who earlier in his life had served as first president of the Illinois Birth Control League, was now bothered by "simple and direct" (317) relation of birth control to poverty assumed by some contemporary apologists of neo-Malthusianism. He rejected the idea that a simple reduction of "occupational congestion" (a term he had borrowed from Carver) among unskilled workers could alleviate the problem of poverty. His rebuttal was grounded on such an explicit use of the relative income hypothesis that the relevant passage should be quoted at full length:

> What, we may ask, is poverty, and how much income must a man have to raise him above the poverty line. From a long-run view, poverty is not an absolute state, but one that varies with the time, the place, and the general conditions of well-being. Similarly, from the point of view of the individual, poverty is relative to what one has and what one would like to have. In a sense, one's degree of poverty depends upon the vividness of one's imagination. It is possible that the general level of economic welfare of a community may be raised or lowered by virtue of an increase or decrease in the number of individuals who compose it, and to that extent the economic motive of birth-control may be sound. But, in the more intimate meaning of poverty, as the failure to attain a standard of living which a person or a society deems the minimum of tolerance, something more than the mere limitation of numbers is necessary. We are accustomed to regard those at the bottom of the economic scale as poor, and so they often are in an absolute sense. But in a relative sense, those persons are poor also who fail to attain a minimum standard of living which they hold to be tolerable, and these suffer quite as much from the psychological inhibitions of poverty, even though in a physiological sense they may meet the test of adequate income. Poverty, in other words, is a function of economic inequality. (Field 1931, 317-318)[16]

The idea that poverty is the failure to attain a socially desirable standard was also reflected in Field's rejection Carver's notion of standard of life as the "number of desires which … take precedence over that group of desires which result in the multiplication of numbers" (Carver 1919, 393). Not only does such a strictly biological definition not apply to those individuals who have passed the age of procreation, but it also fails to explain the tendency, common among certain classes, to "live regularly above one's standard of living." According to Field (1931, 388-389), "Carver's definition seems to belittle the course of development of one's standard through life, by focusing the test on one point in life. Is one's decision to marry perhaps based on a plan and forecast of life?" Field discussed these themes in class, as documented by his outline of the "Standard of Living" course given in 1927, the year of his premature death.[17]

[16] There is an interesting aspect to be considered here. Field's "institutionalist" conception of poverty is also to be found, far more systematically treated, in Hazel Kyrk's celebrated *Theory of Consumption* (1923). Like Field, Kyrk (51) had defined poverty, not as a failure to maintain "physical efficiency," but as the inability to obtain the "minimum requirements for decency and self-respect according to the prevailing standards." Kyrk's book came out from her Ph.D. dissertation at Chicago for which Field had served as supervisor.

[17] The Chicago Sunday Tribune had an obituary for Field: "James Alfred Field, professor of economics at the University of Chicago, died on Friday [cf. The Associated Press reported that he died Saturday] in Boston from a tumor of the brain. He was returning from study at the British museum when he was stricken in Boston and died after a short illness. He was 47 years old" (Chicago Sunday Tribune 1917).

5. Conclusions

After the publication of the famous 1911 survey, Field's dissatisfaction towards eugenics grew in a sort of crescendo. It started with a somehow nuanced disapproval of the eugenists' tendency to draw sweeping conclusions from the limited evidence available to them, and developed into a full-blown criticism which became manifest in his 1924 address on "Eugenic Worth and Economic Value." It is an interesting coincidence that that very same year his "Population, the Standard of Living, and Eugenics" course at Chicago was split into a "Population" module, with no reference to eugenics left in its description, and a "Standard of Living" module, mostly devoted to the analysis and statistics of consumption. In his later contributions, to be sure, Field did not go to the extent of outright rejecting biology as a factor in human civilisation. His mature stance is well represented in the statement that "nature and nurture are not separate entities," but "mutually conditioning factors which are continually making and remaking men and societies" (1931, 283). During the 1920s this sort of ambivalent compromise was by no means uncommon among social scientists, especially sociologists, and it was accepted by the less extreme fringe of eugenists. Yet, from our reconstruction, one cannot fail to notice that after Field's strictures on both positive and negative eugenics, little was left of his original Galtonian enthusiasm on the possibilities of a biological engineering of society. This shift in Field's attitude has received little or no attention in the existing literature on eugenics, but it did not pass unnoticed by his contemporaries. Norman Himes, professor of economics at Colgate and one of the most outspoken supporters of eugenics of his times (Fiorito and Erasmo 2022a), reviewed Field's posthumous *Essays on Population and Other Papers* for the *Eugenics Review*. Himes, who had also been a student of Carver at Harvard and knew Field well, noted Field's unfortunate move from his initial "Galtonian idealism" to the "metaphysical" opposition to eugenics of the later works. Himes went on:

> The chapter on "Eugenic Worth and Economic Value" is unconvincing and vague. Field not infrequently poses unreal "contradictions" and "distinctions." The distinction between "poverty" and the "sense of poverty" … seems hair-splitting and irrelevant to the discussion. For Field is arguing against a self-erected strawman when he says that universalized birth control will not reduce the sense of poverty. I am not aware that anyone ever said it would. The person who is not poor, but who thinks he is, is a problem not for the economist, but for the psychiatrist. (1931, 259)

Himes' harsh words bear witness to the relevance of Field's intellectual journey and to the distance he had eventually placed between himself and the eugenists.

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