

**Dissertation Abstract: *Unsound: A Cultural History of Music and Eugenics***

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In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, music and eugenics entered into a powerful and dangerous alliance. *Unsound: A Cultural History of Music and Eugenics* uncovers a history of music, science, and politics that has not yet been told: of the psychology of music's imbrication in a eugenic research agenda bent on uncovering innate differences in human capacity, and of the continued mobilization of long-discredited musical race science in the present-day far right. The dissertation has two goals. The first is to clarify music's role in forming understandings of race and whiteness during an historical period (1869–1945) in which scientific and cultural constructions of race were shifting. The second and broader goal is to investigate how U.K and U.S. history has been shaped by these musical and scientific imaginaries, and in doing so, to theorize the role music plays in scientific and political argumentation.

The dissertation proceeds in a rough chronology: it begins by examining music's role in the origins of eugenics in mid-nineteenth century Britain (Chapter 1) and follows their interrelationship through eugenics's growth into a mainstream science in the United States (Chapter 2). Its second half explores the ties between music psychology and eugenics: from their first entanglements in the 1920s (Chapter 3), to racialized experiments on musical talent and their modern-day inheritors (Chapter 4). Drawing on new readings of little-studied scientific material and archival documents, I argue that eugenicists in Britain and America considered evidence for the inheritance of musical talent to be especially persuasive of the broad applicability of eugenic ideas, and that research on music supported by eugenics organizations continues to exert an influence in contemporary music-psychological and political discourse.

My first chapter reveals that music had a significant role in eugenic research from its very beginnings. Francis Galton (1822–1911), coiner of the word “eugenics,” considered the purported inheritance of musical talent to be consequential proof of his nascent theory of heredity. I show that this idea persisted over the course of his career, even as his work moved away from the Romantic frame of “hereditary genius” toward statistical surveys of measurable traits.

The second chapter examines how Galton's ideas concerning hereditary musicality were received in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, where eugenics shifted from a fringe theory to a national—and, indeed, nationalizing—endeavor. I focus on the growth of the Eugenics Record Office (founded 1910) as the leading eugenic advocacy organization in the U.S., and the idiosyncratic ways older notions of musical talent were mapped on to the emerging Mendelian genetic consensus, all against the backdrop of the reconfiguring of race, class, and ability that followed the immigration waves of the 1910s and the “Second Industrial Revolution.”

The third chapter considers the career of psychologist Carl E. Seashore (1866–1949), a foundational figure in modern music psychology, and member of the American Eugenics Society's advisory council. As a case study, I focus on the “Eastman Experiment,” a 10-year longitudinal trial conducted at the Eastman School of Music at the behest of George Eastman in collaboration with Seashore and his students, seeking to prove the measurability and heritability of musical talent. I show how Eastman's guiding ideals of efficiency and modernity in music education served as points of intellectual alliance with eugenicist rhetoric, and how Seashore's work provided a veneer of scientific equality to earlier racial and class-based prejudices.

The fourth and final chapter examines, in tandem, studies that applied Seashore's work to various racialized populations, and the ways this work is cited and re-interpreted in present-day political writing. In particular, I consider the work of geneticist and neo-eugenicist Richard Lynn, and the work of his protégé, *Bell Curve* author Charles Murray. I show how rhetorical ticks associated with hereditary musicality first identified in Galton recur almost verbatim in work published in the twenty-first century, and how data obtained from eugenic music research in the 1920s and 30s is laundered via the language of modern genetics. I conclude with a short analysis of a partnership between consumer genetics service Ancestry.com and Spotify, emphasizing that racialized notions of innate musicality have persisted into “post-racial” neoliberalism, just as the science of race has had a new life in the resurgent far right.