

Intelligence Testing at Whittier School, 1890–1920

MIROSLAVA CHÁVEZ-GARCÍA

The author is a member of the Chicana/o Studies Program at the University of California, Davis.

This article examines the intersections of youth, race, and science in early twentieth-century California. It explores how scientific researchers, reform school administrators, and social reformers at Whittier State School advocated the use of intelligence tests to determine the causes of delinquency. Through the process of testing, they identified a disproportionate number of delinquent boys of color—Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans—as mentally deficient or “feeble-minded.” As the evidence reveals, intelligence, race, heredity, and criminality became inextricably linked as the basis for segregating and removing youth of color from the reformatory. The records indicate that, despite officials’ recommendations to send feeble-minded boys to state hospitals that routinely sterilized their wards, as allowed by a 1909 state law, they sent the majority of youth to the Preston School of Industry, a reform school for older boys. In this instance, expediency in creating a premier institution at Whittier State School took precedence over larger eugenicists designs.

In 1920 Johnny García, a twelve-year-old Mexican American from Los Angeles, received a battery of intelligence tests at Whittier State School, California’s leading reform school for boys.¹

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1. Whittier State School was originally established in 1889 as the State Reform School for Juvenile Offenders; it opened in 1891. Fifty years later, in 1941, legislators changed the name to Fred C. Nelles School for Boys in honor of Superintendent Nelles, the much beloved administrator whose term spanned from 1912 to 1927, when he died. The State of California shut down the Nelles School in the summer of 2004, citing fiscal deficits.

Note on sources and privacy use: According to the California Government Code, Section 12237, as of January 1, 2005, “all items seventy-five years or older that are on deposit in the State Archives shall be accessible to the public.” This means that all of the records, including photographs, used in this study are open to the public. Therefore, I have kept the original names of all individuals discussed in this article. I identify as Mexican Americans people of Mexican origin and of Mexican descent, including

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García's exams determined that he had the mental condition of a "moron," which meant that, as a "feeble-minded" boy and, later, adult, he would not develop beyond the capacity of the average twelve-year-old child.² García's mental state, school administrators noted, appeared influenced by a condition common among the mentally deficient: heredity. García's probation officer reported that the boy's mother drank and was a prostitute; his father was a deserter. The family's history of immorality and "nomadism," traits considered common among defectives, confirmed his inherited deficiencies. Officially, García's term at the reform school was to end at age twenty-one, but school administrators released him much sooner, at age sixteen. In all likelihood, his perceived mental weakness and inability to reform played a significant role in his early discharge, a practice that was becoming increasingly common at Whittier State School.³

García's experience at Whittier State School represented part of a well-established practice of testing, identifying, and segregating so-called mentally deficient boys from the general population. Reflecting the Progressive educational movement and the growing national and international interest in science, race, and eugenics, the school's administrators introduced the use of intelligence tests in the early 1910s as they sought to determine the causes of delinquency. Contemporary scientific researchers popularized the idea that low intelligence, an innate and predetermined characteristic or trait influenced largely by heredity and minimally by environment,

those persons born in the United States and with at least one parent of Mexican ancestry; this category also includes those born in Mexico who became naturalized U.S. citizens. I identify as Mexicans those who were born in Mexico and did not self identify as Indian.

2. For the contemporaneous definition of moron and feeble-minded, see Lewis S. Terman, *The Measurement of Intelligence* (Boston, 1916), 6, 79. A feeble-minded person, he wrote, was one "incapable, because of mental defect existing from birth or from an early age, of competing on equal terms with his normal fellows; or of managing himself or his affairs with ordinary prudence." *Ibid.*, 80. In California, legislators codified this meaning of feeble-minded in state law. See, for instance, State of California, *Statutes of California and Amendments to the Codes* [hereafter cited as *California Statutes*], 1917, chapter 776, section 16, p. 1626. In contrast to those classed as feeble-minded, Terman determined that persons with the intelligence of a child between the ages of three and seven were "imbeciles," and those whose intelligence was that of a three-year-old or younger were "idiots."

3. For Johnny García's case, see Case File No. 3741, vol. 108 (1920), pp. 88–89, Fred C. Nelles School for Boys (Whittier) Collection, Youth Authority Records, California State Archives, Sacramento, California [hereafter Whittier Collection].



Figure 1. Johnny García, wearing a state-issued uniform, upon his arrival at Whittier State School in 1920. Photograph by Whittier State School, Whittier, California. California State Archives.



Figure 2. Johnny García upon his departure. Like many of his peers, García received attire befitting the manly citizenship ideal that administrators, primarily Fred C. Nelles, worked to inculcate. Whittier State School, Whittier, California. California State Archives.

functioned as the primary cause of juvenile delinquency in particular and criminality in general. Over time, ideas about intelligence, race, and science became inextricably linked. At Whittier State School, such conceptions resulted in the removal of low-scoring male youth, particularly Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans, who, officials believed, would be unlikely to reform and become productive citizens. (Researchers also tested females at Whittier's Girls' Department, which became a separate institution called the California School for Girls in 1913 and was renamed the Ventura School for Girls in 1916, but the results of those exams or any similar exams have not been located. Thus, I do not include girls in this discussion.)⁴

This article contributes to scholarship that explores the role of the social and behavioral sciences in identifying, segregating, and racializing children and adolescents of color. In the last thirty years scholars working in the fields of Chicana/o Studies, history, education, and psychology have shown how state and national standardized intelligence exams, administered in the public schools in the 1920s and beyond, resulted in the tracking of Mexican, black, and Native-origin youth, among other non-whites, into vocational trade training at best and racial segregation at worst.⁵ This article

4. Whittier was originally established as a coeducational institution and housed boys and girls in separate departments run by separate administrators. In 1913, after much discussion, the Girls' Department was closed and the California School for Girls was opened on Whittier State School grounds until a permanent school was built. Finally, in 1916 the school moved to Ventura where it became known as the Ventura School for Girls. According to psychologist Grace M. Fernald, females at Whittier's Girls' Department received tests as early as 1912 and continued to do so in the mid-1910s at the California School for Girls and, later, at the Ventura School for Girls. I have yet to find the results of any of those tests. For Fernald's statements on girls and testing, see Grace M. Fernald, "Report of the Psychological work in the California School for Girls," *Journal of Delinquency*, 1 (1916), 22–31.

5. For scholarship on the use of intelligence tests to track youth of color in the public schools in the early 1900s, see, for instance, Carlos K. Blanton, "From Intellectual Deficiency to Cultural Deficiency: Mexican Americans, Testing, and Public School Policy in the American Southwest, 1920–1940," *Pacific Historical Review*, 72 (2003), 39–62; Blanton, "They Cannot Master Abstractions But They Can Often Be Made Efficient Workers': Race and Class in the Intelligence Testing of Mexican Americans and African Americans in Texas During the 1920s," *Social Science Quarterly*, 81 (2000), 1014–1026; Gilbert G. González, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation* (Philadelphia, 1990); González, "Racism, Education and the Mexican Community, 1920–1930," *Societas*, 4 (1974), 287–301; Judith Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise: Politics and Reform in Los Angeles Schools, 1885–1941* (Stanford, Calif., 1992); Guadalupe San

reinforces those findings but also demonstrates how, a decade earlier, administrators at Whittier State School used the results of similar tests to weed out the so-called mentally deficient in order to create a premier reform school. In effect, Whittier State School became a laboratory of the social engineering that would take place in classrooms, the military, and other public sectors across the country in the near future.⁶

The article also builds on scholarship that examines the intersections of science, eugenics, race, ethnicity, and gender in the United States in general and in California in particular. These studies show how eugenicist ideas about heredity and environment, as well as racial, ethnic, and gender differences, merged to yield widespread and often diverse ways of thinking—among Progressives, state and community leaders, and professionals—about defective bodies, reproduction, and race betterment. Ultimately, these ideas had far-reaching and serious repercussions, for they resulted not only in the “asexualization” or sterilization of many men, women, and children in the United States—a significant number of whom resided in California—but also in perpetuating the belief that a handful of experts had the authority to dictate who lacked the right to reproduce.⁷ This article demonstrates how

Miguel, Jr., and Richard R. Valencia, “From the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to *Hopwood*: The Educational Plight and Struggle of Mexican Americans in the Southwest,” *Harvard Educational Review*, 68 (1998), 353–412; San Miguel, Jr., “*Let All of Them Take Heed*”: Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910–1981 (Austin, Tex., 1987); and Richard R. Valencia and Lisa A. Suzuki, *Intelligence Testing and Minority Students: Foundations, Performance Factors, and Assessment Issues* (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 2001). For studies that examine intelligence testing in general, see Leila Zenderland, *Measuring Minds: Henry Herbert Goddard and the Origins of American Intelligence Testing* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), and Paul Davis Chapman, *Schools as Sorters: Lewis M. Terman, Applied Psychology, and the Intelligence Movement, 1890–1930* (New York, 1988).

6. In this article, I borrow the concept of social engineering from Daniel J. Kevles, “Testing the Army’s Intelligence: Psychologists and the Military in World War I,” *Journal of American History*, 55 (1968), 565–581. According to this work, social engineering is “the expert application of scientific methods to the social corpus,” in *ibid.*, 566.

7. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of studies have been carried out on science and eugenics and their social implications. For this study, the following works have been consulted: Alexandra M. Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley, 2005); Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley, 2001); Steven Selden, *Inheriting Shame: The Story of Eugenics and Racism in America* (New York, 1999); Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York, 1996); Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South* (Baltimore, 1995); and Philip R. Reilly, *The Surgical*

intelligence, race, and delinquency became intertwined in one of the state's leading reform schools in the early twentieth century, enabling scientific researchers to identify and racialize Mexican, Mexican American, and African American youth as deficient.

This discussion focuses on male youth who entered Whittier State School from its inception in the 1890s to its last year as an independent entity in 1920 (the school became part of the California Department of Institutions in 1921). It begins by providing an overview of the reformatory's history and its link to Progressive reform, from its foundation in 1889 to its modernization in the 1910s under the auspices of newly appointed Superintendent Fred C. Nelles. Next, it demonstrates how and why Nelles recruited scientists and scientific researchers deeply invested in eugenics and Progressive reform to evaluate and develop individualized treatment for the boys. Finally, the article examines the implications of this scientific work for the lives of young men of Mexican and African descent and compares their experiences to those of European Americans, demonstrating how the scientists' convictions about science, intelligence, race, and ethnicity shaped the youths' futures.

Whittier State School and Fred C. Nelles

Whittier State School's history is intimately linked to the broader Progressive movement of the early 1900s. Encompassing a wide range of political, social, and economic interests, the Progressive movement emerged as a consequence of contemporary transformations brought about by rapid industrialization, urbanization, and immigration in major cities across the country. Many white, middle-class men and women became concerned about the effects of the growing numbers of foreigners whom they believed to be overcrowding cities, work sites, and neighborhoods. To bring about order and stability, Progressive reformers promoted science, education, and efficiency in general and argued for the assimilation of millions of foreigners into the mainstream. Americanization, they believed, would make the recent arrivals productive citizens and workers who would accommodate themselves to industrial

Solution: A History of Involuntary Sterilization in the United States (Baltimore, 1991). For a sample of ideas proposed by eugenicists, see Ezra Gosney and Paul Popenoe, *Sterilization for Human Betterment: A Summary of Results of 6,000 Operations in California, 1909–1929* (New York, 1929).

and agricultural capitalism's insatiable demand for labor. They endorsed educational reforms for children, including compulsory public schooling, home economics classes, and kindergartens. They promoted evening English-language and citizenship courses for adults. Progressives also pushed for the amelioration of reform schools, calling for an end to harsh punishments and the use of science and scientific methods to transform delinquent boys into productive male citizens.⁸

Progressive ideas came to Whittier State School in the early 1900s, roughly a decade after the institution had opened its doors. Prior to that, state and local officials used Whittier as a means to deal with troublesome youth. Such youngsters, they believed, most of whom belonged to the state's growing working-class, ethnic, and minority populations, lacked moral guidance in their homes and communities and thus threatened to stray into lives of dependency or crime.⁹ Before the establishment of Whittier, young men convicted of criminal offenses sometimes ended up at the State Reform School for Boys in Marysville, which had opened in 1861 and closed down a few years later, citing a lack of commitments as the reason. Depending on their offenses, youth also served their sentences in county jails or prisons, such as San Quentin, California's first penitentiary. There they were among adults, many of whom had been convicted of serious crimes. Such practices—deemed evil by many—resembled those carried out in the earliest penitentiaries of the United States. By contrast, reform schools, with

8. The literature on the Progressive movement in general and educational reform in particular is vast. Among the most useful for this article have been: Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885–1920* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1995); Estelle B. Freedman, *Maternal Justice: Miriam Van Waters and the Female Reform Tradition* (Chicago, 1996); William Devereil and Tom Sitton, eds., *California Progressivism Revisited* (Berkeley, 1994); George Mowry, *The California Progressives* (New York, 1963); Lawrence T. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876–1957* (New York, 1961, 1964); David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of the American Urban Education* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974); Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893–1958* (New York, 1986); and David Nasaw, *Schooled to Order: A Social History of Public Schooling* (New York, 1979).

9. For the growing criticism of wayward youth on city streets in the late 1800s, see Rino John Patti, "Child Protection in California, 1850–1966: An Analysis of Public Policy" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1967), 40–68, and R. W. Waterman, "Address by Hon. R. W. Waterman," in *Proceedings and Addresses at the Laying of the Corner-Stone of the State Reform School at Whittier, Los Angeles County, California* (Sacramento, Calif., 1890), 9.

their focus on youth, avoided the problem of adults intermingling with juveniles and at the same time tried to provide moral guidance, training, and education. Up until the early 1900s, California, like most states, lacked an integrated juvenile justice system designed to handle wayward youth, although the state funded industrial schools as well as private orphanages, societies, and insane asylums in the 1800s. Finally, citing a dire need for a state reform school, legislators passed a bill in 1889 establishing Whittier State School (originally known as the State Reform School for Juvenile Offenders) for boys and girls ranging in age from ten to sixteen, with discharge mandatory at age twenty-one. In 1890 the state also established the Preston School of Industry, an institution for older males from sixteen to twenty years, although it often accepted boys as young as twelve.¹⁰

The anticipated results of the work at Whittier failed to materialize, despite initial enthusiasm. Within two decades of the school's inauguration, many claimed that the school, under the leadership of a superintendent and board of trustees, had become a cold and repressive institution. Like most coeducational reform schools, Whittier housed boys and girls in two separate units, the Boys' and Girls' Departments, and administered them separately. In the Boys' Department, the school imposed a strict masculine and citizenship ideal; it implemented a military regimen in which "cadets" wore military uniforms and drilled on a daily basis. To ensure discipline at all levels, administrators appointed older males, usually the taller and stronger ones in their squads, to positions of authority within each unit. Essentially, school officials used the fifteen- and sixteen-year-old sergeants and captains as informants to infiltrate peer groups, create distrust among cadets, and prevent groups of boys from taking collective action against the institution or individuals. Sometimes boy-officers abused their power by berating and dominating the more vulnerable. Apparently, school officials

10. For evidence of the commitment of children and adolescents to San Quentin in the second half of the nineteenth century, see the San Quentin State Prison Register, Department of Corrections Collection, California State Archives, Sacramento, California. For evidence of the state's support of private orphanages, children's aid societies, and asylums, see Waterman, "Address by Hon. R. W. Waterman," 9–10, and Patti, "Child Protection in California," 72–107. These agencies were private in the sense that they had been established by private individuals or philanthropies, but the state contributed to funding them since no state-run institutions yet existed; these private agencies received funds in proportion to the population size in the county.

did little to check this mistreatment, for superintendents reported such incidents intermittently throughout the first thirty years of the school's existence.¹¹

To contemporary observers, the housing plan that legislators had established reflected a "cruel and ugly environment" that school administrators sought to transform with little success.¹² The congregate system, a common although outdated model used in reform schools throughout the United States, prevailed at Whittier. In such a setting, male wards of all ages and backgrounds ate, lived, and trained in one main five-story brick building, allowing for the intermingling of older adolescents with younger boys. Although many states in the East and Midwest had eschewed such a design, Californians adopted it for reasons that remain unclear. The congregate scheme, Whittier's board of trustees argued in 1912, was problematic, for it allowed "every class and gradation of misdemeanants and felons, young and old, vicious and comparatively innocent, [to be] intimately associated in the unrestricted intercourse of their daily lives."¹³ To restrict this socialization and cultivate a reform-friendly environment, school administrators repeatedly called for the cottage or family system, a plan originating in the nineteenth century and drawing from European influences.¹⁴ This plan consisted of several small buildings run by a housemother and father to oversee boys of similar ages and experiences. Despite the apparent benefits of that approach, Whittier remained a congregate school for several decades.

Whittier's increasingly dilapidated and overcrowded appearance gave credence to the school's apparently outdated utility, as well as the state's long-term pattern of neglect. As early as 1898 officials reported large cracks in the walls of the trades building, a sign of poor and hasty construction. The reformatory also suffered

11. For evidence that school officials appointed boys to positions as officers, see, for instance, Case File No. 205, vol. 98 (1892), pp. 411–412, Whittier Collection, and Case File No. 531, vol. 99 (1893), pp. 365–366, in *ibid.*

12. Quote cited in Elmer E. Knox and Norman Fenton, *Fred C. Nelles: An Appreciation* (Whittier, Calif., 1930), 4.

13. W. E. McVay, Ben. F. Pearson, and Prescott F. Cogswell, "Board of Trustees' Report," *Biennial Report: Whittier State School, 1912* (Whittier, Calif., 1912) [hereafter *Biennial Report . . . 1912*], 4.

14. On the cottage system, see Steven L. Schlossman, *Transforming Juvenile Justice: Reform Ideals and Institutional Realities, 1825–1920* (1977; Dekalb, Ill., 2005), and Eric Schneider, *In the Web of Class: Delinquents and Reformers in Boston, 1810s–1930s* (New York, 1992).

from poor sanitation, particularly its plumbing, sewage, and drinking water, leading to frequent illnesses. The inability to meet the boys' needs did not slow the process of admitting new wards, however, for their numbers continued to increase significantly, particularly in the early 1910s, leading to the temporary suspension of new admittances.¹⁵

A much-publicized incident of corporal punishment at Whittier in 1903 did little to win the favor of legislators or the public. That year the *Los Angeles Examiner* reported that a male employee had whipped an inmate of the Girls' Department, despite a ban on corporal punishment and official declarations that such practices "belong[ed] to the Dark Ages."¹⁶ The newspaper report triggered a scandal, which led to a statewide investigation into mistreatment and cruelty. As a result, male employees could no longer impose "reprimands" such as whipping girls or shaving their heads. Notwithstanding the purported reforms, conditions worsened at the school, bringing the attention of public officials and Progressive reformers.

In 1912 recently elected Governor Hiram Johnson, a leading California Progressive, hired Los Angeles businessman Fred C. Nelles to become the school's superintendent. Nelles's Progressive politics, leadership, and optimism doubtless caught Governor Johnson's attention. Nelles's task was to humanize the institution, which by then had become a "great, cold, cheerless five-story building with barred windows, . . . surrounded by iron fences and walls." Governor Johnson urged Nelles, as the newly appointed interim (eventually permanent) superintendent, to overhaul the school's outdated practices and staff attitude. Until then, most of the staff believed that Whittier's wards possessed innate antisocial qualities,

15. For evidence of overcrowding, see *San Francisco Post*, Nov. 26, 1892. News clipping found in Case File No. 440, vol. 99 (1892), pp. 181–182, Whittier Collection. For boys coming down with illnesses, see, for instance, W. V. Coffin, "Physician's Report," in *Biennial Report: Whittier State School, 1908* (Whittier, Calif., 1908) [hereafter *Biennial Report . . . 1908*], n.p. Others called Whittier State School a juvenile penitentiary and a training school for criminals. See Jesse C. Fenton, "Delinquent Boys Individualized," *Sierra Educational News* (Sept. 1931), 7; and Whittier State School, *The Whittier Idea: A brief review of the Whittier State School since its founding in 1890* (Whittier, Calif., n.d.), 9.

16. For the 1903 whipping of Mabel Sylva, a Mexican American girl, see Case File No. 1653, vol. 102 (1903), pp. 509–510, Whittier Collection. For statements on the ban on corporal punishment, see T. B. Van Alstyne, "Superintendent's Report," *Biennial Report: Whittier State School, 1898* (Whittier, Calif., 1898) [hereafter *Biennial Report . . . 1898*], 34. That same superintendent claimed that corporal punishment had been reduced in the Boys' Department; see *ibid.*, 5.

making them unlikely to reform. Nelles held that, on the contrary, with the proper guidance, the boys could be transformed and “turn[ed] back into society as useful, law abiding and God-fearing citizens.”¹⁷

Nelles’s ideas, although relatively new to Whittier, resonated with broader beliefs about wayward youth and how to deal with them that were emerging in the juvenile justice system throughout California and the United States. The focal point of that system was the juvenile court. Californians adopted that tribunal in 1903, modeling it on those already established by Progressive judges, politicians, and their supporters in Illinois, Colorado, and New York. Influenced by recent developments in psychology, sociology, medicine, and business management, the juvenile court emphasized assessment, prevention, and treatment of delinquent youth within the family environment. Rather than pull youngsters from their homes and dump them in reformatories, as justices had often done in the nineteenth century, the juvenile court judges made every possible effort to keep wayward youth in their homes, ideally on probation under the watchful eye of a probation officer. Keeping youth at home not only saved the state money but also allowed probation officers to impart moral instruction to boys and their families in the intimate setting of the household. When that approach failed to alter the boys’ behavior, judges sent erring young men to private homes, orphanages, detention facilities, and, as a last resort, to reformatories such as Whittier.¹⁸

17. For the description of the school, see Fenton, “Delinquent Boys Individualized,” 7; for Governor Hiram Johnson’s request, see Fred C. Nelles, “Superintendent’s Report,” *Biennial Report: Whittier State School, 1914* (Whittier, Calif., 1914) [hereafter *Biennial Report . . . 1914*], 14. For more on Nelles, see Steven L. Schlossman, “Delinquent Children: The Juvenile Reform School,” in Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, eds., *The Oxford History of the Prison* (New York, 1995), 379. Nelles, “Superintendent’s Report,” *Biennial Report . . . 1912*, n.p.

18. For more on the role of the juvenile court and probation officers in California, see Curtis D. Wilbur, “Juvenile Court,” in *Report and Manual for Probation Officers of the Superior Court acting as Juvenile Court, Los Angeles County, California, 1912* (Los Angeles, 1912), 11–16; Wilbur, “Delinquent Children,” in *ibid.*, 17–29; Wilbur, Samuel J. Barrows, and W. A. Gates, “The Juvenile Courts and Recent Developments in Penology,” in *ibid.*, 31–51; and Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*. To date, Odem’s is the only book focusing on the juvenile court in Progressive Era California. For more on the juvenile court system in Illinois, Colorado, New York, and elsewhere, see Anthony M. Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency* (1969; Chicago, 1977); Schlossman, *Transforming Juvenile Justice*; Anne Knupfer, *Reform and Resistance: Gender, Delinquency, and America’s First Juvenile Court* (New York, 2001); and Elizabeth J. Clapp,

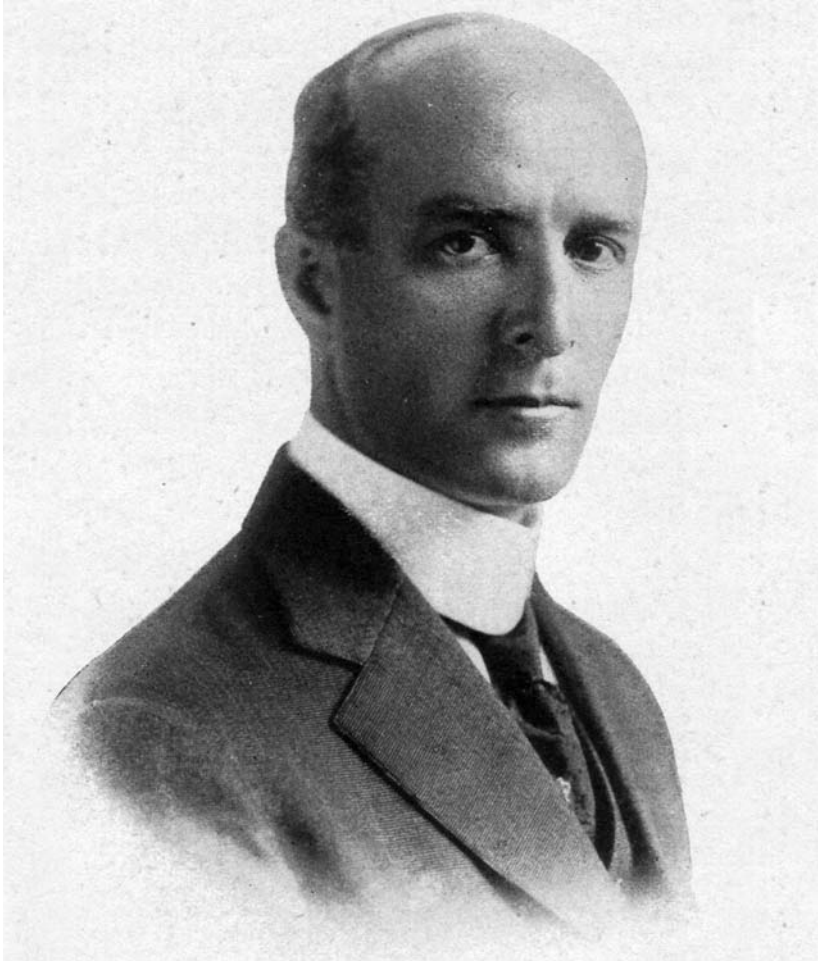


Figure 3. Fred C. Nelles, the much-beloved superintendent, governed from 1912 to 1927, when an illness led to his untimely death. Whittier State School, Whittier, California. Photograph by Whittier State School. California State Archives.

In Nelles's view, the young men who ended up at the reformatory responded more effectively to a family-like, rather than a prison-style, environment. Immediately following his appointment

Mothers of All Children: Women Reformers and the Rise of Juvenile Courts in Progressive Era America (University Park, Pa., 1998).

in 1912, Nelles instituted a policy of friendly cooperation and rehabilitation, gradually eliminating the approach of forcible reformation. At the same time, he did away with the prevailing masculine ideals upheld by the former administrators. Nelles relaxed and nearly abandoned the military system and altered policies on discipline and punishment; this involved getting rid of the use of guards “armed with guns and clubs” and the so-called Oregon boot. According to Nelles, the boot “was a device consisting of two or more rings of iron, riveted around the leg, and resting on the heel and instep of the wearer. Often this boot cut into the skin and led to sores that sometimes extended into the bone.” When he arrived at Whittier, Nelles found six boys anchored to a boot, prompting him to declare: “the old-time Oregon boot no longer has a place in the school.”¹⁹ Nelles also proclaimed an end to the guard line—a process by which a youth was forced to stand at attention, unable to move or speak to anyone, usually for an hour or more.

Despite earlier pronouncements against the flogging of inmates, Nelles found that administrators and staff regularly whipped wards for attempting to escape or being absent without leave (AWOL), infractions considered among the most serious. Rather than punishing pupils with confinement in an unsanitary, inhumane, underground cell or depriving them of food, as a contemporary observer noted, Nelles instituted a system of losing privileges in the Lost Privilege Cottage. There, boys who committed infractions remained in a family setting and received regular meals. They carried out their work assignments alone and could not to speak to anyone other than the unit’s officer. Young men who failed to follow those orders received only bread and milk until they obeyed house rules. The new regulations, although strict, indicated a shift in understandings about gender and masculinity. Like many of his contemporaries, Nelles sought to inculcate a manliness that emphasized the values of the family rather than of the military.²⁰

19. Nelles, “Superintendent’s Report,” *Biennial Report . . . 1914*, 31.

20. For comments about solitary confinement, see Fenton, “Delinquent Boys Individualized,” 7. For Nelles’s policies, see Nelles, “Superintendent’s Report,” *Biennial Report: Whittier State School, 1915–1916* (Whittier, Calif., 1916) [hereafter *Biennial Report . . . 1915–1916*], 23–25. For more on the changing conceptions of manhood in this period, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880 to 1917* (Chicago, 1995), and Heather A. Pang, “Making Men:

Instead of dealing with errant youth on a mass scale, Nelles, like many of his fellow Progressives, held that the most effective means of reaching his charges involved one-on-one contact and what he called character building or character reformation. To do so, Nelles emphasized vocational training and athletics such as swimming, basketball, or tennis—activities, he noted, “which have helped give to the Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A., Hull House, and kindred organizations, the grip they have on the lives of young people.” Within a few years, Nelles claimed that his methods had resulted in a powerful effect on the boys. “The substitution of kind, intelligent vocational guidance for former methods of rigid and often inhumane discipline has contributed much to the problem of juvenile reform,” he argued. Nelles underscored that many boys stayed on to carry out responsibilities, instead of leaving the school’s grounds when paroled or after their terms had expired, a point corroborated by the evidence. Indeed, as the sources indicate, some boys chose to remain at Whittier following their release, working for wages, while others returned later to participate in sports, particularly during football and baseball seasons. Another group, according to Nelles, had changed their views toward going AWOL. Where once male youths had celebrated peers who fled successfully, characterizing them as heroes carrying out daring escapes, they later saw those same individuals as weak, shameful deserters. “The hero worship of the boy who resisted longest and most vigorously,” wrote Nelles a few years later, “no longer exists. The most respected boys now are the ones who are making the best records.”²¹ In this instance too, the evidence supports Nelles’s claims of decreasing numbers of boys who escaped, for the documents reveal that the frequency of flight among all boys, regardless of race and ethnicity, dipped in the 1910s from the previous two decades.²²

Reform Schools and the Shaping of Masculinity, 1890–1920” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2000).

21. Nelles, “Superintendent’s Report,” *Biennial Report . . . 1912*, n.p.; Nelles, “Superintendent’s Report,” *Biennial Report . . . 1915–1916*, 23–25, 28–29; “Superintendent’s Report,” *Biennial Report . . . 1914*, 13; Nelles, “Superintendent’s Report,” *Biennial Report . . . 1915–1916*, 23–25, 28–29; “Superintendent’s Report,” *Biennial Report . . . 1914*, 13.

22. In a previous study, I traced all escapes and attempted escapes from Whittier State School in the years spanning 1890 and 1920. I found that, in the 1910s, following Nelles’s appointment and reforms, the frequency of flights fell by nearly 50 percent. See Miroslava Chávez-García, “Youth, Evidence, and Agency: Mexican and Mexican

Intelligence testing, eugenics, and scientific measurement

As in other parts of the United States, the transformation and, ultimately, modernization of Whittier State School in the early 1900s included implementing the latest findings in scientific research. Like most contemporary Progressive reformers, Nelles had an unshakable faith in the ability of science and scientific methods to solve social issues efficiently. Such social engineering included the reformation of youth deemed delinquent; that is, those who transgressed European American middle-class standards of behavior as reflected in the law and custom. To carry out his goals, Nelles turned to college-educated men—trained in the “history of corrective institutions, [and] the development of modern ideas in connection with them”—to analyze each boy’s case and recommend treatment.²³ Stanford psychologist Lewis Terman, a leading practitioner of intelligence testing, responded to Nelles’s request by sending J. Harold Williams, his doctoral student and a research fellow at the Buckel Foundation at Stanford University, to carry out a preliminary survey of boys at Whittier to determine their mental abilities and, if possible, the causes of their delinquency.²⁴

To carry out his task, Williams employed Terman’s revision of the Binet-Simon Measuring Scale of Intelligence, a standardized intelligence test developed in France in 1908 and later adopted in the United States as modified by Terman. The exam consisted mostly of a series of quizzes, arranged in order of difficulty, involving two- and three-dimensional puzzles and games as well as pencil and paper quizzes. According to Terman, the Stanford-Binet Scale, as it was later popularly known, took into consideration a boy’s mental age; that is, his overall score as determined through his performance on the test, as well as his chronological age. The difference between the two—the ratio of the mental age to chronological age—determined a child’s intelligence or intelligent quotient (IQ). According to the scale, individuals with an IQ ranging from .50 to .75 scored as feeble-minded; those between .75

American Youth at Whittier State School, 1890 to 1920,” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 32 (2006), 55–83.

23. Nelles, “Superintendent’s Report,” *Biennial Report . . . 1914*, 21–22, 29.

24. For a succinct overview of this history, see J. Harold Williams, *A Study of 150 Delinquent Boys* (Palo Alto, Calif., 1915).

and .82 as “borderline” feeble-minded; those between .83 and .91 as “dull-normal”; and those .92 or above as “normal” or “superior.” This meant that a sixteen-year-old boy, for instance, who had a mental age of eight-and-a-half years, and hence an IQ of .53, fell among the ranks of the feebleminded. In contrast, a fourteen-and-a-half year old boy with a mental age of sixteen-and-a-half had an IQ of 1.22, deeming him superior.²⁵

Nevertheless, the test and its interpretation had major flaws. In administering the survey, Williams, like his mentor, ignored the role of language and education, despite giving the exam to male youth with limited English skills or formal school instruction. Williams, Terman, Alfred Binet (coauthor of the original test), and Henry Herbert Goddard, a renowned psychologist and one of the greatest champions of the exam in the United States, all vehemently argued that the test was largely independent of verbal abilities and language acquisition. Not everyone in the scientific community or Progressive reform movement agreed. Grace Fernald, an applied psychologist who had tested girls in Whittier’s Girls’ Department in the winter of 1912, questioned the men’s assumptions. Fernald argued that language, as well as schooling, socioeconomic class, and environment, influenced the testing process and outcome. In her 1916 report on the psychological work at the Ventura School for Girls, for instance, she acknowledged that intelligence scales had less value “in cases in which the children were not thoroughly familiar with the English language.”²⁶ Wayward youth, she stated on another occasion, led “very different sorts of lives” from non-delinquents, often dealing with crime, alcoholism, and parental

25. A French psychologist and a physician, Alfred Binet and Théodore Simon, originally developed the Binet-Simon Intelligence test in 1908; American psychologist Henry Herbert Goddard, a leading advocate of Binet’s test, popularized it in the United States. For more on Goddard and intelligence tests, see Zenderland, *Measuring Minds*. For J. Harold Williams’s belief in the ability of intelligence tests to produce efficient results, see J. Harold Williams, “Report of the Department of Research,” *Biennial Report . . . 1918*, 42. For more on the tests’ contents, see Alexandra M. Stern, “An Empire of Tests: Psychometrics and the Paradoxes of Nationalism in the Americas,” in Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham, N.C., 2006), 560–592. For IQ scales and their meaning as used at Whittier State School, see Williams, “Report of the Department of Research,” *Biennial Report . . . 1915–1916*, 57–58, 62, 66.

26. According to Zenderland, *Measuring Minds*, 241–42, especially footnote 54, Alfred Binet later modified his stance on the role of language. Fernald, “Report of the Psychological work in the California School for Girls,” 29, 21–22.

abuse in their homes and larger communities. Delinquents, Fernald believed, “act[ed] rather than talk[ed].” Other intellectuals also argued that IQ reflected cultural background and educational achievement rather than innate intelligence.²⁷

In private and public circles, Williams, Terman, and others, including Goddard, dismissed such critics, arguing that intelligence scales did not evaluate school training but rather mental development or innate ability. “Anyone living in an average environment, even with not a day of schooling, should be able to do the tests,” Goddard declared.²⁸ To counter any claims of biases in the testing carried out at Whittier, Williams argued that the exams evaluated “native intelligence,” not “the consequences of opportunity.”²⁹ He believed that nearly everyone born with mental deficiencies had acquired them through the family line and would likely pass them along to future generations. Although environmental factors influenced the ways in which individuals expressed those deficiencies, “heredity,” he wrote in 1914, “accounts for about 75 percent of the feeble-mindedness which exists.” As such, he believed that the mentally deficient or feebleminded, as well as their offspring, were born that way. “There is not the slightest reason to hope,” wrote Williams, “that those testing at the moron or the borderline level could by any amount of school instruction raise their intelligence index by more than a few insignificant points.”³⁰

27. Fernald’s quotes cited in Zenderland, *Measuring Minds*, 240–241. In time, Binet too questioned the results of the tests, particularly regarding differences among social classes. Upper-class children in France, he admitted, had verbal skills superior to those of their lower-class counterparts. Rich children, he wrote, lived “in a superior environment from the point of view of language, they hear a more correct language and one that is more expressive.” Binet is cited in *ibid.*, 241–242. The other observations come from Blanton, “‘They Cannot Master Abstractions,’” 1016; for more on the larger critiques of intelligence tests, see Kevles, “Testing the Army’s Intelligence,” 574–576.

28. Goddard cited in Zenderland, *Measuring Minds*, 250. Most psychologists generally said little about language. As historian Leila Zenderland has observed, by 1917 professional psychologists kept debates about intelligence and the “relationship to language skill, schooling, and social environment . . . largely hidden from the public and amongst themselves.” *Ibid.*

29. Williams, “Report of the Department of Research,” *Biennial Report . . . 1915–1916*, 60–61.

30. Williams, “Psychological Survey of the Whittier State School,” *Biennial Report . . . 1914*, 41, 35. For more on Mendelian ideas and hereditarianism, see, for instance, Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 14–18; Stern, “An Empire of Tests,” 567; and Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise*, 130.

After Williams completed his research at Whittier, he drew two major conclusions that reflected broader beliefs in the scientific community, particularly among eugenicists. First, he found that a significant proportion of the boys examined at Whittier tested as mentally deficient. Among the 150 surveyed, 28 percent of the boys were definitely feebleminded, 25 percent borderline feebleminded, 22 percent dull-normal, and 25 percent of average or superior intelligence. Comparing Whittier boys to ordinary public school children, he found that delinquents had lower intelligence levels than non-delinquents. According to contemporary scientific studies evaluating the mental ability of public school children, 75 percent, a significant majority, tested as having a normal or superior intelligence, while the remaining children were distributed among the dull-normal, borderline, and feebleminded groups. In contrast, only 25 percent of Whittier boys tested as normal, suggesting a strong link between intelligence and delinquency.³¹

To bolster the connections between the mentally weak and the criminally minded, Williams turned to the latest contemporary scientific writings on intelligence and criminality. Williams noted that U.S. and European criminologists working in the field of anthropology reported a connection between mental deficiency and crime, arguing that mental weakness characterized 25 to 50 percent of the criminals in their studies. Moreover, such scientific researchers reported a direct correlation between mental weakness (or feeblemindedness) and moral abnormality (criminality and delinquency). To lend further credence to his own work, Williams cited additional studies carried out at all-male reformatories across the country in states such as Ohio, New Jersey, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Kansas, and Virginia. These reports found that 24 to 79 percent of their inmates were feebleminded, findings that reflected those carried out at Whittier. Contemporary studies of “degenerate” families, such as Goddard’s *The Kallikak Family*, added to Williams’s argument about the inextricable links between heredity and feeblemindedness. Indeed, he cited those works as further proof of the inherited nature of mental deficiency.³² Surveys

31. Williams, “Psychological Survey of the Whittier State School,” *Biennial Report . . . 1914*, 8, 15.

32. For the studies Williams cited as support for his own work, see *ibid.*, 30–33, 38–39. For the so-called degenerate family study, see, for instance, Henry H. Goddard, *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-mindedness* (New York, 1912), and

of delinquent females supported Williams's deductions as well. Based on that work, he concluded unabashedly, "We are justified in believing that fully half of the professionally immoral women of our towns and cities are feeble-minded. . . . They are adult in body and instincts, but are often no more responsible, mentally, than little girls of 10 or 11 years."³³

Williams's second major conclusion from the Whittier State School survey noted the "marked racial differences among the boys."³⁴ He determined that, while most boys—regardless of race or ethnicity—had a gap between their mental and chronological ages, those with the largest differences were youth of Mexican descent, a group that he and the other researchers referred to as Mexican-Indians. These researchers made this distinction to draw attention to the fact that many youths of Mexican origin had Indian blood and racially were not necessarily white, regardless of how the federal census identified them.³⁵ In California, according to Williams, Mexican Indian boys had a six-year difference between their mental and chronological ages; the gap for African Americans was five-and-half-years, and for European Americans three years. This meant that Mexican-origin youth had the largest percentage of feebleminded individuals among them. Indeed, Williams's results indicated that about 60 percent of Mexican-origin youth were feebleminded, in contrast with 48 percent of African American boys and 6 percent of white or European American boys. Mexican and Mexican American boys also comprised the lowest percentage of youth who tested in the normal range—about 5 percent—while 15 percent of African Americans and nearly 40 percent of European Americans did so. In short, boys of Mexican descent appeared the least likely to achieve in the normal

Richard L. Dugdale, *"The Jukes": A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease and Heredity* (New York, 1877). For a recent analysis of those works, see Nicole H. Rafter, *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 1877–1919* (Boston, 1988).

33. Williams, "Psychological Survey of the Whittier State School," 32.

34. *Ibid.*, 16.

35. Unlike in Texas, where some intelligence testers made color and class distinctions among lighter- and darker-skinned as well as among working- and middle-class Mexicans they examined, researchers in California made no overt attempt to classify their subjects in a similar vein. In this context, social scientists' racial categories were more rigid and stark in California than those developed in Texas. Williams and his colleagues did not perceive such a complex portrait of the Mexican population. For more on the findings in Texas, see Blanton, "They Cannot Master Abstractions," 1014–1026.

range and the most likely to be mentally deficient and, as a consequence, criminally minded in nature.³⁶

The findings did not surprise Williams. He noted, "While Mexicans are usually classified as white, it seems best here to make the distinction on account of intelligence differences probably due to the intermingling of Indian blood." Moreover, he observed, Mexicans and blacks, on the whole, "often contribute[d] to the amount of crime and delinquency in this country."³⁷ Williams's generalizations about Mexican-origin peoples echoed a growing chorus of social scientists, educators, and advocates of immigration restriction, among others, who called for an end to the "Mexican problem" of inferior, unassimilated, culturally backward, and economically burdensome people.³⁸

Ultimately, Williams's findings on racial, ethnic, and intelligence differences among Whittier's delinquent boys supported the idea of a race-based intelligence hierarchy, with whites on top, blacks in the middle, and Mexicans on the bottom. This hierarchy varied across regions, however. In Texas, intelligence testers placed African Americans on the bottom, Mexicans in the middle, depending on class and color, and whites on top.³⁹ In California, the racialization and subordination of Mexicans and blacks, based on supposed biological differences between them and European Americans, were not new phenomena. Rather, they stemmed from long-held beliefs about race, blood, and nation that solidified in the nineteenth century for Hispanic peoples and in the seventeenth

36. Williams, "Psychological Survey of the Whittier State School," 15–16. In that study, Williams presented pie charts indicating the proportion of feebleminded boys among whites, blacks, and Mexicans but did not give precise percentages. Those figures are found in his later publication, *A Study of 150 Delinquent Boys*.

37. Williams, "Psychological Survey of the Whittier State School," 47, 25.

38. For more on the "Mexican problem," particularly as it was conceived and dealt with in California in the early 1900s, see, for example, Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848–1930* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 225–226; David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley, 1995); and Gilbert G. González, *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1880–1930* (Austin, Tex., 2004).

39. For variations of this hierarchy, particularly as they worked out in Texas, see Blanton, "They Cannot Master Abstractions," 1014–1026; for a study claiming to have developed a comparative racial intelligence hierarchy at the national level, see William H. Sheldon, "Intelligence of Mexican Children," *School and Society*, 19 (Feb. 2, 1924), 139–142.

century for Africans and African Americans.⁴⁰ The difference in the early twentieth century was the use of intelligence tests to identify youth of color as mentally deficient and to segregate them on that basis.

To weed out defectives, Williams recommended the segregation and sterilization of mentally deficient boys, a practice that scientific researchers, eugenicists, and intellectuals—including Progressives—largely supported. In Williams's view, feebleminded children and adolescents, like those at Whittier, needed special, permanent care. Ezra Gosney and Paul Popenoe of the California-based Human Betterment Foundation, an organization advocating the sterilization of the mentally unfit, issued similar arguments. They held that such methods protected, rather than punished, the individual and larger society. "Institutional care," Williams stated, "not punishment, is the only just or rational solution of the problem."⁴¹ Like his mentor Terman, Williams supported the creation of a state-sponsored sterilization program to contain the reproduction of tainted persons and thus "lighten considerably the burden of crime, alcoholism, prostitution, and pauperism." He continued, "when this policy [of sterilization] has been relentlessly followed for a few generations, the menace of feeble-mindedness will be reduced to about one-fourth its present proportion."⁴²

Superintendent Nelles subscribed to Williams's beliefs and thus supported his recommendations, urging the segregation or regrouping of Whittier's youth according to intelligence levels. Unlike Whittier's normal and superior boys, who were classified as capable of reformation, Nelles stated, the mentally deficient "represent[ed] a class which should be placed under perpetual custodial care." The "morally diseased," Nelles held, should be "quarantined" with similar individuals. "Dependents, delinquents, incorrigibles (all with great diversity of age and nationality) associate on terms of enforced intimacy with the moron, the feebleminded and the epileptic," he wrote. "To attempt to properly care for and train [them] . . . and all the different kinds, nationalities,

40. For more on ideas about race, blood, and nation in the nineteenth century, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981).

41. Williams, "Psychological Survey of the Whittier State School," 35. For more on the work of Gosney and Popenoe, see their *Sterilization for Human Betterment*.

42. Williams, "Psychological Survey of the Whittier State School," 40–41, 47.

and ages of boys, in one institution, is not wise." Moreover, by removing deficient boys to proper institutions, they would be sure to "receive scientific, reasonable and effective treatment. That sort of treatment is impossible under existing conditions and with existing facilities [at Whittier]." Despite Nelles's insistence throughout his administration that the goal of Whittier State School was "to restore . . . boys to normal life" and to teach them values of citizenship, he had little hope for the mentally deficient. "Some," he conceded, "cannot be reformed."⁴³

Nelles not only advocated the segregation of the so-called mentally deficient but also supported the establishment of institutions with the capacity to sterilize morons and "idiots" (those deemed to have lower mental levels than the feebleminded). In 1915 the California legislature appointed him and the Whittier board of trustees, along with two members of the Psychopathic Association of California, to a special committee responsible for investigating and reporting on the viability of establishing the Pacific Colony for the Feebleminded in Spadra, California, an institution advocated by John R. Haynes, a leading physician in Southern California and an ardent supporter of the sterilization of the mentally unfit. All the committee members eventually agreed to its establishment and drafted a report to the legislature recommending its formation. Legislators, in turn, drafted and passed the bill creating the Pacific Colony in 1917, the second state institution for the feebleminded. The first, Sonoma State Hospital, had been founded in 1889. That bill not only established the colony but also recognized mental deficiency as a psychological and social condition that could be accurately measured through science.⁴⁴ As institutions for the feebleminded, the Pacific Colony and Sonoma State Hospital, among others, had the legal right to sterilize wards with or without their consent. In 1909 the California legislature had first granted the medical superintendents of those state hospitals

43. Nelles's statements are found in Nelles, "Wards of the State: Suggestions Regarding their Scientific Segregation and Re-Distribution into Proper Groups for Effective Treatment," *Biennial Report . . . 1914*, 11–12; for evidence of Nelles's belief in hereditarianism, see Nelles, "Report of Superintendent," *Biennial Report . . . 1915–1916*, 6–8, 14.

44. For more on Nelles's role in the establishment of the Pacific Colony, see Nelles, "Superintendent's Report," *Biennial Report . . . 1914*, 8–10; "Superintendent's Report," *Biennial Report . . . 1918*, 10; and Knox and Fenton, *Fred C. Nelles*, 7.

and prisons the right to sterilize wards with “hereditary insanity or incurable chronic mania or dementia,” so long as it improved their “physical, mental, or moral condition.” In 1917 the legislature amended and expanded that statute to include any “mental disease which may have been inherited and is likely to be transmitted to descendants,” thereby allowing a more expansive and eugenics-based rationale for sterilization. The hospitals did not carry out sterilizations without oversight, however. The State Commission in Lunacy, the board that oversaw California’s insane asylums, had the right to investigate any patient or case identified for sterilization and to approve or disapprove of such action. According to historian Alexandra Stern, by the 1960s nearly 20,000 individuals, “or one-third of 60,000 total nationwide,” had been sterilized in California.⁴⁵

At the same time that Nelles worked to establish the Pacific Colony, he also made a great effort to establish a department of “research for intelligent action” at Whittier State School, a unit strongly advocated by Williams and Terman.⁴⁶ Ideally, Nelles wanted the program to be run as a scientific institute and site of social engineering, headed by a psychologist and supported with medical and psychiatric consultants. In addition, the department would facilitate meetings of expert social and behavioral scientists studying the causes of juvenile delinquency in particular and the latest findings in science and eugenics in general. These gatherings would enable scientific researchers and their supporters to establish a network in which they would share and publish their latest findings. The investigations and publications of the department would benefit not only young men and school administrators at Whittier, Nelles argued, but also delinquent youth and reform school officials throughout the state and the country.

The board of trustees supported Nelles’s recommendations and accomplishments, particularly his persistence in segregating boys by intelligence levels, arguing that the mentally weak impeded the progress of normal and superior boys. “It is our belief that many are incapable of self-direction,” the board indicated in 1914. “These belong in a different institution; and their presence

45. Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 84, 99–110.

46. Quote cited in Nelles, “Superintendent’s Report,” *Biennial Report . . . 1914*, 30.

here tends to prevent those who are capable of attaining to normal self-control from receiving the training and care they require.”⁴⁷

The state also supported this line of reasoning. In 1915 it established the Department of Research (which became the California Bureau of Juvenile Research in 1917) at Whittier State School with Williams as its director. With “a corps of trained investigators,” Williams believed that they, as objective scientific researchers, had the ability to answer questions pertaining to delinquency, intelligence, and heredity, “unbiased, free from personal opinions,” and without “sentimental injections.”⁴⁸ Touting themselves as leaders among Progressives in the research of juvenile delinquency, Williams and his colleagues sponsored meetings and published many of the proceedings in the *Journal of Delinquency*. In addition, the department continued testing all incoming wards at Whittier into the late 1910s and well into the 1920s; they carried out similar surveys at reformatories and detention homes in California and throughout the United States.

The ongoing research carried out at Whittier State School and elsewhere led Williams and Terman to harden their views on the links among intelligence, race, and heredity and on the role of the feeble-minded in society in general. In 1915 Williams argued that the “segregation and sterilization [of individuals such as Whittier boys], both strongly advocated by leading authorities, seem to be the only means at hand.”⁴⁹ A year later Terman expanded on those ideas when he published *The Measurement of Intelligence*, in which he advocated the sterilization of Mexicans and blacks and the confinement of youth of color to vocational trade training. Feeble-mindedness, Terman wrote, was “very, very common among Spanish-Indian and Mexican families of the Southwest and also among negroes [*sic*]. Their dullness,” he stated

seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family stocks from which they come. The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans, and negroes suggests quite forcibly that the whole question of racial differences in mental traits will have to be taken up anew and by experimental methods. The writer predicts

47. *Ibid.*, 6.

48. Williams, “Report of the Department of Research,” *Biennial Report . . . 1915–1916*, 52; Nelles, “Superintendent’s Report,” *Biennial Report . . . 1918*, 4–6.

49. Williams, “Report of the Department of Research,” *Biennial Report . . . 1915–1916*, 89.

that when this is done there will be discovered enormously significant racial differences in general intelligence. . . .

Children of this group should be segregated in special classes and be given instruction which is concrete and practical. They cannot master abstractions, but they often can be made efficient workers, able to look out for themselves. There is no possibility at present of convincing society that they should not be allowed to reproduce, although from a eugenic point of view they constitute a grave problem because of their unusually prolific breeding.⁵⁰

Terman remained steadfast in his beliefs, even when broader questions surfaced in the scientific community about the validity of the intelligence tests. Criticism of those exams followed on the heels of the examination and poor performance of World War I army recruits. Terman, who coauthored those evaluations with Robert M. Yerkes, his student and a comparative psychologist, wrote several essays and gave speeches defending their theories, methodologies, and findings. Nevertheless, the doubts expressed by Terman's and Yerkes's colleagues did little to dissuade Whittier's administrators about the legitimacy of the tests and conclusions about feebleminded children and adolescents.⁵¹

Indeed, Nelles's faith in the scientific research, as well as his own beliefs in hereditarianism, led him to go so far as to suggest the testing of all children in California public schools. Terman also promoted this recommendation after he and Yerkes developed the National Intelligence Tests, which allowed for group testing, rather than individual testing, in the 1920s. By examining every young person, Nelles argued, society would gain the ability to prevent delinquency among students in the public schools. Moreover, testing promised efficiency in classifying and segregating pupils into the three main classes of intelligence: average, superior, and inferior. This process would, in turn, allow instructors and administrators to weed out the mentally incompetent who struggled in school and made it difficult for those classified as normal children to learn.⁵²

50. Terman, *The Measurement of Intelligence*, 91–92.

51. For more on the Army tests and outcomes, see Kevles, "Testing the Army's Intelligence," 565–581; John L. Rury, "Race, Region, and Education: An Analysis of Black and White Scores on the 1917 Army Alpha Intelligence Tests," *Journal of Negro Education*, 57 (1988), 51–65; and Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise*, 128–129.

52. On the testing of all children, see González, "Racism, Education, and the Mexican Community in Los Angeles," 293–294, and Nelles, "Superintendent's Report," *Biennial Report . . . 1918*, 4–9.

Nelles's proposition for universal testing nearly came to fruition in the 1920s and 1930s, when the public schools subjected thousands of Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans as well as children of other ethnic and racial backgrounds to intelligence tests throughout the United States. Public school officials carried out some of the first exams as early as 1913 in Columbia, South Carolina, administering them to African Americans and whites. The researchers found the former to be mentally younger, or inferior, compared with the latter. From 1916 to 1929 behavioral scientists, educators, and others carried out over 175 studies with a total of 36,882 participants. The most frequent ethnic and racial groups tested included African Americans, followed by Native Americans, Chinese, Italians, Portuguese, and Mexicans. The results of those exams concluded that Northern European Americans were mentally superior to others tested. In California in 1918, the Santa Ana School District hired Williams to oversee the testing of its mostly Mexican-origin school population, many of whom scored below normal. As a result, school administrators placed these students in remedial classes, providing only non-academic vocational training. By the 1930s school officials throughout the Southwest, including Texas and Colorado, commonly placed Mexican and Mexican American children in manual trade classes.⁵³

The impact of intelligence testing at Whittier State School

At Whittier State School, intelligence testing resulted in the identification, segregation, and removal of low-scoring male youth, a significant proportion of them youth of color. In the 1910s, when testing got under way, officials sent away 143 males who scored "too low mentally." Of those, 36 percent were non-white and the remaining 64 percent were European American, even though whites accounted for a greater proportion of the school populace (80 percent on a yearly average). Black students made up 50 percent of the youth of color segregated from Whittier; that is, African American

53. González, "Racism, Education and the Mexican Community," 295–296. For examples of the analyses derived from the tests given to students, see Kimball Young, *Mental Differences in Certain Immigrant Groups* (Eugene, Ore., 1922); Franklin C. Paschal, "Racial Differences in the Mental and Physical Development of Mexican Children," *Comparative Psychology Monographs*, 3 (1926), 1–76; and Sheldon, "The Intelligence of Mexican Children."

youth comprised 18 percent of those removed, even while they made up only 8 percent of the pupils at Whittier. In other words, school officials transferred them out of the institution at rates disproportionate to their overall numbers at the school.⁵⁴

Curiously, the records reveal that, contrary to the recommendations, a relatively small number of males who were classified as mentally deficient ended up in a state hospital for the feeble-minded. That is, of the 143 youths tested and segregated in the 1910s, only about 27 percent, which included thirteen boys of color and twenty-six whites, went to hospitals such as the Sonoma State Home or the Pacific Colony. For instance, Arthur and Henry Pierce, sixteen-year-old Mexican twin brothers from San Diego (originally from Baja California) were among the few sent to the Pacific Colony. The San Diego juvenile court judge sent them to that hospital after they had spent nearly a year at Whittier. Why exactly the Pierce brothers ended up at the Colony, not at Preston or somewhere else, and what happened to them once they arrived at the Colony are unknown; the case files do not reveal many details, including whether they, or any of the boys committed to state hospitals, were sterilized. None of the Whittier State School case files indicates whether boys were eventually sterilized. The only available evidence is the probation officer's report, which stated briefly that that boys appeared "under nourished and Henry . . . [seemed] somewhat retarded in his mental development." What is known is that at least Arthur eventually left the Pacific Colony and returned to San Diego, since the local police arrested him in 1926 and placed him in the county jail.⁵⁵

Unlike the Pierce brothers, the majority of young men identified as mentally deficient (73 percent), regardless of race, ethnicity, or class, found themselves at Preston rather than a state hospital. Apparently the 1889 statute forbidding the commitment of boys of "unsound mind" to Preston did little to curb the administrators' practice of sending wards from Whittier to Preston.⁵⁶ Indeed, even when Williams and his colleagues diagnosed African American

54. These and all figures come from my tabulation of the extant data in the Whittier State School case files for the first thirty years of the school's existence. These records include some 3,816 case files.

55. For Henry Pierce, see Case No. 3585, vol. 107 (1919), p. 314, Whittier Collection; for Arthur Pierce, see Case No. 3586, vol. 107 (1919), p. 315, in *ibid.*

56. For the statute describing the population of boys allowable at Preston, see *California Statutes*, 1889, chapter 53, section 15, p. 103.

youth as having low mental abilities, making them ideal candidates for hospitalization and, implicitly, sterilization, the youths seldom ended up at such places as Sonoma or the Pacific Colony.

Leonard Horn, a fifteen-year-old African American boy abandoned by his parents at a young age and arrested multiple times for burglary, had the mental ability of a moron, according to Williams's diagnosis. Heredity explained those deficits, Williams stated, for his parents drank incessantly, his mother was immoral, and his sister was reportedly wayward—in other words, sexually promiscuous. "The boy is feeble-minded," Williams concluded in his evaluation in 1916, "and probably so by inheritance. Is in reality an institution[al] case, needing permanent supervision. Would be likely to respond best in a colony for morons. . . . Needs intelligent and kindly treatment by persons who know of his true condition, and who will realize that his moral degeneracy is but an expression of his mental deficiency."⁵⁷

Despite William's recommendation, school administrators sent Horn to Preston, like all but one other black youth transferred to another institution. Their reasons suggest that practicality overrode principle. Doubtless the bureaucratic ease that enabled reform school administrators to transfer boys between reformatories influenced the high rate of reassignments from Whittier to Preston. According to the 1915 juvenile court law of California, the superintendents at Whittier and Preston had the legal right to exchange wards between their institutions at their own discretion and with little oversight from the state, a practice they implemented with frequency.⁵⁸ Those same administrators could not so readily commit boys to state hospitals, however. To do so, the superintendent had to return the individual to the sentencing court, usually the superior court or juvenile court of the county, where the judge then considered the superintendent's recommendation for removal to a state hospital. That determination did not occur immediately, however, for the justice also weighed the opinions of the school's board of trustees as well as those of parents and relatives; family members had the legal right to have their voices heard in the matter. Ultimately, the judge, not parents or superintendents

57. For Leonard Horn's case, see Case File No. 3174, vol. 106 (1916), pp. 285–286, Whittier Collection.

58. For the law enabling superintendents to transfer wards, see *California Statutes*, 1915, chapter 631, section 8, p. 1232.

such as Nelles, made the final decision.⁵⁹ Rather than rely on this long and complex process to transfer unwanted youth, Nelles sent so-called defective boys to Preston instead of a state hospital. This approach produced faster results for the larger goals of his administration, which included the modernization and transformation of his reform school into a first-class institution.

Indeed, reform school administrators dispatched many so-called mentally deficient boys to Preston for their failure to respond to the treatment at Whittier. Such was the rationale given in 1918 for sending James López, a fourteen-year-old Mexican American boy, to Preston. According to Williams, the youth's difficulties derived from his degenerate and immoral family stock. In describing the family's living conditions, the probation officer described the home as "filthy and unsanitary," no more than a "schack [*sic*] in a poor neighborhood." Even though it "provide[d] [p]lenty of play space[,] the [en]vironment [was] not good," for the parents were neglectful, cruel, and depraved. The officer went so far as to suggest that the mother, who had recently passed away, had been a prostitute, for she had lived with a man who was not her spouse and had had a contagious disease. James López's father, a common laborer, had a poor reputation as well. He drank and had been arrested for stealing and smoking marijuana.⁶⁰

When it came time to test James López, Williams admitted that he had been unable to determine with precision the boy's IQ because of his "inadequacy of [the English] language." Williams's acknowledgment of such a barrier with verbal communication was significant, for he, as a biological determinist, normally ignored such variables in the examination process. Yet, in this case, he could not deny its influence. According to public school records, James López had received only a second-grade education, likely in one of the segregated Mexican schools common throughout Spanish-speaking neighborhoods and communities in California.⁶¹ The "boy cannot speak English well enough to make himself

59. For the statute defining the process to transfer a boy or girl from a state school to a state hospital, see *California Statutes*, 1917, chapter 776, section 34, p. 1630.

60. For James López's case, see Case File No. 3238, vol. 106 (1916), pp. 349–350, Whittier Collection.

61. For studies on the segregation of Mexican-origin children in Mexican schools and the struggles to overturn that practice, see, for instance, George I. Sánchez, "Concerning Segregation of Spanish-Speaking Children in the Public Schools," *Inter Amer-*

clearly understood,” Williams confessed. Even though the youth “performed a number of the tests satisfactorily,” the researcher decided to postpone the remainder until James López completed additional schooling, a move that ran counter to the researcher’s avowed beliefs about the influence of schooling on performance on intelligence tests. In Texas, too, researchers testing Mexican-origin youth occasionally admitted that language proficiency influenced the testing process. To help Spanish-speaking youngsters understand instructions, they translated instructions and resorted to hand and other non-verbal signs to communicate.⁶² In California, Williams’s inability to conclude the exams with James López did not discourage the scientist from making several deductions about the boy. The youth, he inferred, was “probably of inferior grade,” and his environment “probably contributed something” to his delinquency. Apparently, these conjectures sufficed to have James López transferred to Preston.

Administrators dispensed with unwanted youths such as James López not only by transferring them to Preston but also by releasing them much earlier than their twenty-first birthdays, supposedly their final date of discharge. The case files indicate that in the 1910s school officials released at least eighty-six boys identified as “too low mentally.” Of those, 29 percent included youth of Mexican descent, 19 percent of African origin, and 50 percent white. Such Mexican boys included fifteen-year-old Joe López. In 1919 the board of trustees released him because of his low mental abilities and inability to reform. “[T]he school has done all it can for this boy,” the board declared. What exactly the school had done or attempted to do is unclear, for the records provide few details on his experience at the school. All we know is that Joe López did not have many opportunities in life before arriving at Whittier. As a young boy, he attended the first and second grades only. At some point, his mother died and his father decided to live with a

ican Education Occasional Papers, 9 (Austin, Tex., 1951); San Miguel, Jr., and Valencia, “From the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to *Hopwood*”; San Miguel, Jr., “*Let All of Them Take Heed*”; and Reynaldo Anaya Valencia, Sonia R. García, Henry Flores, and José Roberto Suarez, Jr., *Mexican Americans and the Law: El Pueblo Unido Jamas Sers Veneido* (Tucson, 2004), chapter two. For a dramatic reenactment of that same struggle in San Diego County, see *The Lemon Grove Incident*, produced and written by Paul Espinosa and directed by Frank Christopher, 58 min., Cinema Guild, 1985, available on videocassette.

62. Blanton, “They Cannot Master Abstractions,” 1016.

Lopez, James	July 31, 1918.
SUMMARY FOR PRESTON SCHOOL OF INDUSTRY.	
<u>Examination.</u>	Nov. 23, 1916, at Whittier State School, by Dr. J. Harold Williams, Binet-Simon Scale, Stanford Revision.
<u>Test results.</u>	Age 13 yrs 7 mos. Mental age undetermined because of inadequacy of language. Boy cannot speak English well enough to make himself clearly understood. He performed a number of the tests satisfactorily, however, but it was found desirable to postpone examination until after he had had more schooling. The subsequent examination has not been reported. Is probably of inferior grade.
<u>Education.</u>	Attended several schools in Los Angeles, reaching the second grade. Very deficient in English.
<u>Family history.</u>	Father, Mexican laborer. Intemperate. Conduct not good. Mother dead.
<u>Home conditions.</u>	Not investigated by our field-workers, but reported to be "a schack in a poor neighborhood. Plenty of play space. Environment not good."
<u>Neighborhood conditions.</u>	Lived in a poor part of the city.
<u>Conclusions.</u>	We are unable to conclude anything definite in regard to this boy's intelligence or the cause of his delinquency. We know that he came from very unfavorable surroundings, and this is sufficient to explain his delinquency. At the same time his mental inferiority probably contributed something.

Figure 4. A summary of James López's performance on intelligence tests and prognosis. These documents often accompanied the boys who were transferred to other institutions, including the Preston School of Industry, Whittier State School, Whittier, California. Photograph by Whittier State School. California State Archives.

woman whom he never married, a living situation that caught the attention of the authorities. Eventually, local officials removed Joe López from these surroundings and placed him in the detention center, a holding place of the juvenile court. There, a probation officer described him as "very unruly, vicious, sullen, ill-tempered, untruthful, lazy, and slovenly." Such a characterization as well as his previous living situation undoubtedly influenced the juvenile court's decision to commit him to Whittier.⁶³

63. For Joe López's case, see Case File No. 3304, vol. 107 (1917), pp. 33-34, Whittier Collection.



Figure 5. Like many boys identified as mentally deficient, James López was transferred to the Preston School of Industry in 1918. Whittier State School, Whittier, California. Photograph by Whittier State School. California State Archives.

Where unwanted males such as Joe López, James López, Horn, and the Pierce brothers finally ended up after their institutionalization is unclear, for the records provide limited insight into what became of them after their release. Perhaps they eventually returned to their communities of origin or ended up in prison or jail, as did Arthur Pierce and many of his Whittier State School peers. Regardless of where they landed, the reform school's move to let them go earlier than planned signaled the administration's steadfast refusal—and unwritten policy—to have anything to do with those judged too low grade mentally for Whittier and Nelles's standards.

Within a short period of time, the practice of removing mentally deficient or unwanted boys from Whittier State School re-

sulted in one of Nelles's greatest successes. In 1925 Nelles boasted that merely 2 percent of tested youths at Whittier State School scored as feeble-minded or borderline feeble-minded, a significant reduction from the 28 percent identified in 1914. The normal and superior made up the overwhelming majority (78 percent) of Whittier boys, he continued, a proportion that surpassed even the average public school classrooms. Although Nelles said little about the ethnic and racial backgrounds of the boys who remained at the school in the mid-1920s, his social engineering—that is, his plan to house and work with a young, pliable, and intelligent group of boys—appeared to have come to fruition.⁶⁴

Conclusion

As this article has demonstrated, Whittier State School administrators turned to science, scientific research, and eugenics, as well as widely held ideas about race, intelligence, and heredity to identify, segregate, and remove so-called mentally deficient boys, the majority of whom were youth of color. According to the intelligence tests carried out by Williams and his peers, male youth of color had little, if any, hope of increasing their mental capacities. Neither education nor experience could ever pull them up from the ranks of the feeble-minded and moron. As such, these young men in particular had little hope of leading normal adult lives and would do best in institutions such as Sonoma State Hospital or the Pacific Colony for the Feeble-minded. The scientists also gave intelligence exams to young males of European American descent, but the majority of them scored as normal or dull-normal, a classification given to those scoring slightly below normal. In contrast to youth of color, school officials deemed the majority of whites capable and worthy of reformation and citizenship.

Despite the researchers' recommendations, the majority of mentally deficient youth ended up at another reformatory, the Preston School of Industry. In all likelihood, school administrators chose to send the majority of boys to Preston rather than to Sonoma or the Pacific Colony for reasons of bureaucratic efficiency. Such decisions, while practical, contradicted the policies that Williams and Nelles, as well as other eugenicists, advocated: the sterilization

64. For Nelles's comments, see Nelles, "Changes in the Nature of the Population at Whittier State School," *Journal of Delinquency*, 9 (1925), 231–232.

of the unfit. Instead, at Preston even those deemed least capable of learning skills, the feebleminded, received manual trade instruction as well as educational opportunities, for the reform school also provided a grammar school education.⁶⁵ Perhaps this signaled the researchers' alternative agenda of training even so-called deficient Mexican-origin youth into productive low-skilled manual laborers who would fit well in the industrial capitalist system's need for workers. Regardless of the reasons for the youths' transfer to Preston, in time Whittier's social engineering of classification and segregation would be replicated throughout the public schools in the United States.

Within a decade, ideas about race, intelligence, and heredity as they pertained to Mexican-origin children and adolescents began to shift in emphasis. By the end of the 1920s and into the 1930s, many scientific researchers and professionals recognized the importance of culture as well as biology in assessing intelligence. They held that language, specifically the Spanish language, played a significant role in the inability of young people to progress and develop like so-called normal youth. According to this view, as long as youth of Mexican descent learned English proficiently and discarded Spanish entirely, they would assimilate and be on the road to educational success and economic opportunity. English-language acquisition notwithstanding, however, Mexican and Mexican American youth continued to be identified explicitly by inherent racial attributes and implicitly by mental deficiencies. In the World War II era, as Chicana and Chicano historians have demonstrated, public officials, the media, and scientific experts drew links among Chicana/o youth, racial inferiority, and innate criminal tendencies.⁶⁶

As this article has shown, scientific researchers and reform school administrators, many of them Progressives, racialized youth of color as inferior and criminalized them as delinquent decades

65. *California Statutes*, 1889, chapter 53, section 12, p. 102; John Lafferty, *The Preston School of Industry: A Centennial History, 1894–1994* (Ione, Calif., 1997).

66. For more on the connection between culture and low educational performance in the 1930s, see Blanton, "From Intellectual Deficiency to Cultural Deficiency"; for more on the perceived links between youth of Mexican descent and criminality in the 1940s, see Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900–1945* (Berkeley, 1999), and Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003).

prior to World War II. Such findings contribute to our knowledge of Chicana/o history in general and Chicana/o youth in particular.⁶⁷ By examining and analyzing how race—and ideas about race—shaped the lives of the young people of color who ended up at Whittier, this article contributes to our understanding of how these young men fared in the educational and juvenile justice system in California. The evidence reveals that it meant marginalization at best and institutionalization at worst.

67. For works that examine Mexican and Mexican American youth in the pre-World War II era, see Vicki L. Ruiz, “The Flapper and the Chaperone: Historical Memory among Mexican-American Women,” in Donna Gabaccia, ed., *Seeking Common Ground: Multidisciplinary Studies of Immigrant Women in the United States* (Westport, Conn., 1992), 141–157; see also Chávez-García, “Youth, Evidence, and Agency,” 75, note 27.