

## INTRODUCTION

Between 1907 and 1937, 32 U.S. states passed laws authorizing the sterilization of residents of state homes for the feeble-minded and mentally ill.

California performed over 1/3 of eugenic sterilizations nationwide (20,000 officially reported).

Eugenic logics of prevention and cost reduction were closely aligned with public health.<sup>1</sup>

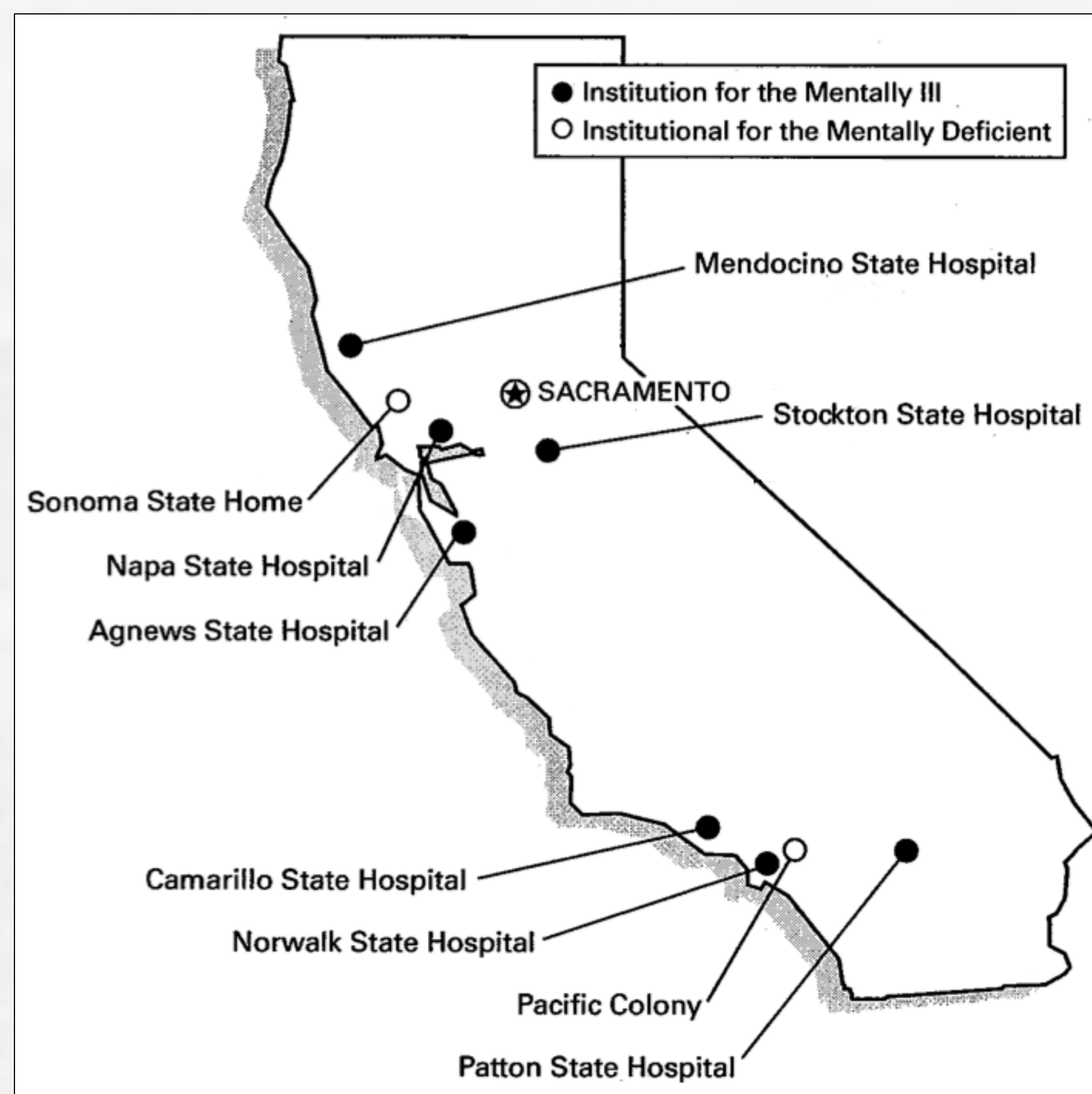


Figure 1. Map of California state institutions, adapted.<sup>4</sup>

Medical superintendents recommended sterilization of patients with conditions considered to be “heritable”, including developmental disabilities and mental illness, but also criminal behavior and non-normative sexuality.

Many accounts report that people of color were more likely to be sterilized, in California and elsewhere.<sup>2-4</sup>

Until recently there has not been individual-level data to evaluate racial/ethnic bias in sterilization in more detail.

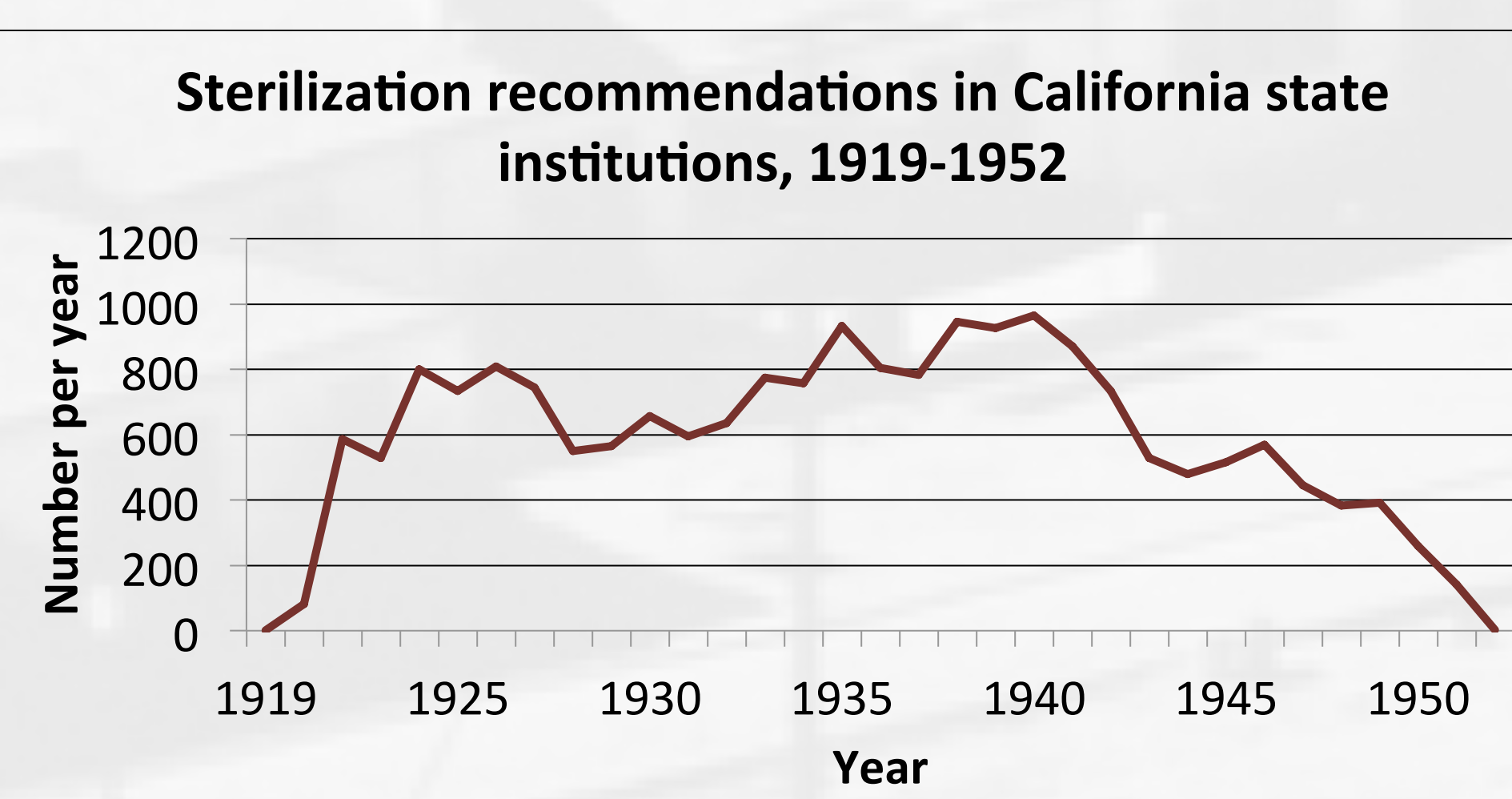


Figure 2. Sterilizations per year, new eugenic sterilization data.

## AIM

Use new individual-level sterilization data to document patterns in sterilization by Latino/Hispanic ethnicity.

## METHODS

### Data

Newly compiled data from 19,953 sterilization recommendation files from 9 California institutions

Restrict to years 1935-1944 (n=7,970)

Variables: age, sex, Hispanic ethnicity (Spanish surname, 1980 US Census standard), justification for sterilization, year, institution

1940 US Census microdata on all residents of sterilizing institutions (n=27,148)

Variables: age, sex, Hispanic ethnicity (Spanish surname), institution

Figure 3. Data for this analysis were extracted from sterilization forms similar to this redacted one from Patton State Hospital in 1945.<sup>4</sup>

### Analysis

- Use Poisson regression to estimate rates of sterilization by ethnicity, sex and age
- Include a random effect for institution to account for differences between medical superintendents

## RESULTS

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, individuals recommended for sterilization in nine California state institutions, 1935-1944 (n=7,970).

Variable	Non-Spanish surname (n=6916)		Spanish surname (n=1054)		Total (n=7970)	
	n(%)	Mean(SE)	n(%)	Mean(SE)	n(%)	Mean(SE)
Sex						
Male	3349 (48%)		497 (47%)		3846 (48%)	
Female	3567 (52%)		557 (53%)		4124 (52%)	
Age	25.7 (0.1)		22.6 (0.3)		25.3 (0.1)	
Justification						
“sexual delinquency”	471 (7%)		87 (8%)		558 (7%)	
petty crime	119 (2%)		35 (3%)		154 (2%)	

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, all inpatients at nine California state institutions, 1940 (n=27,148).

Variable	Non-Spanish surname (n=25741)		Spanish surname (n=1407)		Total (n=27148)	
	n(%)	Mean(SE)	n(%)	Mean(SE)	n(%)	Mean(SE)
Sex						
Male	13544 (53%)		899 (64%)		14443 (53%)	
Female	12197 (47%)		508 (36%)		12705 (47%)	
Age	46.7 (0.1)		38.4 (0.4)		46.3 (0.1)	

Table 3. Poisson regression results: rates of sterilization (per 1000 residents per year), by sex and ethnicity.

Ethnicity/sex	Rate per 1000/yr (95% CI)
Non-Spanish surname male	33.1 (28.3, 38.7)
Non-Spanish surname female	48.7 (39.7, 59.7)
Spanish surname male	108.8 (84.5, 140.0)
Spanish surname female	185.8 (120.7, 286.1)

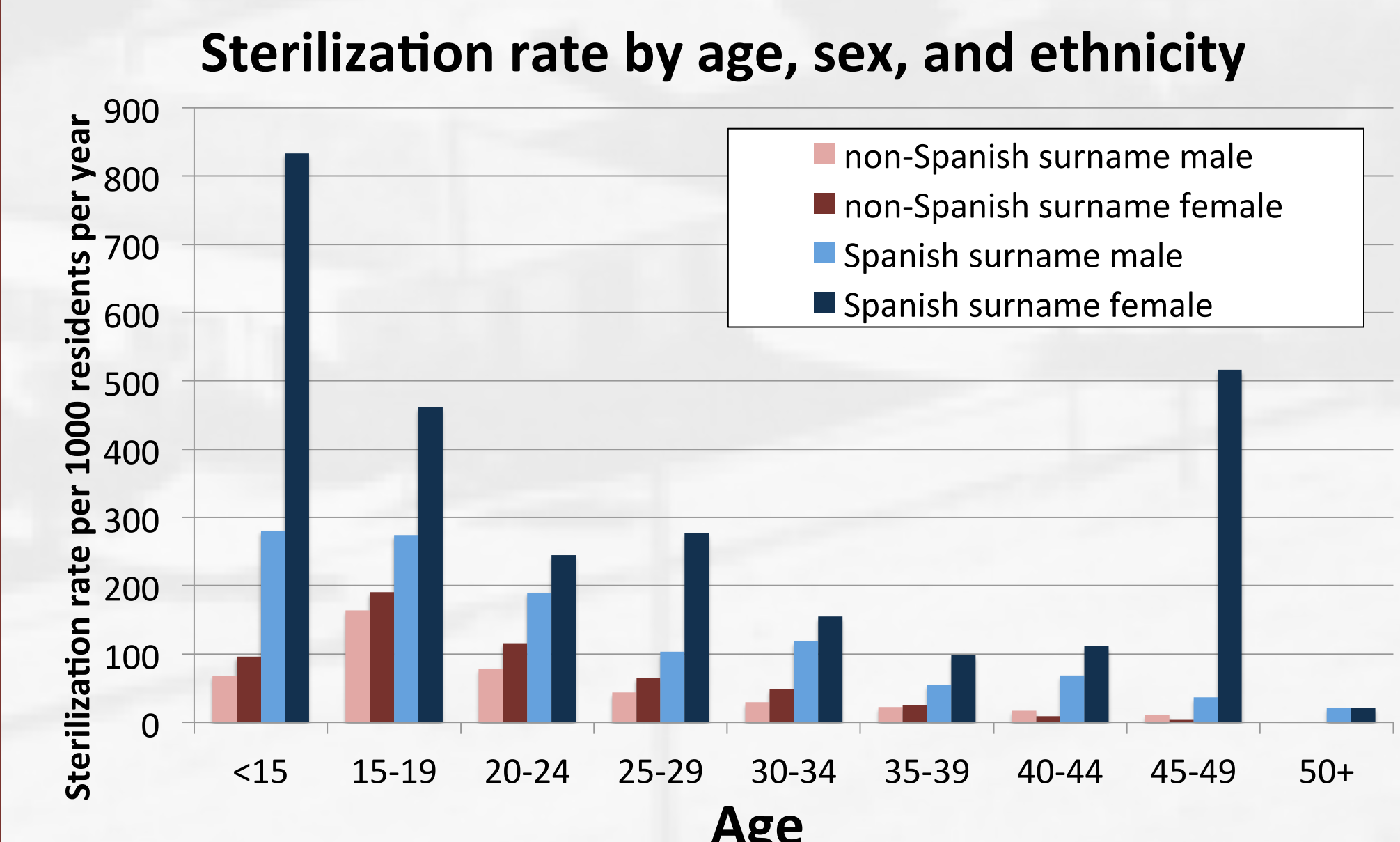


Figure 4. Poisson regression results including a random effect for institution.

Holding sex and age constant, individuals with Spanish surnames were 3.5 times as likely to be sterilized for non-normative sexual behavior and 4.9 times as likely to be sterilized for petty criminality such as theft (which was thought to be heritable).

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Institution residents with Spanish surnames were recommended for sterilization at more than three times the rate of their non-Spanish surname counterparts.

Ethnic bias in sterilization was particularly high for female institution residents, and especially for adolescents.

Medical and public health authorities used sterilization to manage pathologized social circumstances and identities (poverty, sexual minority status).

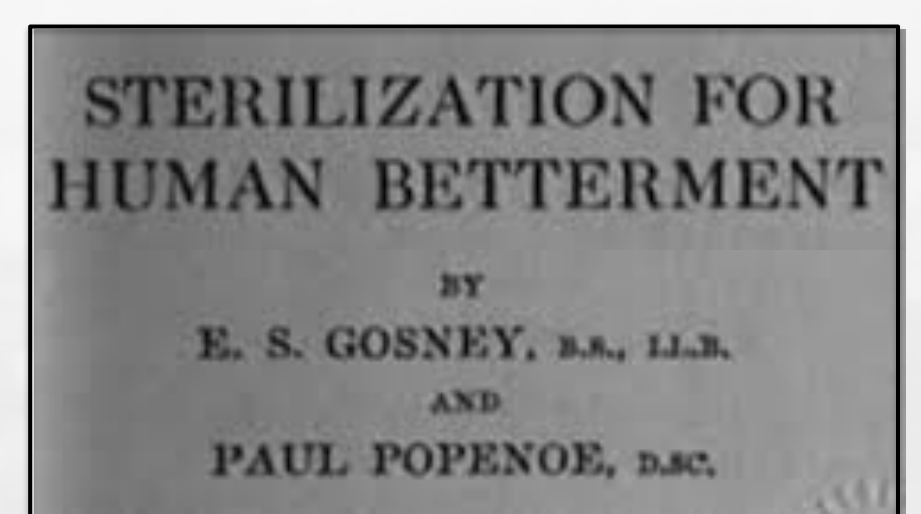


Figure 5. Title page from eugenic sterilization report, 1930.<sup>1</sup>

### Limitations

Due to small numbers, we did not examine bias toward other racial/ethnic groups (e.g. Black Americans, Japanese and Filipino immigrants, Native Americans, European “white ethnics” e.g. Italians, Portuguese).

Our analysis assumes that institution populations at 1940 Census are representative of populations during 1935-1944 period.

### Future directions

Add Census microdata from 1920, 1930, 1950 and 1960 to extend analysis to the entire period 1919-1952.

Examine changes in ethnic and gender bias over time and differences in sterilization practice between institutions.

Examine other dynamics, such as timing of sterilization after pregnancy, differences in sterilization by education.

## REFERENCES

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