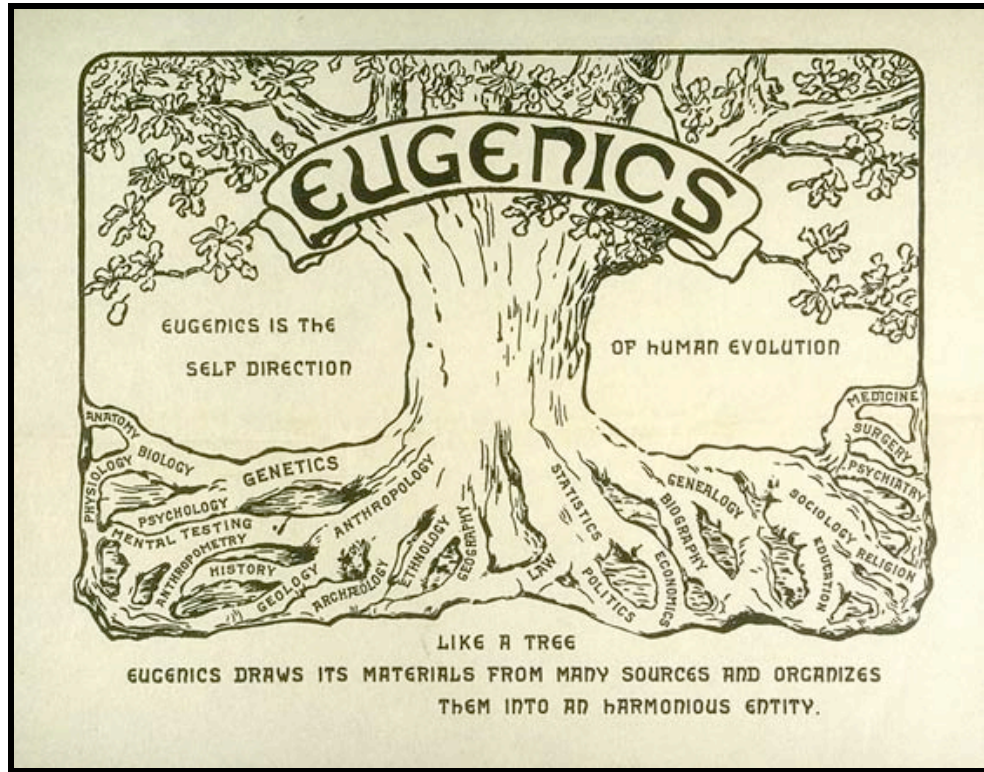


113 HESTER STREET presents

# War Against The Weak

A documentary film based on the book by Edwin Black



93 Minutes, Color, Unrated

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It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind....  
Three generations of imbeciles are enough.

Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes  
Majority opinion in *Buck Vs. Bell*, 1927

## SYNOPSIS

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Based on the book by New York Times best selling author and nine time Pulitzer Prize nominee, Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak* is the untold story of American Eugenics, a movement that attempted to breed a Nordic master race through the elimination of those deemed "unfit".

In the first three decades of the 20th Century, American corporate philanthropy, combined with the efforts of the scientific, academic and political elite, created the pseudoscience eugenics, and institutionalized race politics as national policy. The goal was to create a superior, white, Nordic race and obliterate virtually everyone else.

Eugenicists went about identifying so-called 'defective' family trees and subjected individuals to legislated segregation and sterilization programs, and sometimes even euthanasia. The victims were poor people, brown-haired white people, African Americans, immigrants, Native Americans, Eastern European Jews, the infirm and anyone classified outside the superior genetic lines drawn up by American raceologists. The main funders were The Carnegie Institution, The Rockefeller Foundation, and The Harriman Railroad fortune. The main actors included America's most respected scientists, hailing from such prestigious universities as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, and operating out of a complex at Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island. The eugenic network worked in tandem with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the State Department, numerous state governmental bodies and legislatures throughout the country, and the U.S. Supreme Court. They were all dedicated to breeding a eugenically superior race, just as agronomists would breed better strains of corn, and to eliminating the reproductive capability of the weak and inferior.

American eugenic crusades proliferated into a worldwide campaign, and in the 1920s came to the attention of Adolf Hitler. Under the Nazis, American eugenic principles were applied without restraint, careening out of control into the Third Reich's infamous genocide. American

eugenicists openly supported Germany's program. The Rockefeller Foundation financed the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute and the work of its central racial scientists. Once WWII began, Nazi eugenics turned from mass sterilization and euthanasia to genocidal murder. One doctor at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute was Josef Mengele, who continued his eugenic research in Auschwitz, making daily eugenic reports on twins.

The Nazi's were eventually tried at the Nuremberg trials, for their long list of genocidal activities. One of the Nazis on trial asks a question: What is the difference between the actions of the Germans and those of the Americans?

*War Against the Weak* is the story of the birth of Eugenics, the relationship between America and Germany, and how American eugenic thought directly influenced the Holocaust.

We say, "never forget," and yet we have completely forgotten our own dark history. *War Against the Weak* is a shocking narrative of bad science at its worst, and a warning bell for the impending genetic age.

#### **FROM OUR DIRECTOR**

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Flash backward. 105 years. At a cutting edge laboratory at the edge of a tranquil harbor, a group of scientists plot the biological domination of the world. They call it Eugenics.

Flash forward, 40 years. In a strange chamber at a death camp called Auschwitz, a mad scientist conducts horrifying experiments. Children are murdered, dissected, violated. The scientist is methodical, following a protocol. Following an idea. An idea, also called Eugenics.

Eugenics attempted the sublime through a contradictory emphasis on destruction. Humankind was to be perfected for the good of all, including those to be eliminated. The idea bridged chasms. Revolutionary and reactionary, religious and humanist, scientist and philosopher. It was so dense, and drew so many brilliant minds to it, that it eventually spawned its own religion, complete with ritual. And sacrifice.

My journey through this subject, and into its eventual heart of darkness, is one of revision. Edwin Black's book is massive, overwhelmingly detailed. I spent two years sifting through it, finding the sub-textual connections.

I then amassed thousands of documents, clippings, films, advertisements:

the detritus of Eugenic propaganda. The film links the text through these visual remnants, and is therefore not a deconstruction of eugenics, but a reconstruction. We have cinematic reenactments throughout the film, hyper-stylized manifestations of the Eugenicists' ideal. I call them invocations. Channeled images of their utopia.

The story is told from the eugenicists' POV. The audience is the actor and voyeur. The film sets the scene, delineates the facts, presents Eugenics in its most seductive way. The audience must make decisions, constantly. Do I agree? Should some people never have been born? The audience is forced to confront the past. When the credits roll, they must confront our present. And our future.

Although the standard documentary interview format is eschewed for narration, the film does include a set of interviews. These are invocations as well: avatars of those who were segregated, sterilized, or euthanised. Victor is an African American albino. Dennis is black and Jewish; his wife is the German born granddaughter of an SS officer. Robert is blind, Jewish, and gay. Gary has Down Syndrome. Lucille is 60 years old and homeless. As they talk, briefly, directly to the camera, to the audience, they confront us with the underlying question of the film: is some life not worth living? And who decides?

The film's style channels the aesthetics of the eugenicists, first of the Americans, and then of the Nazis. Horror imagery is used, sparingly, to represent eugenicists' fears. A lurking handheld camera watches a fit blond investigator as she approaches a dark cabin housing a "feeble-minded" person. The full pregnant belly of a woman doomed to sterilization pulses and throbs. A sick cow coughs, spreading TB. Science fiction imagery is used to represent their hopes. Glowing fingerprints, calipers, pyramids; the autopsy table as obelisk and altar.

Why is this story vital? We need to look no further than our news feeds. The desire for modification, for genetic supremacy and perfection. For designer genes, couture biology. How can we proceed with caution, how can we understand potentialities if we are unaware of the past?

*War Against the Weak* shows the consequences of putting science to prejudice. Of rationalizing intolerance. It demystifies the Holocaust and the Nazi atrocities, drawing them out of the ether of time and memory, and solidifies a historical trajectory that has never been exposed on film before.

## FILMMAKERS

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Director ..... Justin Strawhand  
Producer ..... Peter Demas  
Historical Consultant ..... Edwin Black  
Director of Photography ..... Jay Silver  
Composer ..... Mario Grigorov  
Co-Writer ..... Richard Belfiore  
Legal ..... Phyllis Kaufman

## FILMMAKER BIOS

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### **Justin Strawhand – Writer / Director**

Justin Strawhand is an independent documentary maker and artist. His first film, *8 BIT: A Documentary about Art and Videogames*, which he produced, co-directed, and edited, premiered at the New York Museum of Modern Art, and was named one of the top ten films of 2006 in *Artforum* magazine. It was also featured in *Wired Magazine* and has toured the world to international acclaim. VH1 called it “the best game movie ever made”. *8 BIT* was also an official selection of many festivals, including the Full Frame Documentary Festival.

### **Peter Demas – Producer**

Pete is a New York based producer. His last project, *The Third Wave*, produced with Academy Award nominee Morgan Spurlock (*Super Size Me*, *30 Days*), documents the story of four volunteers who travel to Sri Lanka to help after the Tsunami of 2004. Premiering at the 2007 Tribeca Film Festival, it has since been accepted to festivals worldwide including a Presidential Screening at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival, championed by Cannes Jury president Sean Penn.

### **Edwin Black – Consultant**

Edwin Black is the award-winning, New York Times and international bestselling investigative author of 56 bestselling editions in 14 languages in 61 countries, as well as scores of newspaper and magazine articles in the leading publications of the United States, Europe and Israel. Edwin's work focuses on genocide and hate, corporate criminality and corruption, governmental misconduct, academic fraud, philanthropy abuse, and historical investigation.

Editors have submitted Black's work for Pulitzer Prize nomination nine times, most recently for *Internal Combustion*, and three times for the National Book Award. In addition, Black received the Carl Sandburg Award for *The Transfer Agreement* as well as two Folio Awards and a Computer Press Association Award for excellence in magazine publishing.

### **Jay Silver – Director Of Photography**

Jay got his start in Chicago working as a camera assistant on such films as "*With Honors*", "*Natural Born Killers*" and TV shows like "*The Untouchables*" and "*ER*". Jay has shot numerous short films, music videos, commercials and a number of features, including "*Wendigo*", "*Persona au Gratin*", and "*Eurotrash*". He has shot numerous commercials for clients such as Calvin Klein, Earl Jeans, Merrell shoes and American Eagle Outfitters. His most recent work includes the award winning short films "*The Intervention*" (Silver Bear, Berlin Film Festival), "*Sangam*", and "*Live at Five*."

### **Mario Grigorov – Composer**

Mario has scored over thirty films and documentaries, including last year's Academy Award winner *Taxi to the Darkside*.

### **Richard Belfiore – Co-Writer**

Richard is a NYC based writer/producer. He was recently credited as co-executive producer of *The Third Wave*. Which was presented by Oscar Award Winning actor Sean Penn as part of the presidential screening at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival. Richard is currently producing two of his feature length screenplays with Mark Lipsky's WHO'S ON FIRST ENTERTAINMENT.

## Phyllis Kaufman – Legal

Prior to becoming a partner at Fish & Richardson, Ms. Kaufman served as vice president and artistic director of The Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema at International House, Philadelphia, PA, a regional not-for-profit arts center. Her producing activities include *My Architect* (associate producer), an Oscar-nominated documentary by Nathaniel Kahn (2003), and *Frogs for Snakes* (producer), a feature film by Amos Poe (1999).



The demand that defective people be prevented from propagating equally defective offspring is a demand of the clearest reason and, if systematically executed, represents the most humane act of mankind. It will spare millions of unfortunates undeserved sufferings and consequently will lead to a rising improvement of health as a whole.

- Adolf Hitler  
*Mein Kampf*

"Better Baby" Contest  
Louisiana State Fair, 1909