Eugenics and Migration: A Case Study of Salvation Army Literature about Canada and Britain, c. 1890-1921

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Abstract. The eugenics movement attracted a wide range of supporters. This article explores this theme with relation to literature about the charitable work of the Salvation Army in Britain and Canada c.1890–1921, with a focus upon the emigration scheme outlined in William Booth’s book In Darkest England and the Way Out. These writings indicate the widespread dispersal of eugenic ideology, and demonstrate the flexibility with which these theories were interpreted in this period. It will be shown that the Salvation Army adopted elements of both hereditarian and environmentalist views regarding racial health. These arguments were unified by the claim that the work of the organization made a worthy contribution to public health, both in the present and in the future. This case study sheds new light upon the history of a prominent evangelical Christian organization and upon the development of the international eugenics movement.

Keywords. eugenics, emigration, Salvation Army, degeneration

Résumé. Le mouvement eugéniste a attiré une large variété de partisans. Le présent article explore cette thématique à l’aide de textes concernant le travail charitable de l’Armée du Salut en Angleterre et au Canada de 1890 à 1921 environ, en s’attardant plus précisément aux projets d’émigration présentés dans le livre de William Booth intitulé In Darkest England and the Way Out. Ces écrits témoignent de la vaste diffusion de la pensée eugéniste et font ressortir la flexibilité avec laquelle les théories sur lesquelles elle repose ont été interprétées durant cette période. Il sera montré que l’Armée du Salut a adopté des idées aussi bien environnementalistes qu’héréditaristes en ce qui a trait à la santé des races. Ces éléments divers ont été harmonisés en clamant que le travail de l’organisation apportait une contribution importante à la santé publique, à la fois dans le présent et pour le futur. Notre étude de cas jette un éclairage nouveau
sur l’histoire d’un organisme évangélique chrétien de premier plan, et sur le développement du mouvement eugéniste international.

**Mots-clés.** eugénisme, émigration, Armée du Salut, dégénérescence

Canada West! What visions of vigorous manhood growing up worthily in a big man’s setting, are evoked by the bare mention of that country of rolling prairie, and towering mountains, with golden corn and yet more corn making the colour-scheme to match the sun-tanned countenance. Well, you can think of sturdy strength and of virility seeking to demonstrate itself, and associate them with The Salvation Army in the Territory.¹

“Eugenics” is a notoriously difficult term to define. Francis Galton, who coined the word in 1883, provided a very loose definition: “[Eugenics is] the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally.”² The openness of this definition meant that eugenic ideology found advocates among a diverse range of people across the political and social spectrum.³ Historians have often limited the terms of their research in order to study manageable aspects of eugenics;⁴ in some cases this appears to have resulted in a narrow, and perhaps artificial, definition of eugenics.⁵ One area that has received insufficient attention is that of the relationship between religious charitable organizations and eugenic ideas: there are good studies of this interaction in Nazi Germany, but limited scholarship with regard to Britain, the United States, or Canada.⁶ This is particularly striking as eugenicists often criticized medicine and philanthropy, the latter of which was dominated by religious believers,⁷ for obstructing natural selection and enabling the weak to survive.⁸ There are excellent studies of eugenics and religion,⁹ but it is often assumed that charities and religious organizations were almost inherently opposed to eugenics. A recent study of Canadian eugenics has suggested that eugenics was the antithesis of “philanthropic or religious appeals.”¹⁰ In this article I seek to test these claims through an examination of the Salvation Army, an evangelical Christian organization, with a focus upon the presentation of its *In Darkest England* scheme and Salvationist writings about emigration.

International migration was an important issue for eugenicists: there are more than 150 references to the subject in S. J. Holmes’ *Bibliography of Eugenics*,¹¹ and the area has been attributed with a prominent role in the development of Canadian eugenics.¹² In Britain some were concerned that emigration might result in a damaging loss of healthy “stock.”¹³ Leonard Darwin, son of Charles Darwin and Honorary President of the Eugenics Education Society in London, wrote to Henry Fairfield Osborn, an organizer of the Second International Congress of Eugenics in New York, and admitted to competing interests: “You must … only
take our good stock, leaving us to look after our own scalawags; whilst we may wish to get rid of … at least a fair proportion of our inferior elements.” The same issue faced Canada, the nation to which the Salvation Army sent the majority of its emigrants in this period: there was a desire to sustain “white British stock” but also fear of being used as a “dumping ground” for people not wanted in Britain. Myra Rutherford has written two excellent articles about the emigration work of the Salvation Army related to Canada, as discussed later in this paper; my focus here is on the extent to which the publications of the Salvation Army reflected ideas associated with eugenics when they considered questions of reform and emigration. These publications provide further evidence of the widespread nature of discussions about eugenics, and indicate the flexibility of the ideology in terms of the interpretations to which it was subjected.

**THE SALVATION ARMY – IN DARKEST ENGLAND**

William and Catherine Booth founded the Salvation Army in East London in 1865. The organization was shaped by the Booths’ background in Methodism: there was a focus upon revivalism and holiness, teaching through classes, and services emphasized singing and testimonies. Influenced by preachers such as Phoebe Palmer, the Salvation Army held that Christianity involved a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit. This encounter was believed to change a convert—“holiness” was both an expectation and a requirement—and the term “salvation” reflected the goal of the organization in seeking out those in material and spiritual need. The membership of the Salvation Army was predominantly working class and it conducted charitable work from an early period in its history, however, in 1890 when William Booth published *In Darkest England and the Way Out (IDE)*.

The book may be divided into two broad sections: the first described social problems that Booth believed plagued society, and the second outlined his recommendations for a solution. Booth believed that reform was possible, but presented an alarming image of “the multitudes who struggle and sink in the open-mouthed abyss.” Despite the claim that descriptions had been conservative, the book concluded that three million people, or one-tenth of the population, were in need of rescue. This group was named the “submerged tenth.” William Booth coined this phrase, but his estimate was extrapolated from the pioneering work of the social investigator Charles Booth. Both these individuals’ interest in poverty reflected a culture of heightened alarm at urban poverty, which was shared with eugenicists. One response to this concern about
poverty was the movement for “scientific philanthropy” or organized charity. The Charity Organisation Society, a major group in this movement, criticized the Salvation Army for its supposed “sentimentality.” Prominent members of Charity Organisation Societies played very influential roles in the eugenics movement: one founded the first eugenic institution in the United States and another was key to the passage of the world’s first eugenic sterilization law. The text of In Darkest England reveals, however, that eugenic ideas were not entirely unpalatable to the Salvation Army, and neither was the move towards co-ordinated relief. Booth proposed to co-ordinate Salvationist relief through three interconnected communities called “colonies.” The first, the “City Colony,” would comprise “Harbours of Refuge” in the “ocean of misery” that characterized urban life:

These Harbours will gather up the poor destitute creatures, supply their immediate pressing necessities, furnish temporary employment, inspire them with hope for the future, and commence at once a course of regeneration by moral and religious influences.

These institutions flourished and the Salvation Army grew famous for this type of philanthropy. When James Marchant wrote Social Hygienics, a text that called for eugenics to be applied to spiritual thinking, he thanked the Salvation Army for providing information from its rescue homes for “fallen women.” “Regeneration” work continued in the second part of Booth’s scheme, the “Farm Colony.” He argued that urbanization had caused much “distress” and that therefore “a substantial part of our remedy” would be “transferring … people back to the country, that is back again to ‘the Garden!’” Farm colonies were established at Hadleigh in England and three locations in the United States, but had limited success. The final “colony,” to the delight of social-imperialists, was an “over-sea colony” in the British Empire. South Africa, Canada, Western Australia, and “elsewhere,” were said to offer “millions of acres of useful land” that could be “obtained almost for the asking [and support] … our surplus population in health and comfort, were it a thousand times greater than it is.” This argument was made after aboriginal claims to land had been ceded through treaties and armed conflicts, yet, despite this history, the Salvation Army (and many others) believed that emigration could improve “health and comfort.” The three-part scheme was summarized in an image of Salvationists plucking people from a “raging sea” of “misery, drunkenness, prostitution, idiocy and want.” This association between “moral failings” and poverty was a common view that would have found favour with the Charity Organisation Society, but the call for intervention to relieve poverty would place the Salvation Army within Boyd Hilton’s category of “radical” evangelicals.
The book, and its depiction of poverty, caused a sensation. By December 1890, 115,000 copies were sold and it was so popular in Toronto that demand outstripped supply; Booth was told that a pirated edition was selling by the thousands. There were favourable reviews in large London newspapers and notices and reviews of the book in “almost every newspaper” in Canada. Booth requested £100,000 to support the scheme and this was received within four months of the book’s publication. Alongside the institutions established in the first two steps of the “colony” system, the emigration scheme sent about 50,000 British citizens to Southern Africa and Australasia, and a further 250,000 to Canada. This work, and the scale of the vision that the book promoted, has attracted a substantial historical literature. Victor Bailey revealed that Salvation Army “shelters” were praised by the UK government’s Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration, but did not discuss this in terms of the eugenics movement or fears about the condition of the “British race.” This omission, despite an excellent analysis of other contemporary ideas, is striking: this was a critical period for the eugenics movement, and the committee was formed as a direct response to contemporary anxieties about the British “race.” Literary studies have been clearer about degenerationist influences upon the text, but have still not related this to eugenics ideology. Most strikingly, despite several studies comparing IDE with Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, a text famous for using imagery of extermination, none have addressed the presence of this picture in Booth’s text.

The degenerationist ideas within IDE are hard to deny. The title was based upon a mutually unflattering comparison: “As there is a darkest Africa is there not also a darkest England?” In spite of claims (by historians and Booth’s contemporaries) that the Salvation Army would help anyone, contravening beliefs about the worthy and unworthy poor, Booth said there were some for whom “nothing can be done.” Even with Salvationist holiness theology, IDE identified some people as “incurably diseased in morals and in body” for whom the only remedy was “the beneficently stern restraints of an asylum or gaol.” This pessimism was only tempered by the claim that there were fewer of these people than most commentators believed. The subject was given a biological tone:

Their [the submerged tenth’s] vicious habits and destitute circumstances make it certain that, without … extraordinary help, they must hunger and sin, and sin and hunger, until, having multiplied their kind, and filled up the measure of their miseries, the gaunt figures of death will close upon them and terminate their wretchedness.

The argument that some would “sin” and “hunger” until they were helped was logical in a call for action, but the claim that these
individuals were multiplying themselves raised a biological question. Gaols and asylums offered what might be called a palliative solution: there was no suggestion that the next generation might improve, only the expectation of continued suffering. Custodial solutions have often been associated with the loss of reformist faith and the adoption of eugenic arguments, but here they featured alongside a reformist agenda. The phrasing, however, remained bleak: “death” represented release, and “multiplication of their kind” suggested an increasingly large threat from this “type.” This resonated with eugenicists’ fears about differential fertility, expressed, for example, by James Marchant, with whom the Salvation Army worked in the 1910s.

Booth developed his views about the potential for reform in the claim that while there was no consensus about adults, it was “universally admitted that there is hope for the children.” This faith in the potential of all children would not have been found among eugenicists, however, Booth moderated this “universal hope”:

Unfortunately the demoralising circumstances of the children are not being improved ... The deterioration of our population in large towns is one of the most undisputed facts of social economics. The country is the breeding ground of healthy citizens. But for the constant influx of Countrydom, Cockneydom would long ere this have perished.

Despite starting from a different viewpoint to eugenicists, Booth reached a similarly pessimistic conclusion: a belief in the “deterioration of our population” and the threat of “cockney” people “perishing.” Even more foreboding, Booth claimed that the country population, which he credited with saving cities, was decreasing: “every year there are more town-bred children and fewer cousins in the country.” Booth did not offer his own conclusion regarding the capacity of adults for reform, but offered a bleak vision of poor childhood environments: “tea and slops and beer take the place of milk, and the bone and sinew of the next generation are sapped from the cradle.” It is noteworthy that “beer” is implicated in these environmental evils, reflecting the Salvationist creed of teetotalism, and this passage concludes by stating that these youths were “cursed from birth with hereditary weakness of body and hereditary faults of character.” Environmental degradation was described with the language of “heredity” and a theology of sin.

Where IDE addressed biological issues more directly we see the starkest incarnation of eugenic ideas. A subsection about “Asylums for Moral Lunatics” stated that “hopefulness” should not obscure the fact that there was a “residuum” of people who had “whether from heredity or custom, or hopeless demoralisation, become reprobates.” Once “forgiven ... seventy times seven” times, an allusion to the teaching of Christ, Booth argued that it should be accepted that such people were
“morally demented” and “incapable of self-government.” For these, the only solution was “permanent seclusion” in a “penal settlement”—a recommendation that was justified in the language of racial health:

It is a crime against the race to allow those who are so inveterately depraved the freedom to … infect their fellows, prey upon Society, and to multiply their kind. … Between them and the wide world there should be reared an impassable barrier, which once passed should be recrossed no more for ever. Such a course must be wiser than allowing them to go … among their fellows, carrying with them the contagion of moral leprosy, and multiplying a progeny doomed before its birth to inherit the vices and diseased cravings of their unhappy parents.

There was no ambiguity surrounding this “multiplication,” permitting these individuals to become parents would be a “crime against the race.” The futility of seeking reform was underlined by the argument that the “impassable barrier” should never be removed. Similar ideas were expressed in a description of plans for a “Social Lifeboat Institution” to help those “on the verge of the abyss.” Booth described “the struggle of life” and accepted that “the fittest, in tooth and claw, will survive.” Attempts at remedial intervention for the “weak” were compared to efforts to “give a jellyfish a backbone.” The only option was to “soften the lot of the unfit and make their suffering less horrible than it is at present.”

This verdict was explicitly hereditarian: Booth questioned how people could marvel at the existence of “a heredity of incapacity” when “generation after generation” had been “uneducated and underfed.” Two pages after this, however, Booth presented a different argument. He said that despite the temptation to “despair” over “drunkards and harlots,” the “pseudo-scientific doctrine that any man or woman is past saving” was opposed to the “essential principle” of Christianity: “The doctrine of Heredity and the suggestion of Irresponsibility come perilously near re-establishing, on scientific bases, the awful dogma of Reprobation which has cast so terrible a shadow over the Christian Church.” This comparison of heredity to the “dogma of Reprobation,” the doctrine that some are predestined to damnation, and the stinging critique of hereditarism, is made more striking by the fact that Booth had described “moral lunatics” as “reprobates” who could not be reformed. The disparity between these conclusions might be explained by Booth’s concern about “irresponsibility”: he feared “drunkards and harlots” might claim inability to exercise self-restraint or descend into hopelessness, where presumably “moral lunatics” were deemed to be insensible to such feelings by the very nature of their ailment.

In the pages that followed, Booth rejected another view that he believed was based upon biological ideas: a genocidal policy directed at “the vicious.” He suggested that failing to improve work among “the
vicious” was equivalent to allowing “the iron laws of nature to work themselves out in their destruction.” This was followed by the provocative claim that if improvements were not made “it might be more merciful to facilitate the slow workings of natural law”:

There is no need of establishing a lethal chamber for drunkards like that into which the lost dogs of London are driven … The State would only need to go a little further than it goes at present in the way of supplying the poison to the community. … I can imagine a cynical millionaire of the scientific philanthropic school making a clearance of all the drunkards in a district by the simple expedient of an unlimited allowance of alcohol. But that for us is out of the question.

This argument, which likened scientific philanthropy to the extermination of animals, demonstrates the close connection between charity and eugenics, and shows that the most gruesome logic of the eugenics movement was not limited to the Nazi era. Despite this gruesome satire of “lethal chamber” ideology, not all of Booth’s critics accepted his rejection of these ideas.

Although IDE generated huge sales and attracted substantial financial donations, the book received considerable criticism. Thomas Huxley made high profile criticisms in newspapers, but wealthy patrons continued to support IDE and the University of Oxford awarded Booth an honorary doctorate. Many people considered IDE to be a worthy endeavour, but one commentator argued that the scheme treated the “submerged tenth” as “a species of inferior animal”—a criticism made more provocative with the imagery of extermination. Victor Bailey discussed this review, written in 1893 under the pseudonymous name “Elihu,” and identified its author as the socialist pamphleteer Samuel Washington, but Bailey focused upon its economic criticisms and did not mention the accusation of extermination. Economics was central to Elihu’s critique: he complained that Booth treated the “submerged tenth” as the root of the problem rather than the “artificial and unnecessary system of competition” in capitalism. Inside this argument, however, was an attack upon the values that Elihu believed inspired Booth’s work. First, he criticized a system that he believed helped only those already in poverty, rather than addressing the causes of poverty: “Why must the manufacture of this human sewage … continue, and all our energies be directed to the construction and working of a pump for removing it?”

It seems unlikely that Elihu, who viewed the poor as blameless victims of capitalism, believed the poor were sewage. Rather this was a criticism of Booth’s claim to be able to convert “waste labour” of England, “a perfect quagmire of Human Sludge,” into an effective labour force for the British Empire. There were contemporary parallels for this type of imagery; Troy Boone has noted that the MP Samuel
Smith suggested that slums should be cleared and “our vast colonial empire” used to prevent people accumulating like “sewage” stuck in the Thames. Elihu suggested that the logical outworking of Booth’s view would focus upon “destroying” rather than dispersing the “submerged tenth”—a scheme that would “quietly and painlessly” put people “out of existence”:

You would require to go about it in a judicious manner so as not to create an offensive nuisance, and your scheme must avoid throwing the expense of their burial upon the authorities, or it would be objected to upon financial grounds. You might get over the difficulty, perhaps, by getting them to bury one another; this would find employment for a short time for a number of them.

Although this attack was satirical, and follows the writings of Jonathan Swift regarding Ireland, it is remarkable that both Booth and one of his critics raised the imagery of extermination regarding the “social problem group.” It is clear that this discussion was not limited to a minority fringe: there were widespread concerns about heredity, deterioration of health, and questions about how to remedy social problems in the light of biology.

EMIGRATION AND “THE VICIOUS”

It is important to consider the previous discussion when analyzing the emigration work of the Salvation Army. IDE was written with an appreciation of contemporary concerns about heredity and degeneration, and balanced an acceptance of these fears with a model for resolving social problems, but how were these debates displayed in the practical work undertaken by the Salvation Army? Emigration work is of particular significance, as outlined above, and Myra Rutherdale has explored the criticism that the Salvation Army received in Canada as a result of the perception that it was “dumping” the “submerged tenth” on Canadian shores. In contrast to the fears of these critics, Rutherdale argued that the overwhelming majority of the organization’s emigration work was successful.

Based on a sample of 200 single women and 200 unaccompanied minors, Rutherdale reveals that very few Salvation Army assisted emigrants were deported: only 1% of the children (with perhaps a further 2% becoming public charges) and only one woman from the sample. It is clear that this was not owing to want of legislative power or desire to deport those considered to be “undesirable”; Rutherdale and others have shown that there was a tightening of immigration laws in this period, especially during times of economic depression.

Rutherdale’s analysis focuses upon economic and political factors as opposed to those of health and eugenics, which provides an important assessment of historical critiques of Salvationist emigration work,
and reveals that the Salvation Army had a vested interest in financial matters in terms of recouping the loans they provided to assist some emigrants. It does not, however, reveal the extent to which Salvation Army literature endorsed the categories assumed by its critics. In many cases the Salvation Army defended its work by contrasting its emigrants with other less suitable people, and this defence often involved descriptions that resonated with eugenic claims. This process led Salvationists to modify the presentation of emigration work in a way that distanced it from the IDE scheme.

Salvation Army emigration work predated IDE. In 1887, an article in the Salvationist newspaper, *The War Cry*, suggested that Salvationists who were interested in “emigration to Canada” should contact Commissioner Coombs, whom it was said “undertakes to find … situations for servants and girls… with higher wages than in his country.” This claim, that Canada presented better job prospects than England, was to feature heavily in Salvationist writing about emigration. Although IDE presented emigration as a solution to poverty, Booth minimized this subject in other writings. In 1905, *The Recurring Problem of the Unemployed. One Permanent Remedy: Emigration-Colonisation*, repeated the claim of IDE that existing “methods of providing temporary alleviation for the suffering” were inadequate. The benefits of emigration, however, were qualified by explicit opposition to “indiscriminate” emigration. Booth emphasized that his scheme did not involve “the exportation of a class more or less composed of the refuse of the community, whether they be vicious, criminal, or wastrel.” Booth argued that his work did not destroy any sense of “independence” or send people to “swell the number of the pauper caste,” but served to “cultivate within him [emigrants] those feelings of manliness and self-reliance which are so helpful in the struggle of life.” The phrase “struggle of life,” which echoes a Spencerian understanding of society, was couched in biological language with the word “cultivate,” and in hereditarian ideas with the mention of a “pauper caste.” Rutherdale links the opening of the Salvation Army Emigration Office, in 1903, to the “jingoistic spirit” that was kindled by the Boer War; this jingoism was, however, accompanied by serious concerns about the quality of the British “race.” Booth answered “several objections” that might be raised to his policy, the first of which was related to racial health: did his scheme deprive Britain of what critics described as “the cream of the working-classes” and the “bone and muscle of the nation”? Booth agreed that it would be desirable to retain some of those who were emigrating, to do otherwise would fuel concerns about the quality of Salvationist-assisted emigrants, but he argued that if the “able-bodied younger generation” could not find “sustenance in the Fatherland” there should be no “great cause for complaint” if they found it elsewhere. This was quite a contrast to the
fear of emigrants being unworthy or in danger of becoming a burden to the recipient country: here emigrants were a loss to Britain. Booth developed this argument by emphasizing that Salvationist emigration work should not be "confounded" with "Rescue Work" among the "Submerged Classes." The emigration process was selective; Booth claimed that the "great majority" of emigrants were "sober, honest, thrifty, industrious, and of known good character"—qualities that he believed to be vital as "a change of heart is the essential preliminary to a change of life" and "conditions abroad, in many instances, are the reverse of favourable to a good and sober life."99 This argument seemed to contrast the "submerged classes," previously estimated at one-tenth of the population, with the "sober, honest, thrifty, industrious," or people of "good character." Articles in The War Cry gave similar accounts of Salvation Army assisted emigrants; it was said of one group destined for Canada: "The party are not only pledged abstainers, but men and women of good Christian repute, and therefore bound to strengthen the foundation of the great nation on the other side of the Atlantic."100 Salvation Army emigration was presented as something that would strengthen a nation, not a cause that should be opposed by the nations receiving emigrants.

In order to build this positive description of Salvation Army emigrants, however, a contrasting image was fashioned of those who were deemed to be ineligible for emigration. In January 1906, an article in The War Cry claimed that the Salvation Army had "reduced emigration to a fine art," and repeated Booth’s statement that the Salvation Army was not involved in the "exportation of a class more or less composed of the refuse of the community."101 In March 1906, this argument was harmonized with IDE as Booth was quoted as explaining to the Royal Colonial Institute that:

\[T\]hough the Emigrant sent out would be poor, that ought to be rather in his favour than otherwise, provided he was—which was the case with all Salvation Army Emigrants—honest, and industrious. The General rightly repeated his protest against the opprobrium that he would transfer to any shores persons of idle, drunken, or criminal habits. The Army Officers knew the class of Emigrant to send and the class the country needed.102

This argument made it clear that the Salvation Army scheme was responsible and trustworthy, but simultaneously accepted the existence of a "class" of people unworthy for emigration. Booth even seemed to accept the notion of a class of criminals, perhaps reflecting the continuing influence of the social investigator Charles Booth who had identified some streets in London as being inhabited by the "Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal."103 An article in the next edition of The War Cry compared Salvationist emigration to the biblical exodus and spoke of Canada as
“the Land of Promise.” 104 This reflected popular contemporary imagery of Canada as an almost biblical promised land,105 but the article also criticized “misguided and ignorant critics” who said that Booth desired to “dump the refuse of Europe on colonial shores.” The article claimed that these critics would be “ashamed” if they saw the most recent group of “strong, sturdy, intelligent emigrants,” but again this was justified with reference to the Salvationist policy of “rigorously excluding” the “unworthy” from emigrating. 106 Booth quipped that many emigrants looked “too good” to lose, and the article developed the racial implications of this claim by noting that: “he afterwards added, with statesman-like wisdom, [that] the so-called ‘good blood’ of the country would soon deteriorate if willing workers are left the victims of unemployment and resulting starvation.” 107 This echoed the discussion of heredity in IDE where it was claimed that “the bone and sinew” of a generation could be “sapped from the cradle” through poor environmental conditions and bad nutrition. 108

It was in this period that there were significant changes in Canadian immigration policy, as in 1905 Frank Oliver succeeded Clifford Sifton as Minister of the Interior. Sifton favoured immigration of “stalwart peasant[s]” from eastern and central Europe, believing them to be suited to the harsh conditions of prairie farming, while Oliver favoured British immigration. Yet Oliver also developed legislation that enabled Canada to deport immigrants, with costs passed to those who had helped these individuals migrate. 109 Booth’s assurances about the quality of his emigrants, and his preference for rural migration, reflected these concerns. His continuing fear about urban “deterioration” was shared by Rider Haggard, 110 who had investigated Salvation Army farm colonies for the UK Government as well as eugenicists. 111 The War Cry of May 1905 quoted from Haggard’s conclusions, including the argument that “Western nations” would have a short “career” if cities continued to be overcrowded:

The city folk will never hold their own in the world, not only because of weakened physique and changed character, but because … [c]hildren are not bred in cities …. And without the supply of healthy children how can the nations stand? With the people on the land it is different. To a small holder a large family is a valuable asset; in the city it is nothing but a drawback. 112

This argument linked urban life with “weakened physique” and the destruction of nations, whereas rural life was said to restore health. It was this rationale that shaped the IDE emigration scheme, but Haggard’s work and the quotation of it in The War Cry reveals that this interpretation reached the public in forms other than IDE. The argument was not dropped after 1890 and was presented to the UK government and Salvation Army supporters alike.
The benefits of rural migration were lauded with attention-arresting headlines in *The War Cry*. An article from 1904, “From Pauperdom to Plenty,” described work at the Hadleigh Farm Colony with the clear message that lives of hardship were transformed into ones of sufficiency and abundance. The article reported that many of the 270 men at Hadleigh had previously been unemployed in London; the scale of their transformation was emphasized in the report that there were plans to help 20 of these men emigrate:

“Several of these men,” said the Brigadier, “were brought here from Metropolitan workhouses. All are men who have benefitted physically and mentally by the training and influence of the Colony. Some of them are Salvationists, and in every case the men have regained their self-respect and are eager to restart life in a new land.”

This training at Hadleigh, which was credited with strengthening men both “physically and mentally,” was contrasted with an account of a “city youth” who moved to Canada under the illusion that “anybody could do farm work.” The folly of this belief was illustrated by a description of the youth’s inability to harness a horse to a plough: he attempted to use the wrong end of the plough before saying to his employer: “Say, mister … this ’ere gee-gee is too fat for the shafts; give us a thinner one!”

The lack of technical ability was compounded by the request for a thinner horse rather than a wider plough, faulty logic that implied the problem was more than just inexperience.

Hadleigh was celebrated in another article in July 1906, where, like the example above, the material produce of the colony was compared to the impact upon people:

“Men are our best crop,” quietly remarks Lieut.-Colonel John Laurie, as we walk along. “We want to grow them more than anything.” Even as he speaks a big farm-wagon comes rumbling through the gate …. here in the man, and the scores of others of which he is a type, we see a product of the soil more precious and remarkable than could be found in any agricultural show.

The claim that these residents shared a physical and moral “type,” and were the “product of the soil,” was contrasted with the description of their condition when they arrived as “social and moral derelicts.” The conversational style of this article conveyed the impression that this was common sense, irrefutable logic; the idea would be taken to its logical conclusion by eugenicists in “fitter family contests,” where people (often at fairs alongside displays of agricultural produce) were measured, tested, and graded according to their eugenic fitness. The article claimed that these individuals were transformed into “happy, honest and industrious” people, the qualities that Booth claimed were essential for emigrants, through both spiritual and temporal means:
“[T]heir spiritual nature transformed by the wonder-working power of God, and their physique renewed and ennobled by the wholesome toil and health-giving air of the Colony.” It is clear from these passages that emigration was still viewed as a solution to the problem of the “submerged tenth”: these individuals had not been in “good condition,” physically or spiritually, before their contact with the Salvation Army. The message highlighted the benefits of rural life, as crowded conditions in London and cities in Canada received equal criticism, but also emphasized that the Salvation Army would not send inexperienced people abroad.

World War One largely halted Salvation Army emigration, but when the work resumed it attracted attention from external organizations. In November 1918, the English Eugenics Education Society invited the Salvation Army to an “Emigration Conference” that was attended by high profile individuals, including Sir Harry Wilson (Secretary of the Royal Colonial Institute), and supporters of eugenics. Commissioner David Lamb, who served General Booth in a diplomatic capacity and was responsible for the Hadleigh Colony, represented the Salvation Army. The Eugenics Education Society stated that: “[T]he settlement of our half-empty lands by the Anglo-Saxon race is a matter of great eugenic importance. Especially eugenic is the problem of including suitable representatives of our race to settle.” Contrasted to this “eugenic importance,” the Society complained that emigration was often haphazard with immigrants “dump[ed]” irrespective of local needs. Salvationist emigration work was praised as a “splendid contrast” to this carelessness. Commissioner Lamb seemed to appreciate this praise, and wrote a letter after the conference in order to provide more details of the Army’s scheme. This was published in the Eugenics Review, and underlined areas of agreement between the Eugenics Education Society and the Salvation Army concerning emigration work. Lamb claimed that the principle guiding Salvation Army emigration work was that emigration should be “helpful to the individual, acceptable to the Old Land, and advantageous to the New Country.” In practice this meant that “the department advises enquirers as to their suitability, encouraging no-one to emigrate who does not conform to the standards of suitability and fitness established by its long experience.” Lamb indicated the long-term benefits of this scheme by noting that “in one province it was found that 60 per cent of the women who went through the Salvation Army had been married within two years of their arrival.” This would have pleased the Eugenics Education Society, which claimed that the issues of sustainability and fertility were central to the eugenic success of emigration work.

Lamb’s claims were not a disingenuous distortion of Salvation Army views: Salvationist publications had discussed many of these thoughts
prior to, and independent from, any interaction with the Eugenics Education Society. Women were seen as crucial to the success of emigration work. In 1919, *The War Cry* described the “disabilities” faced in western Canada “owing to the dearth of women”; a serious problem, as the article claimed that “the great need of the Dominion is … Christian homes—and these can only appear when the women are out there in sufficient numbers to take their proper share in fashioning the Empire’s destiny.” This echoed claims from 1905, when William Booth wrote that “godly, healthy, strong women” were “essential” to the British Empire and to the Colonies. The eugenic implications of this ideology appeared as early as 1906, when Florence Booth, Bramwell Booth’s wife, spoke at the National League for Physical Education and Improvement. She argued that marriage was the only institution that prevented “retrgression of the race,” and said the “training of children” was a “sacred duty”:

Will churches and chapels and clergy and music be able to make a godly England if our people are not well born? I believe the preaching of the Gospel would be greatly helped if all our people were well born and none were condemned to stunted growth and weak intellect before they came into the world, or were weakened and depraved by alcohol or tobacco afterwards.

The phrase “well born” translates into the Greek words forming “eugenics,” and appeared regularly in eugenics texts; Florence Booth’s argument combined concern for the hereditary predispositions of children and for their environmental nurture. The “sacred” significance of these issues was related to the success of Christian preaching; weak people were less able to “make a godly England.” This view was not uncommon in Salvationist publications. In 1918, it was claimed that homes “constitute an innumerable and endless succession of minute contributaries to the great stream of a nation’s life,” which made them “of supreme importance to every nation.” These arguments related to claims that Salvation Army emigration work contributed to the strength of the nation and empire, an idea that was given front-page attention in *The War Cry* under the headline, “Noble and Nation-Improving Work.” The article criticized people who described Britain as a “C3 Nation” without knowing anything about the conditions under which “rising generations” were being “born and bred.” It claimed that Salvation Army slum work was “helping to raise the moral and physical standard of the men and women of the morrow”; one example was the individuals who had improved their lives by moving to “the provinces.” These were families “saved for the nation,” leading to the conclusion: “The Salvation Army [is] assisting the poor and needy, and out of the most unpromising material it is helping to make an A1 nation. May God continue to give His blessing to such noble and nation-improving work.”
There was sympathy for “unpromising C3” people, but the article did not deny that they were in need of improvement, and this was presented as a task of national significance. The counterpart to this view was that some people weakened the nation. In 1921, a description of Salvation Army emigration work stated that:

The suitability of emigrants can only be determined by a careful system of selection by means of which all the information available as to their antecedents and tendencies can be thoroughly investigated. … the Department is emphatic in its refusal to assume responsibility for such as it has reason to believe are vicious or thriftless, whether they be the ne’er-do-well sons of the rich or degenerate types of a lower stratum of society.\(^{138}\)

CONCLUSION

To some extent the above quotation serves as a useful synopsis of Salvationist attitudes toward eugenic ideas. The reference to “antecedents” and “tendencies” implied an acceptance of hereditarian ideas, but the reference to the “ne’er-do-well sons of the rich” appears to be designed to create distance between Salvationist attitudes and some of the class prejudice of what has been termed “mainline eugenics.”\(^{139}\) Salvationist publications emphasized that the organization behaved responsibly in its charitable work and was sympathetic to contemporary concerns about “degeneration” and the health of the nation. These issues were discussed in very diverse terms, ranging from concerns about environmentally provoked deterioration to knowledge of the “lethal chamber” solution for dysgenic people. This emphasizes how diverse and widespread eugenic ideology was in this period: it was not limited to a minority group.

The fact that the Salvation Army, an evangelical Christian organization, was prepared to discuss these ideas serves as a useful revision to previous claims that liberal Christians were the most willing to adopt eugenic ideology.\(^{140}\) Far from being secretive discussions, the Salvation Army entertained eugenic ideas in its most prominent publications. The fact that this included IDE demonstrates that the Salvation Army believed that these ideas were sufficiently mainstream to be understood by its followers and would not alienate financial supporters. There was a complex balancing act to perform: hereditarianism has often been depicted as the antithesis of charitable work, or the sign of a resignation to hopelessness, but this was not true in the case of the Salvation Army. Fears of environmental degeneration supported the organization’s reformist agenda, while it was possible to accept that some people were beyond help. This lent credibility to what was, especially in the case of IDE, an extremely ambitious agenda for reform. Far from undermining
religiously motivated charity, eugenic fears were used to promote the
importance of the Salvation Army and to suggest that it played a vital
role in strengthening the nation and empire.

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NOTES

1 The War Cry, London, No. 2164 (12 January 1918), p. 3.
2 Galton cited in Ian Robert Dowbiggin, Keeping America Sane: Psychiatry and Eugenics
3 This is recognised in much of the historiography; for an example see Angus McLaren,
Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945 (Toronto: McClelland and stew-
4 Lora Lea Knight adopts this approach in “Guardians of the Race: Scientific Eugenics
and the Woman Question in Germany and the United States, 1900-1945,” PhD thesis,
5 See John Macnicol, “Eugenics and the Campaign for Voluntary Sterilization between
6 An early example is Michael Burleigh, “Between Enthusiasm, Compliance and
Protest: The Churches, Eugenics and the Nazi ‘Euthanasia’ Programme,” Contem-
porary European History, 3, 3 (1994): 253-63; the United States Holocaust Memorial
Museum Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies has an annual seminar dedicated
7 Kathleen Heasman, Evangelicals in Action: An Appraisal of Their Social Work in the Vic-
in England 1850-1914 (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1994), p. 22; and Susan Mumm,
“Weapon and Philanthropic Cultures,” in Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries, eds.,
Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1949 (Abingdon: Routledge,
2010), p. 54.
8 For example, see the views of the asylum psychiatrist G. Alder Blumer, cited in Dow-
biggin, Keeping America Sane, p. 83.
9 Christine Rosen, Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Move-
10 Carolyn Strange and Jennifer A. Stephen, “Eugenics in Canada: A Checkered History,
1850s-1990s,” in Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, eds., The Oxford Handbook of the
11 Samuel J. Holmes, A Bibliography of Eugenics (Berkeley: University of California Press,
12 Dowbiggin, Keeping America Sane, p. 133.
13 Richard A. Soloway, Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate
in Twentieth-Century Britain (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press,
1990), p. 60.
14 Darwin to Osborn, 30 August 1934. Henry Fairfield Osborn Collection (MSS 0835),
American Museum of Natural History Archives.
15 Dowbiggin, Keeping America Sane, p. 152. Emigration figures for the Salvation Army
schemes are provided later in this paper.
16 Myra Rutherdale, “‘Canada is no dumping ground’: Public Discourse and Salvation
Army Immigrant Women and Children, 1900-1930,” Histoire sociale / Social History,
40, 79 (2007); and Rutherdale, “Scrutinizing the ‘Submerged-tenth’: Salvation Army
Immigrants and Their Reception in Canada,” in Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas
Francis, eds., Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity (Vancouver: 
UBC Press, 2006).
17 Pamela J. Walker, Pulling the Devil’s Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian
18 Walker, Pulling the Devil’s Kingdom Down, p. 22, 243-44.
19 Walker, Pulling the Devil’s Kingdom Down, p. 66-72; R. G. Moyles, The Blood and Fire 
in Canada: A History of The Salvation Army in the Dominion 1882-1976 (Toronto: Peter 
21 There has been some dispute over the authorship of this work, partly triggered by
Booth’s acknowledgement of “valuable literary help” from W. T. Stead, the editor of
the Pall Mall Gazette. However, as Pamela Walker has noted, Stead denied respons-
ability for the book, and the text “resembles much else Booth wrote.” Regardless of
authorship, Salvationists embraced the book with enthusiasm. Walker, Pulling the
Devil’s Kingdom Down, p. 298, n. 30.
22 General Booth, In Darkest England and the Way Out (London: International Headquar-
ters of the Salvation Army, 1890), preface, p. 15-16, 67-81.
24 Booth acknowledged his debt to Charles Booth: In Darkest England, p. 21. For an over-
view of Charles Booth’s work, see Jose Harris, “Booth, Charles (1840-1916),” Oxford 
26 Robert Humphreys, Sin, Organized Charity and the Poor Law in Victorian England 
27 See details on Josephine Shaw Lowell in Nicole Hahn Rafter, Creating Born Criminals 
28 See details on Oscar McCulloch in Elof A. Carlson, “The Hoosier Connection: Com-
pulsory Sterilisation as Moral Hygiene,” in Paul Lombardo, ed., A Century of Eugenics 
in America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2011), p. 15-16; and 
Nathaniel Deutsch, Inventing America’s ‘Worst Family: Eugenics, Islam, and the Fall and 
29 In Darkest England, hereafter referred to as IDE.
32 James Marchant, Social Hygienics: A New Crusade (London: Swan Sonnenschein &
34 Clark C. Spence, The Salvation Army Farm Colonies (Tuscon: University of Arizona 
35 W. T. Stead introduced Booth to Arnold White, and informed White that “we have got 
the Salvation Army … for Imperial Unity. I have written to Rhodes about it and we 
stand on the eve of great things.” Stead cited in Victor Bailey, “In Darkest England
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38 Booth, In Darkest England, frontispiece.


43 Bailey argued that Booth was influenced by: W. L. Rees, who suggested emigratory schemes as a solution to poverty; Arnold White, who had experience of colonization in South Africa; and Reverend Herbert Mills, who suggested that workhouses ought to be transformed into Home Colonies for co-operative production. Bailey, “In Darkest England and the Way Out,” p. 150-51, 161.


47 Booth’s work is the only example of the “darkest” genre identified in the edited version of Conrad’s work: Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness and Other Tales, edited with an introduction and notes by Cedric Watts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 105, 202.


49 Booth, In Darkest England, p. 11.

50 See Humphreys, Sin, Organized Charity and the Poor Law in Victorian England, p. 62.


55 For example, see Rafter, Creating Born Criminals, p. 30.
63 The Holy Bible, Matthew xviii, 21-22
64 Booth, In Darkest England, p. 204.
65 Booth, In Darkest England, p. 204-5.
67 Booth, In Darkest England, p. 44.
68 Booth, In Darkest England, p. 44.
69 Booth, In Darkest England, p. 44.
70 Booth, In Darkest England, p. 44.
73 Booth, In Darkest England, p. 49.
75 The latter is shown in Dan Stone, Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race, and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002).
76 Robert Sandall summarized Huxley’s criticisms as: the claim that the scheme was “socialism in disguise,” inspired by “religious motives,” and presented as the only solution. Sandall, The History of the Salvation Army, Volume III, p. 82-83.
80 Elihu, Is General Booth’s Darkest England Scheme a Failure, p. 22.
81 Elihu, Is General Booth’s Darkest England Scheme a Failure, p. 15.
83 Booth, In Darkest England, p. 73.
84 Boone compares Smith’s comments with those of Booth, but does not mention Elihu. See Boone, Youth of Darkest England, p. 90.
86 Patrick Brantlinger argues that Swift’s writings were “haunted” by the idea that England’s policy towards Ireland was focused upon depopulation. A Modest Proposal (1729) recommended that the Irish evaded poverty by butchering, marketing, and eating their children. Brantlinger, Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 96-98.
87 Rutherford, “Canada is no dumping ground,” 115-42.
88 Rutherford, “Canada is no dumping ground,” p. 133, 141.
90 Rutherford, “Canada is no dumping ground,” p. 119.
91 The War Cry, London, No. 582 (1 October 1887), p. 5.
93 Booth, The Recurring Problem of the Unemployed, p. 13.
95 Herbert Spencer, who had been an adherent of the theory of evolution from the early 1850s, is famed for his phrase “survival of the fittest.” Jose Harris, “Spencer, Herbert
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Booth, The Recurring Problem of the Unemployed, p. 21.

Booth, The Recurring Problem of the Unemployed, p. 22.

Booth, The Recurring Problem of the Unemployed, p. 33.


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Knowles, Strangers at Our Gates, p. 84-92, 106-11.


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The War Cry, London (2 April 1904), p. 3.

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The Eugenics Review, 9 (1918): 289.

The Eugenics Review, 10 (1918): 91.

The Eugenics Review, 10 (1918): 91.

The Eugenics Review, 10 (1918): 93.

The Eugenics Review, 9 (1918): 279.


Booth, The Recurring Problem of the Unemployed, p. 42.


The categories “C3” and “A1” were military classifications of health, but eugenicists believed that they represented distinct biological characteristics. In 1922, Marie Stopes campaigned for ministers standing at the UK General Election to pledge that they would “press the Ministry of Health to give such scientific information … as will curtail the C3 and increase the A1.” Ross McKibbin, “Introduction” in Marie Stopes, *Married Love*, edited with an introduction and notes by Ross McKibbin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. xvi.

