**[Beyond Darwin: Eugenics, Social Darwinism, and the Social Theory of the Natural Selection of Humans](http://www.britannica.com/blogs/2009/02/beyond-darwin-eugenics-social-darwinism-and-the-social-theory-of-the-natural-selection-of-humans/" \o "Permanent Link to Beyond Darwin: Eugenics, Social Darwinism, and the Social Theory of the Natural Selection of Humans)**

Charles Darwin’s cousin Francis Galton was by the 1860s an established explorer and anthropologist. He found his cousin’s idea of natural selection an irresistible topic, to be studied in connection to human beings. So too did philosopher Herbert Spencer, who coined the phrase “survival of the fittest” just five years after Darwin’s publication.

During Galton’s era eugenics and social Darwinism …………… reasonable. The notion that filth and disease were associated …………. immortality was widespread. Furthermore, those who viewed themselves as superior, usually ……………. of the upper classes of society, found that they could rely ……………. the theories put forth by Galton and Spencer to justify their discrimination against lower classes.

But while social Darwinism and eugenics flourished in popularity in the late 19th ………….., there was little evidence that solidified eugenics as anything more than a preferred theory of the morally elite.  Support for the fundamental principles of eugenics relied ………. demonstrating that certain disadvantageous traits, such ………… disease and lack of intelligence, were inherited and that selecting against …………. traits would benefit society.  Of course, the word *gene* and the ……………. of [genetics](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/228936/genetics" \t "_blank) didn’t exist in the 19th century.

The gaps in knowledge concerning the ………………... of inheritance as well as disease transmission made it impossible to tackle the basic scientific questions posed ………… eugenics.  Even after the field of ………………… was established in the early 1900s, another two decades passed before researchers finally demonstrated that selective breeding among humans could not rid society ………….. transmittable diseases such as [syphilis](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/578770/syphilis" \t "_blank), nor could it eliminate conditions, such as [alcoholism](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/13448/alcoholism" \t "_blank) and mental illness.

………….. 1900 and 1930 in the United States, support for eugenics continued to grow.  The fallacy of selective breeding in humans …………… only realized when the wealthy were suddenly poor, and the reality of genocide had demonstrated the extreme end of eugenics—in …………… words, with the shock of the [Great Depression](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/243118/Great-Depression" \t "_blank) and the rise of Adolf Hitler in Nazi Germany, which ushered in the [Holocaust](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/269548/Holocaust" \t "_blank).  …………….. the dissolution of eugenics in the United States was a slow process, because racial discrimination persisted.  Involuntary sterilization laws, enacted in the early 1900s, ………………. finally repealed in 1979.

The lasting impacts of the deceit and flawed science associated with eugenics ……………… been tremendous.  The claims made by eugenicists ………………. erroneous exaggerations drawn from Darwin’s work that ultimately endorsed racism and blatant acts of discrimination.  ………….., because eugenics was so deeply intertwined ………………. genetics, it is a constant companion among the hurdles associated with the advancement of genetic testing and gene therapy.

Today, our decisions ………………. genetic testing and how to act on the results of these tests are personal—they are not dictated by …………………, there are no imposed pressures.  As a result, our freedom of choice, among the most fundamental of …………… privileges, determines the “natural selection” of the human species.