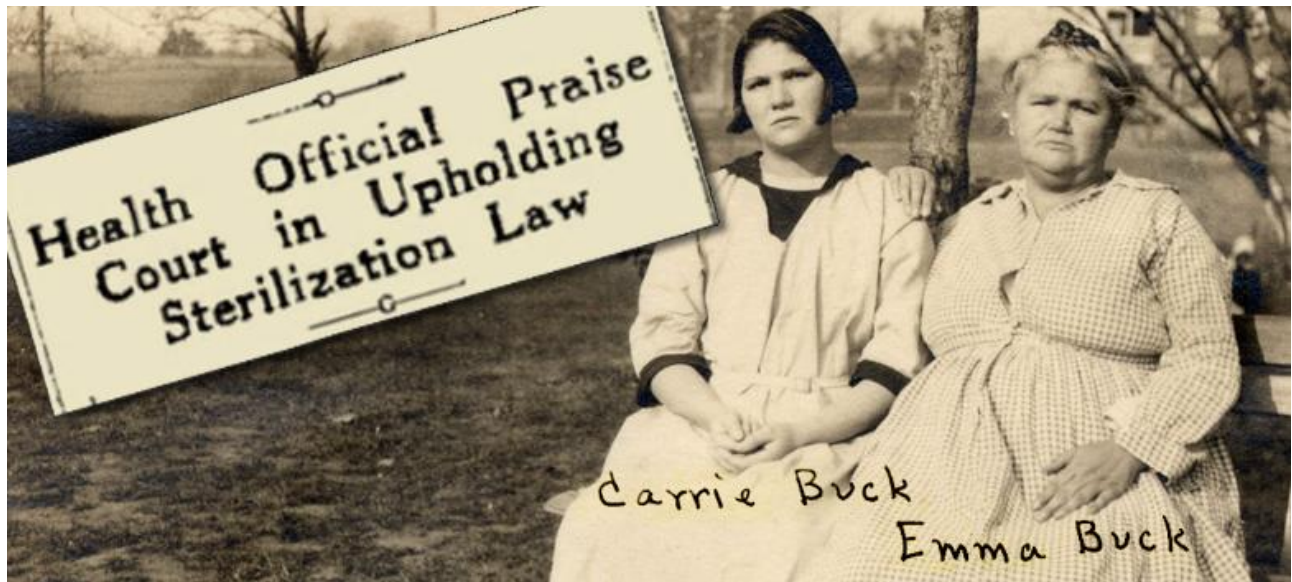


# Carrie Buck and the Eugenics Movement

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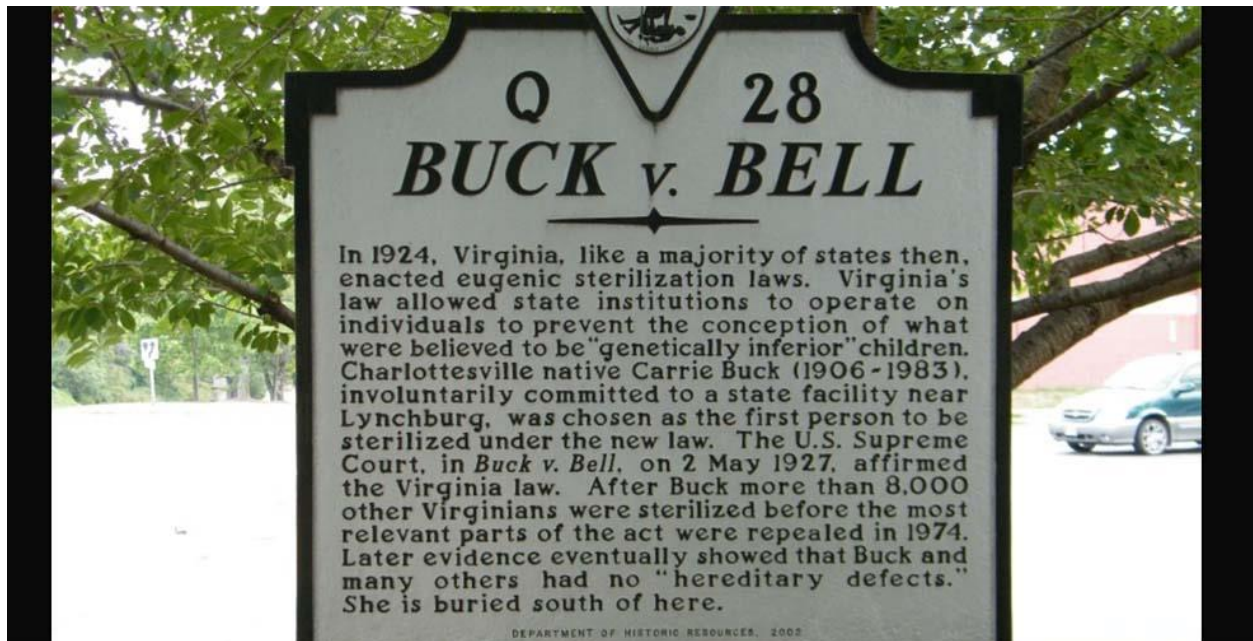
## Who is Carrie Buck?

Carrie Buck was a victim of being sterilized for purportedly being “feeble-minded”. Her mother was an inmate at the Lynchburg Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded. It was rumored that her mother was a prostitute. When Emma and Fredrick Buck had Carrie they were married, although they separated when she was very young. Due to the split Emma was unable to support Carrie, which caused her to place the four-year-old in foster care. Carrie was sent to Mr. and Mrs. J. T. Dobbs. She did chores for the couple and attended school up until the sixth grade. When she was in school, she kept up with her classmates and was promoted every year.

According to the school records, Buck sixth grade teacher characterized her as having good behavior and having “very good” work. Since Buck grew up in rural Virginia like most poor children, Buck received a sixth grade education. She continued to live with the Dobbs and work in their home. However when the nephew of Mrs. Dobbs joined the household, Buck was later raped and ended up pregnant. When Mrs. Dobbs found out, she tried to commit her to the Lynchburg Colony by claiming that Carrie appeared “Feebleminded”. When State officials heard about these claims they didn’t question it since Buck fit their stereotype of a “feebleminded” girl. Carrie was poor, pregnant, and uneducated.

## **Buck v. Bell**

After giving birth to her daughter, whom she named Vivian. Carrie was admitted to the Lynchburg Colony. Not to long after her arrival, on March 20, 1924, Virginia passed the Virginia Eugenic Sterilization Act. The Act stated that in certain cases, inmates of any state could be sterilized if the institution board discover that the patient was idiotic, insane, feebleminded, epileptic, or an imbecile. On September 10, 1924, Albert Priddy who was in charge of the Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feebleminded, made a request to sterilize 18 year old Carrie Buck. He argued that Buck had the mindset of a 9 year old. After ordering Buck to be sterilized, the board appointed her to have a guardian named Robert Shelton.



In 1927, the U.S. Supreme court case *Buck v. Bell* set a legal precedent that states they can sterilize inmates of public institutions. The court argues that traits such as imbecility, epilepsy, and feeble-mindedness were hereditary, and that inmates can prevent from passing these defects to the next generation. Buck's lawyer was Irving Whitehead, he was a eugenics advocate who wanted the sterilization law. He was also on the board and helped request buck for sterilization and was in contact with Priddy during and after the case. On May 2, 1927, in an eight to one decision, the U.S. Supreme court ordered that Carrie Buck, whom was declared feeble-minded because of her feeble-minded mother and herself a mother of a feeble-minded child, to be sterilized under the 1924 Virginia Eugenic Sterilization Act. This case has also boost the American eugenics movement and established legal authority for sterilizing more than 60,000 U.S. citizen, most of them were poor or working class backgrounds, and many were sterilized

without knowing. For instance in 1928, Carrie Buck sister was also sterilized. However she was told that the operation was used to remove her appendix, so when she tried to have kids, she found out that she was actually sterilized and can never have kids.

## What is the Eugenics Movement?

The Eugenics movement was aimed at improving the composition of the human race. The eugenicist advocated for selective breeding to achieve these goals. In 1883 Sir Francis Galton, used the term eugenics, meaning “well born”. He believed that the human race could help direct its future by selectively breeding individuals who have “desired” traits. This movement began in the U.S. in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Eugenicists in the U.S. focused on the efforts to stop the transmission of the negative or “undesirable” traits from generation to generation. US leaders, private citizens, and corporations started funding these Eugenic studies, which led to the establishment of The Eugenics Records Office (ERO) in Cold Spring Harbor, New York. The ERO spent time tracking families’ history and concluding that people deemed to be unfit came more often from families who were poor, low in social standing, immigrant, and minorities. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century a total of 33 states had sterilization programs. These practices kept going until it ended in the 1970s.