

Introduction

Our race was born as all those called historic races should be: from the combination of the vanquishing male element with the vanquished female, complying with the biblical sentence that woman will avenge her race, perpetuating the blood of the conquered lineage.

Palacios, *Raza chilena*

In his best-known work—the multivolume *Raza chilena: libro escrito por un chileno y para los chilenos*, first published anonymously in 1904—the Chilean physician Nicolás Palacios (1854–1911) wrote as a dedicated nationalist and sometime labor activist. His primary motivation was to question Chilean business leaders and politicians who were at that time creating a variety of schemes designed to welcome both foreign laborers and foreign capital into the national economy. Palacios agreed that the capital was welcome, but he was concerned that the immigration programs operated on the faulty assumption that foreigners were racially superior to domestic workers. To combat this belief, he argued in *Raza chilena* that Chileans had a unique biological profile that existed nowhere else on Earth, and therefore the country’s leaders should protect the population from foreign racial incursion. Invoking a trope of colonial conquest and subsequent racial mixture that was familiar throughout Latin America, Palacios described the Chilean race as the biological result of the encounter between two distinct ethnic groups, one European and one indigenous.

Different versions of this type of racially mixed, or mestizo, origin story evolved and were celebrated throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries across Latin America as part of independence struggles and subsequent nationalism. Historians of racial thought in Latin America have studied these tropes and their specific national contexts extensively.¹ Less well studied has been what Palacios referred to as the “biblical” punishment of childbirth visited on Latin American women; specifically, that by the early twentieth century they were considered to be the primary conservators and reproducers of racial heritage. Although historians of race and gender have discussed the obvious disregard for the brutality suffered by indigenous women at the hands of European men in order to foster this mixture, the conceptual mixing of biblical imagery and biological claims in a work dedicated to eugenically inspired racial protectionism has often gone unremarked within the history of racial thought in Latin America.²

Yet Palacios was not the only Latin American writer to rely on these types of metaphors. They were commonplace, and their existence suggests a significant amount of discursive effort to make religious and scientific ideologies work together. In the case of Latin America, where the social, cultural, and political influence of Catholicism remains significant, it seems especially important that the impact of Catholicism on racial thought not be overlooked. By tracing connections and similarities across Catholic and secular eugenic writing in the early twentieth century in this book, I examine the interactions between Catholicism and eugenics as intellectual frameworks to highlight their symbiotic relationship in the construction of Latin American racial thought.

Doing so demonstrates that an essential component of this process, which Palacios captured in his prose, was the widespread belief among virtually all Chilean intellectuals, eugenicists, and public figures that women were the key to maintaining and improving the nation’s supposedly exceptional racial heritage. Monitoring—and when necessary, modifying—women’s behavior was therefore essential to the quality and longevity of what Palacios dubbed *la raza chilena*.³ In other words, the modernization of patriarchy became a time-sensitive issue critical to the protection of the racial integrity of the Chilean populace in the first half of the twentieth century. Conceptual connections between eugenics and Catholicism were forged primarily through the shared belief that gender difference and patriarchal social structures were not merely biologically determined and therefore scientifically sound but also vital for the prevention of racial degeneration. Agreement regarding the importance of marriage, the appropriate roles of men and women in the home and outside it, and the need for sexual fidelity in women, all united Chilean eugenicists and their writing in ways they often failed to see themselves.

What Constitutes Eugenics in Latin America?

One of the main obstacles facing the historian of eugenics in Latin America is a generalized belief that the science never thrived there. Two ideas remain pervasive within the history of science that allow for this belief to persist. The first is that the term “eugenics” is best understood as the implementation of practices such as coerced sterilization, abortion, and euthanasia legislated and eventually mandated by the state.⁴ Since the Catholic Church as a whole stood against these practices, no matter where they were proposed, and because Latin America compared to other regions is striking for its lack of eugenic legislation in the early-to-mid twentieth century, it is easy to assume that eugenics was not popular there. The second and more problematic assumption operating within the history of science is that eugenics was only of use or of interest to individuals identified as White and that Latin Americans of any persuasion cannot legitimately claim membership in that racial group.⁵ Drawing together Chilean sources from the first decades of the twentieth century, in this book I show that the popularity of eugenics was in no way limited by the cultural influence of Catholicism nor by the presumed racial identity of its advocates. In fact, I seek to better illuminate the claims to White identity that writers of Chilean eugenic scholarship (both Catholic and secular) sought to strengthen and legitimize.

At first glance, treating Catholicism and eugenics as complementary intellectual frameworks makes for a surprising set of bedfellows. In the United States, in particular, the Catholic Church represented one of the few staunchly anti-eugenics public institutions operating in the early twentieth century.⁶ In Latin America, however, historians of eugenics have been examining this interaction for quite some time; one of the first examples is Nancy Leys Stepan’s *“The Hour of Eugenics”: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (1991). Comparing eugenics in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, Stepan primarily illustrates the distinctive ideological differences between Latin American and North Atlantic eugenics. The two major differences were Latin Americans’ overall skepticism regarding biological determinism, particularly when linked to race or ethnicity, and their enthusiasm for the future possibilities of race mixing.⁷

Stepan attributes these fundamental differences to the influence of Comtean positivism and neo-Lamarckian evolution among Latin American intellectuals and scientists intent on the orderly improvement of their respective nations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Showing the intellectual connections across the Latin world, both strands of thought were developed by French scholars. Jean-Baptist Lamarck, a naturalist, rose to prominence at the turn of the nineteenth century as a result of a series of publications on zoology. In particular, Lamarck had an interest in taxon-

omy that would eventually cause him to consider the biological processes involved in speciation. In 1809 he published his treatise *Philosophie Zoologique* (*Zoological Philosophy*) where he proposed the idea of traits being acquired through use and disuse. Although he was not the first to suggest this type of change over time, his name became associated with one of the earliest modern theories of speciation and evolution known as Lamarckism.⁸

In French philosopher Auguste Comte's most famous published work, *The Course in Positive Philosophy* (published between 1830 and 1842), he sought to understand the universal concepts that formed the foundation of disciplines such as mathematics, physics, biology, and various social sciences. At its most basic, Comtean positivism broke human evolution into three progressive stages: theological, metaphysical, and positive. The positive stage, which he also referred to as "the scientific stage," was humanity's ultimate endpoint. In this cosmivision, human civilization was always progressing toward a positivist future, in which scientific exploration and experimentation would be used to determine human behavior. Needless to say, Comte did not believe that humanity had reached this stage during his lifetime.⁹

Yet Latin Americans familiar with his work were far more enthusiastic about its promise than Comte had been. The notion that progress could be achieved through careful study and human agency was especially inspiring in the young Latin American republics, in the midst of struggles with concerns about their potential turn toward barbarism in the wake of nineteenth-century independence.¹⁰ Neo-Lamarckian environmentalism, and the eugenic theories it later influenced, fitted into the already popular positivist vision of the late-nineteenth-century because that theory implied that human beings had the ability to master their own destiny. The Darwinian version of evolution, despite its popularity among eugenicists in the North Atlantic, held little sway in Latin America because in it there seemed to be no place left for human agency.

According to Stepan, the preference for neo-Lamarckism in Latin America arose directly from a specifically Latin intellectual community whose members were influenced by French theories of human development, biology, and anthropology.¹¹ In her words: "This was less a matter of their being 'out' of the mainstream of genetics than of their being 'in' an alternative stream or tradition of Lamarckian hereditarian thought."¹² Characterizing the Latin American eugenicists as forming part of an alternative but equally valid scientific tradition meant recasting their scientific debates and contributions to the field as a whole. Rather than portraying their work as flawed or derivative, Stepan illuminates how eugenics could be widely appealing in a majority non-White, predominantly Catholic region. Ultimately, she argues, studying eugenics in Latin America disrupted the binary of positive

and negative—hereditarian and environmental—divisions at work in the scholarship on eugenics in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Unfortunately, the canonical history of eugenics continues to be determined by this divide and still privileges the theories and work of North American and European eugenicists as representative of the discipline as a whole.

The case of Chile offers an opportunity to question the claim that North Atlantic eugenic theory and writing are representative of the entire field. For example, the continued salience of racial hierarchy in Chile and its links to biological determinism demonstrate that Darwinian ideas did impact Latin American eugenics, at least somewhat. In fact, I will show that it impacted some individual Chilean eugenicists quite a lot. It is more fitting to consider eugenics in the region as being founded upon a synthesis of neo-Lamarckism and Darwinism, which led to a widespread belief that individuals' environments as well as their biological ancestry were central to their overall eugenic fitness.¹³ This mixture of evolutionary theories meant that notions of racial improvement and hierarchy coexisted with tolerance of racial mixture, which has so often been treated as proof of Latin America's disinterest in the field.

The Chilean, and Latin American, intellectual reckoning with eugenics highlights one of the more obvious aspects of eugenics as a whole—namely, that neo-Lamarckism was still a widely accepted scientific theory among eugenicists all over the world until well into the twentieth century.¹⁴ French historian and philosopher of biology Jean Gayon argues this was because, prior to the 1930s, Darwinian evolutionary theory presented rather stubborn problems for its advocates. As he put it: “The long initial crisis of Darwinism was not only the result of external factors such as ‘resistance’ or the existence of rival evolutionary paradigms; it was also a consequence of a range of problems that were intrinsic to Darwin’s central hypothesis. These difficulties, most of which were linked to the concept of heredity, could not be resolved by the biology of the time.”¹⁵

Darwinists could provide little proof of how favorable traits were passed from parent to offspring, so neo-Lamarckian environmentalism or its variations remained appealing for many scientists, particularly for those interested in eugenics. Gayon argues that Darwin’s own theory of evolution, until it was substantiated by the work of biologists and geneticists later in the twentieth century, was more accurately described as an extreme form of neo-Lamarckism.¹⁶ Recognizing the international appeal of neo-Lamarckism—combined with the scientific obstacles to a functional evolutionary theory prior to the 1930s—helps to show that Latin American eugenicists were not isolated from larger transnational scientific trends, nor were they working with outdated concepts. The intellectual malleability of eugenic theory itself and the Latin American penchant for the recon-

stitution of scientific frameworks for local purposes both give context to Catholic involvement in the development of eugenics in Chile.

Stepan's work is also important because it inspired more scholars to research what aspects of Latin American eugenic theory and practice distinguished them from their North American counterparts. This research has led to better explanations of the reasons Latin American eugenicists consistently objected to methods usually considered quintessential to the field, such as coerced sterilization, euthanasia, and abortion. An example of this scholarship is Marius Turda and Aaron Gillette's *Latin Eugenics in Comparative Perspective* (2014). They demonstrate how eugenic science in what they identify as the Latin world was less affected by notions of biological determinism—and practice was therefore more interested in a wide variety of state-sponsored environmental interventions into individuals' lives such as maternal and infant health programs, preventive medicine instruction, and public health campaigns, in the name of racial improvement.¹⁷ Their explanation for this difference is that Latin eugenics focused primarily on homogenizing national populations (understood to be racially similar) and concentrated less on purifying a specific racial group considered to be superior.¹⁸ I argue that this concept of national homogenization held true for Chilean eugenicists as well, despite the significant racial and ethnic diversity of the national population. I also argue that the environmentally focused eugenic theory that was popular in Chile, Latin America, and the Latin world more broadly, despite its advocates' seeming altruism, was still driven by racist logics that considered European heritage superior.

This more complete picture of racism operating within Chilean racial thought allows the historian to grapple with the ideological fluidity related to concepts such as racial fitness, hierarchy, and mixture operating within eugenic theory itself. The overwhelming popularity of eugenics in the first half of the twentieth century (not only in Latin America) allowed for widely varied interpretations of the science's application and ultimate purpose. As Matthew Connelly states: "the idea of improving the genetic makeup of humankind counted adherents all over the world, including everyone from W. E. B. Du Bois to John Maynard Keynes. Eugenics was invoked to justify everything from free day care to forced sterilization."¹⁹ The conceptual malleability of eugenics allowed historical actors from a wide swath of political, social, racial, and cultural subjectivities to use the discipline as a tool. Yet, there has been significantly less scholarship on how this ideological flexibility allowed non-White and mixed-race peoples to develop their own forms of racialization and discrimination.²⁰ My argument in this book is that a significant portion of Chilean eugenic writing was committed to creating a White identity for Chileans, which obscured the existence of racial and ethnic minorities while simultaneously discriminating against them.

The Complex Relationship between Catholicism and Eugenics

Stepan also argued that, “From the beginning, and alone of the major institutions of the West, the church opposed an extreme reproductive eugenics, for it took human reproduction as a sphere within its own rightful authority and did not cede that authority easily to secular science.”²¹ This power struggle has traditionally been portrayed as the reason Catholics objected to eugenic science whole cloth. However, state attempts to control human reproduction were only part of what constituted eugenic practice, which permitted more Catholic involvement in the science than has generally been recognized. The papal encyclical *Casti connubii: On Christian Marriage*, released December 31, 1930, speaks to this distinction. Written under the auspices of Pope Pius XI, the encyclical was mostly about protecting the sanctity of sacramental marriage in the face of growing efforts all over the world to popularize civil marriage and legislate divorce. Intriguingly, *Casti connubii* also included nine paragraphs about eugenics.²² At first glance, those paragraphs seem to substantiate the claim that the main problem that eugenics posed for Catholics was when governments sought to prohibit specific individuals from marriage or childbearing: “there are some who[,] over solicitous for the cause of eugenics, not only give salutary counsel for more certainly procuring the strength and health of the future child—which, indeed, is not contrary to right reason—but put eugenics before aims of a higher order, and by public authority wish to prevent from marrying all those whom, even though naturally fit for marriage, they consider, according to the norms and conjectures of their investigations, would, through hereditary transmission, bring forth defective offspring.”²³ Reading this passage more closely, however, reveals that Pius XI did not object to the central tenet of eugenic science—humanity can and should be improved. In fact, the endeavor to create stronger and healthier children was “not contrary to right reason.” Rather, the encyclical states, the problem was with overzealous eugenicists or eugenic programs operating outside the purview of the Catholic Church. Distinguishing between eugenic practices that sought to control human reproduction through legislation or coercion and the larger goal of human perfection was not only an essential component of Catholic eugenic writing, it also explains how Catholics in Latin America (where negative eugenic legislation was never very popular even with secular eugenicists) were able to actively engage in framing the discipline’s overall mission.²⁴

This key distinction is the reason Turda and Gillette argue that “the relationship between eugenics and religion is of crucial importance when examining Latin eugenics.”²⁵ For them, one of the defining features of Latin eugenic science is its ability to fit conceptually with the long-standing

cultural and intellectual influence of Catholicism.²⁶ They contend that the development of a distinct network of eugenicists and eugenic literature in southern Europe and Latin America during the early twentieth century explicitly opposed the strict hereditarian eugenic theory associated with northern Europe and North America. In other words, understanding the interactions between Catholicism and eugenics, for Turda and Gillette, highlights the existence of a Latin scientific community. In this book I add to their work by demonstrating how Catholicism played a direct role in shaping racial thought in Latin America, not only as a cultural institution but as an intellectual framework.

This builds on the work of scholars such as Phillip M. Thompson who argues that the early twentieth century prompted a Catholic intellectual renaissance that “provided a coherent alternative to the culture of modernity.”²⁷ For example, the papal encyclicals *Rerum novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo anno* (1931) alongside Pope Pius XI’s establishment of the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archeology (1925) and the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (1936) attest to an obvious desire on the part of the Catholic Church to engage with science and society in new ways, even if the term “modernity” caused a certain panic among some Catholic writers.²⁸ Examining eugenics as a part of this intellectual renaissance, however, moves away from discussing both Latin American and Catholic knowledge production regarding race and ethnicity as alternative in the way that Thompson implies. Instead, it demonstrates that Catholic concepts about the body, the self, and the possibility of human improvement were central to the construction of racial thought in early twentieth-century Latin America.

Disrupting the idea that religious knowledge production is alternative is important because historians of science have a tradition of being particularly critical of the relationship between science and Catholicism.²⁹ This has been especially true in the context of nations perceived as non-White. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra’s *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (2006) illustrates how scientific achievements in botany conducted under the auspices of the Spanish and Portuguese empires were overlooked, and even attributed to other individuals, in the prevailing canonical historiographies. Those works, he notes, tend to emphasize the role of scientists from northern Europe and North America. Cañizares-Esguerra attributes this to “narratives of modernity inaugurated first by Protestantism and later by the Enlightenment, [which were] both profoundly hostile to Catholic Iberia.”³⁰ Implicit in the critiques of Catholicism as an impediment to scientific discovery or innovation are also racialized and racist beliefs that portray northern European imperial expansion as neutral, or even benevolent, while the legacy of Iberian empires is characterized as perennial backwardness, scientific and otherwise.

Illuminating the scientific influence of the national church in the first half of the twentieth century is useful in the Chilean case because scholars often characterize this period as one of growing secularism and a corresponding decline of religious influence. Historian Hannah Stewart-Gambino has argued that “the post-1930s Chilean church did not wield the same degree of political power as did some other Latin American churches. The pattern of economic and political modernization in Chile resulted in a process of secularization and rationalization more common to Europe than to other Latin American countries.”³¹ While not untrue, these claims often point to the disestablishment of the Chilean Catholic Church in 1925 as the primary evidence of its waning political and cultural influence. As a result, the national church has been treated as an anachronistic institution with very little social relevance after that time. However, the founding of the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (Christian Democratic Party) in 1957 and the creation of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad (Vicariate of Solidarity) in response to the Pinochet regime belie the supposed irrelevance of the Chilean national church after 1925. Examining how Catholics engaged with eugenics is just one way to make visible their continued impact on, and engagement with, Chilean society throughout the twentieth century.

Sol Serrano’s *Universidad y nación: Chile en el siglo XIX* (1993) describes this continued presence: “The Church was concerned with, as much in its discourse as in its educational practice, demonstrating that its opposition to secularization did not mean its opposition to scientific knowledge nor to technological advances.”³² Similarly, I will show that Catholic eugenic writers adopted and used the same scientific terminology and identified the same eugenic threats to *la raza chilena* as their secular counterparts. This illustrates how Catholic concepts and Catholic intellectuals remained active parts of Chilean public life and intellectual discourse by virtue of their contributions to the growing national interest in race as a biological category and in racial homogeneity as a pathway to progress.

Catholic eugenicists may have felt especially called upon because the most pressing threat affecting the Chilean race was increasingly considered to be blurred gender divisions—deviations that had typically been regulated within the confines of traditional family life. Catholic and secular eugenic texts both contended that modern life had drawn Chilean men and women away from their biologically determined—and therefore eugenically desirable—binary gender roles. As Thomas C. Holt writes: “Gender provided the most powerful language to describe national and racial relations. Whether invoked as metaphor, metonym, or allegory, the very idea of nation and national belonging is more often than not expressed in familial metaphors.”³³ I will show that to be considered racially fit in early to mid-twentieth-century Chile, women and men had to conform to

increasingly inflexible ideas about supposedly natural and healthy female and male behavior. That said, women were portrayed as the most important agents for maintaining racial health and therefore the subject of far more eugenic writing.

Catholics were not the only ones who used eugenic theories to legitimize a modernized form of patriarchy as the supposedly natural framework for organizing any society. In fact, the rise of eugenic science in Chile caused a wide variety of historical actors to insist that gender binaries were scientifically verifiable social realities. Building on the work of a number of scholars who have discussed the modernization of patriarchy in early twentieth century Latin America, I will demonstrate how emphasis on the maintenance of gender difference and the modernization of patriarchal social structures created a eugenic community of diverse historical actors who all agreed that a strict gender binary was essential to racial fitness.³⁴ The uniformity of agreement on this point among eugenicists cannot be overstated, as it emerged from my survey of hundreds of documents rather than from a predetermined interest in gender discourse.

In the scheme of women's centrality to the health of *la raza chilena*, it is particularly striking to note that coverage regarding indigenous women was relatively absent. After the recognition that their sexual exploitation in the colonial past was essential for the existence of a unique Chilean race in the present, most eugenic treatises were no longer interested in discussing indigenous women or their contributions to modern Chilean society. I will show that, time and again, discussions regarding Chilean racial identity were mostly about accessing Whiteness. The issue, for most of the texts and writers mentioned here, was always about how to prove that a history of mixed racial heritage need not preclude individuals (and the nation at large) from claiming a White identity in the present. This meant an overemphasis on *mestizaje* being the defining racial feature of the Chilean population, which effectively erased all but the "purest" indigenous Chileans from the eugenic landscape.

Racial Thought and Eugenics in Latin America

Indicative of the conceptual fluidity within Latin American racial thought, the same set of historical tropes were used to create supposedly singular national racial profiles rather than a regionalized ethnic identity. Throughout Latin America early twentieth-century race theorists such as Palacios looked to the colonial past as the origin point for a myriad of distinct racial types. This approach, however, was not new. Claims were widespread that the colonial encounter created new races.³⁵ Despite studying different geographic regions at different periods of time, scholars of early modern Latin

America all demonstrate how the imperial expansion of Spain and Portugal in the Americas created new types of colonial societies where racial and ethnic identity became increasingly important and formalized. Some historians argue that the very concept of race arose from the fact of the European colonial endeavor.³⁶

By the first decades of the nineteenth century, this kind of thinking was updated. Founding fathers of Latin American nations often pointed to their racially mixed heritage or their ancestral connection to the land as central to the legitimacy of their claims for independence.³⁷ No matter where these concepts arose, a central component of them all was an understanding of the colonial past in which indigenous women became sexually involved with European men as the origin of national racial profiles.³⁸ Overlooking and obscuring the often coercive or abusive nature of these sexual relationships, national racial origin stories were celebrated and used as proof of Latin American pragmatism regarding race mixing. A number of early Latin American nationalists also claimed that the new republican nations would not permit the type of racial discrimination and prejudice that characterized the United States and previous imperial governments.³⁹ Although racial and ethnic difference in these societies remained a reality, Latin American nationalists contended that racial mixture was so deeply embedded in their respective cultures that, beyond its ability to legitimize political self-determination and independence from Europe, it remained irrelevant.

These stories continued to mature such that by the early twentieth century, many Latin American scholars had a strong conviction that their approach to race and ethnicity was unparalleled in a world increasingly divided by the color line.⁴⁰ Specifically, scholarship from Latin America in the first decades of the twentieth century began to reconsider racial mixture and suggest that it might not be degenerative.⁴¹ Some scholars went so far as to contend that racial mixture actually improved the quality of human beings. Two figures most emblematic of this type of thinking were the Mexican philosopher and minister of education José Vasconcelos and the Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre.⁴² In the Latin American context, they argued, skin color and racial heritage had no particular meaning for—or impact on—individuals. What was far more relevant was someone's cultural capital as evidenced by their education, income, or family history. This argument was so powerful and pervasive that the theme of cultural signifiers, particularly class, mattering more than physical traits has consistently played a central role in the study of Latin American racial thought since the mid-twentieth century.

Latin American area studies grew in prominence in the 1950s and 1960s among Anglo-American scholars precisely because of the widespread

belief that biological race and racial purity held virtually no meaning there, in contrast to nations such as the United States.⁴³ The logic that these scholars relied on, as their Latin American counterparts had done before them, was that racism and prejudice manifested only in the context of White racial purity. If there was no one who could claim a “pure” White identity, which Latin Americans presumably could not, then racial hierarchy lost its meaning. However, beginning in the 1970s and maturing in the early 2000s, scholars of Latin America increasingly began to argue that, although Latin American racial ideology and practices did not seem to be based on physical traits alone, they still created conditions that were conducive to racial discrimination. This was especially noted by the writers of the literature about Brazil, who sought to document how prejudice and racialized identities persisted in the face of state-mandated antiracist programs that refused to recognize race at all.⁴⁴

Histories of Latin America written in the early 2000s continued to build on the already considerable scholarship focused on how race was created primarily through socioeconomic conditions and cultural practices.⁴⁵ Despite the fact that this period saw the rise in immigration history and Whiteness studies in other fields, these questions were generally not incorporated into the larger remit of Latin American histories of race.⁴⁶ Similarly, histories of race science and eugenics proliferated but often remained focused on intellectual communities and practices in North America and northern Europe.⁴⁷ As a result, in various ways the notion persists that Latin American tolerance of racial mixture serves to undermine racial hierarchy. Histories of race science in Latin America that emphasize the influence of neo-Lamarckism unintentionally contribute to this situation as they seem to explain why Latin Americans might be more likely to focus on social standing rather than on phenotypical “realities” of race, despite the knowledge that this preference did not protect citizens from state-sponsored eugenic interventions into their lives.⁴⁸

In the past decade, there has been a renaissance in the study of biological race in the region. For example, there is a good deal of writing about the development of genomics in contemporary Latin America and about the impact of long-standing racialized concepts in those studies.⁴⁹ Similarly, there is a growing awareness that ascriptions of racial identity are at least somewhat determined by physical traits such as one’s hair, eye, and skin color.⁵⁰ Most relevant to my argument, there have been increasing efforts to incorporate questions from US Whiteness and immigration studies into considerations of race in Latin American contexts.⁵¹ This is more than timely, as Latin American nations share similar histories regarding selective immigration schemes, the dispossession and annihilation of indigenous groups, and reliance on the labor of enslaved African-descended peoples.

Despite the similarities, there is considerably less scholarship on racial thought in Chile specifically. This is mostly because of a long-held belief, among many scholars and average Chileans alike, that the Chilean population has been racially homogeneous until relatively recently.⁵² In terms of biological components, *la raza chilena* is considered to be exclusively and predominantly mestizo.⁵³ Widespread acceptance of racial mixture as a foundational myth was not without its problems, however. The Chilean case is especially valuable as it demonstrates how ideas of race mixing existed alongside more pernicious forms of racism and racial hierarchy. Chilean eugenic writers, both Catholic and secular, often implied that the Chilean mixture of European and indigenous ancestry was superior to that of other Latin American nations. This presumed superiority was based primarily on two claims: that the national population was racially homogeneous and that the period of active racial mixture was over. Chilean eugenic scientists combined elements from European, North American, and Latin American racial theory and refashioned them to create a particular blend of tolerance for racial mixture in the abstract and a preference for European heritage in reality. Thus my purpose here is not to write a history of the Chilean reception of European or North American eugenic principles or ideas but, rather, to analyze important nuances in the national eugenic discourse regarding Chilean racial thought.⁵⁴

A Snapshot of Chile between 1891 and 1952

Rather than being organized chronologically, these chapters concern a number of themes at work in Catholicism, eugenics, and racial thought in early twentieth-century Chile. The earliest document discussed in the text, the papal encyclical *Rerum novarum: On Capital and Labor* was published in 1891, and this document impacted Catholic social activism and science all over the world (see chapter 2). The year 1891 was also an important year in the national context of Chilean history. It was almost entirely consumed by civil war, which began in January when then President José Manuel Balmaceda tried to wrest political control from congress with the support of the Chilean army. The war was quick and bloody and concluded in August with Balmaceda's surrender and suicide. These events led to the birth to the so-called Parliamentary Era in which the country was effectively ruled by congressional oligarchy.⁵⁵

Growing political dissatisfaction with the parliamentary system ushered in a new era in 1924 when a group of military officials, including General Carlos Ibáñez del Campo, seized government control in protest over the treatment of the Chilean armed forces. Initially, the military leaders objected only to certain key congressional and cabinet figures and kept Ar-

turo Alessandri Palma in the presidency. However, by September, Alessandri resigned as he felt increasingly like a puppet for the powerful military junta. He returned to the presidency in March 1925 but was not to last in the office much beyond the creation of a new constitution that same year. The political situation between 1925 and 1932 was especially precarious, as Ibáñez operated as a shadow dictator throughout those years. This period left its mark on the Chilean political landscape, as the strengthened executive style of government created during these seven years remained in place until the September 11, 1973, coup against President Salvador Allende.⁵⁶ The emphasis on presidential power encouraged the rise of coalitions between political parties in the 1930s and 1940s, such as the left-leaning Frente Popular (Popular Front) and the conservative Falange Nacional (National Phalanx).⁵⁷

Another defining feature of the period between 1891 and 1952 was an explosion in the size of the country's urban population. Men and women from throughout the country came to cities such as Santiago, Valparaíso, and Concepción, to find work. In 1895, the number of Chileans living in cities with populations of more than twenty thousand was 34 percent. By 1930, that number was closer to half.⁵⁸ This new urban working class demanded new government services and protections.⁵⁹ Their numbers also made social issues such as poverty, disease, and infant mortality much harder to ignore. In 1920, the average Chilean had a life expectancy of only thirty years, which demonstrates just how unhealthy the population actually was.⁶⁰ These very real health threats caused a variety of politicians, priests, medical doctors, and average citizens to fear for the future of the Chilean race and its viability in the modern world.

This period was also characterized by internal struggles among the historical actors identified here as Catholic. A significant amount of the conflict had to do with the role of the Partido Conservador (Conservative Party), the traditional political home of most Catholics since the mid-nineteenth century. Catholic writers who came of age before the First World War were typically more closely aligned with the Partido Conservador than their younger counterparts. An individual who will appear a number of times in this book, Gilberto Fuenzalida Guzmán strongly believed that working with the Partido Conservador was the only proper means by which to realize Catholic social reform.⁶¹ Younger Catholics, however, questioned this close relationship and indeed some of the organizing principles of the party itself, and they created the Falange Nacional in 1935, which they felt more accurately represented their supposedly enlightened views about the relationship between church and state.⁶²

This generational difference was exacerbated when the Chilean Catholic Church was disestablished in 1925, which seemed to confirm the

younger Catholics' fears about relying too heavily on state indulgence and protection.⁶³ The separation of church and state in Chile came as the result of the new constitution Ibañez demanded.⁶⁴ Prior to the coup, Catholicism had been the official state religion. This meant that religious practice and belief of any sort other than Catholic could only be observed privately. It also meant that the national church received state funding to support its various properties and endeavors while simultaneously avoiding taxes.⁶⁵ The combination of these material benefits, the close relationship with the state more generally, and the oligarchic nature of the Chilean state at the time served as driving forces of Ibañez's coup.⁶⁶ Older Catholics saw the separation of church and state as a concerning development not only for the loss of prestige but also for the growing need to reckon with secularization as a social and political reality.⁶⁷

Just as the Catholic individuals discussed here should not be treated as uniform in their perspectives and experiences, so too the overall category of "eugenicist" is not monolithic. Texts from popular periodicals, medical journals, monographs, and visual images produced by Catholic and secular writers and publishers show that eugenicists hailed from many walks of life. The eugenicists discussed here were selected by virtue of their ability to publish in one of these mediums, not because of their politics, prestige, or privilege, though many Chilean eugenicists came from privileged positions. What united eugenicists in Chile, and indeed all over the world, was their belief that the human race could be improved through human intervention and that intervention was necessary. Both of these elements are basic requirements to believing in eugenic science, but despite this foundational agreement among Chilean eugenicists, eugenic theory and practice were the subject of considerable debate.

It should be noted that medical training generally facilitated an interest in eugenics, and many of the eugenic texts discussed here were written by physicians from a variety of different specialties. This fits with trends for the region as a whole, as most Latin American eugenicists found their way to the discipline through the study and practice of medicine.⁶⁸ Medical schools were often incubators for various scientific disciplines in Latin America at the turn of the twentieth century, because of the relatively small set of scientific institutions there, which created an intimately connected local scientific community. However, this should not indicate a lack of scientific sophistication or interest. Indeed, Thomas Glick has argued for Spain that a small scientific community served to facilitate the "conductivity of scientific ideas" there.⁶⁹ In Chile, the relatively small size of the scientific community also created a certain porousness, allowing for self-taught experts, religious figures, and social reformers to make up a significant portion of the national eugenic movement alongside those with medical degrees. Eu-

genicists committed enough to put pen to paper and publish (those who are examined here) considered themselves experts, though their expertise might have been achieved in a variety of ways. In this book I illuminate just how fluid this expert category was—expanding even beyond the scope some of them believed it should to include Catholics.

By the early 1950s, political coalitions such as the Frente Popular and the Falange Nacional no longer commanded the same control as they had in the 1930s and 1940s.⁷⁰ The shifts in political priorities were probably best represented by the fact that Ibáñez, representing the center-right Partido Agrario Laborista (Agrarian Labor Party), was legitimately elected president in 1952 concluding a period of generally left-leaning political control.⁷¹ It was also in the early 1950s that the papal encyclical *Humani generis* was published. Released on August 12, 1950, by Pope Pius XII, this encyclical recognized evolutionary theory as true, officially concluding any remaining internal conflict in the Catholic intellectual community on this issue. This only furthered the possibility of Catholic involvement in eugenic science, which continued to thrive in the region (and elsewhere) far beyond the end of the Second World War as is traditionally argued.

Chapter Summaries

The book is divided into two parts. The first is focused on illuminating how Catholicism and eugenic science reckoned with each other. To be clear, while belief and faith are essential to Catholicism as religious practice, the concern here is with how Catholicism as an intellectual framework was able to engage with eugenic concepts and theories. In this sense, both Catholicism and eugenics are treated as ideologies, which gained adherents by offering similar ideas regarding gender difference, family formation, and racial health in early twentieth-century Chile. In the first three chapters I address how these conceptual similarities fostered an unexpected link between ideologies that are often treated as oppositional. In chapter 1, I compare the writings of Catholic and secular eugenicists regarding the supposed marriage crisis of the interwar years so as to demonstrate that both groups identified similar issues as threats to the health and future of *la raza chilena*. In chapter 2 the focus is on exploring how Chilean intellectuals discussed the relationship between Catholicism and science generally. Although most secular eugenicists argued that Catholics had no place in Chile's racial renewal, most Catholic eugenic writers questioned this exclusion. They generally argued that Catholicism and science were mutually beneficial and that both worked to reveal the same laws prescribing human life and experience. In chapter 3, I demonstrate how Catholic eugenic writers contributed to

the development of eugenic science in Chile by modifying the concepts and practices that were considered the most ethically dubious from a Catholic perspective.

The second half of the book is dedicated to a discussion of how Chilean racial theorists, both Catholic and secular, supported the contention that there was such a thing as a singular and homogeneous Chilean race. Shared ideas regarding the racial exceptionalism of the Chilean biotype not only further illustrate connections between Catholic and secular intellectual circles, they also give insight into a specific type of racial thought in Latin America that was quite different from other nations. The claim in Chilean eugenic literature was that the national racial character was the product of *mestizaje*, much like counterparts in Brazil or Mexico, but the contention was also that the Chilean mixture was Whiter and more complete than others elsewhere in the region. My primary purpose here is to better understand the formation of a distinctive “Chileanness” and how that racial identity functioned much like Whiteness in other contexts. To do this, my analysis begins with the work of Palacios. Although his book *Raza chilena* has mostly been forgotten, I show how it had a profound impact on Chilean racial thought throughout the twentieth century. In chapter 5 the discussion centers on how controlling female sexuality was treated as essential to both the continuation and the protection of the Chilean race. In chapter 6, I examine Chilean visual culture in order to illuminate how Whiteness could exist in conjunction with mestizo heritage, a contention that set Chilean racial theorists apart from their Latin American counterparts.

Despite scholarly and popular claims to the contrary, eugenics as a discipline had not yet fallen out of favor by the early 1950s, at the end of the period examined here. In 1953, Reverend Father Yves M. J. Congar wrote a short booklet entitled *The Catholic Church and the Race Question*, which was published by the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization as part of a series on race and racism in various religious traditions and scientific disciplines. In it, Congar argued: “True eugenics is a matter involving the solution of the social problem (slums, drunkenness, prostitution, pauperism), the general respect of ethics . . . [and] constructive health legislation.”⁷² He also decried racism and wrote at length about how Catholicism stood in direct opposition to racist conceits. Echoing claims made decades later by historians of eugenics and Catholicism, he argued that the Catholic Church had been one of the few institutions to oppose coerced sterilization.⁷³ Yet, he still maintained that eugenics was a legitimate science with noble goals. “The Church has no idea of prohibiting eugenic practices or research,” he wrote. A few sentences later, he stated: “It holds that, even on the animal side of his nature, man is not an animal. . . . This is over-

looked not only by racist doctrine but also by that unconsciously materialistic attitude towards eugenics that racial feeling inspires.”⁷⁴ His ability to disconnect eugenic science from racism and discrimination speaks to the conceptual malleability of the discipline. It also demonstrates how concepts often associated with Latin American racial flexibility not only were the result of cultural predispositions or pragmatism but were actively fostered by Catholic intellectual traditions. If anything, in this monograph I hope to illuminate how elements of eugenic science and racial thought became palatable through their active disconnection from obviously racist sentiments. The Chilean case, in particular, offers an important opportunity to consider how racialized concepts and tropes can be made invisible.