

**PRESS KIT FOR**  
***THE GENE POLICE***  
**BY ELLIOTT LIGHT**

**CONTACT INFO:**

*Publisher*

Bruce L. Bortz, Publisher  
Bancroft Press  
PO Box 65360  
Baltimore, MD 21209  
410-358-0658  
410-627-0608 (cell)  
[bruceb@bancroftpress.com](mailto:bruceb@bancroftpress.com)

*Author*

Elliott Light  
Naples, FL 34109  
[Elight65@gmail.com](mailto:Elight65@gmail.com)  
(301) 251-9221

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## QUICK OVERVIEW

Reggie Mason, a black Virginia state trooper, comes to Shep Harrington's law office and makes a breathtaking confession to his longtime friend: "I think I'm guilty of illegally using the state DNA databases . . . and maybe a few more felonies to boot. Shep, I'm trying to decide whether to turn myself in."

The "why" behind Reggie's confession is equally shocking: "Fifty years ago, my Aunt Betty was told that her male baby had died of a heart defect. Aunt Betty believes he either was given away or murdered. She asked me to find out what really happened. So I used the state DNA database to look for him. A few weeks ago, I found a match. The good news is that he's not dead. The bad news is that he may have been involved in a murder."

The murder victim, Jennifer Rice, is a famous photographer. Curiously, photographs of Shep's farm and the elderly residents who once resided there were found at her house. All Reggie wants Shep to do is to ask the previous residents if they remember anyone taking pictures at the farm or if they saw a woman with a baby.

But simple requests are not easily contained. As Shep soon learns, the request brings him to the top of a slippery slope with an ill-defined edge. Question begets question, and the slide down the slope proves inevitable: What happened to the baby? Who took it? Why was he taken? And who killed Jennifer Rice?

When Shep learns that the child, known as Baby John, was born at a hospital run by Alton Nichols, a famous Virginia eugenicist, he is drawn into the dark history of the American eugenics movement, a pseudo-science used to justify racial bigotry and white supremacy.

As Shep puts together the jigsaw of clues, he becomes convinced that the seeds of Jennifer Rice's murder were sown fifty years earlier by men obsessed with skin color and racial purity. Worse still, Shep decides, the ghost of that obsession has yet to fade.

*The Gene Police* is a challenging whodunit that informs readers of a little discussed part of our history—a major movement a century ago that, in the days of Trump, seems to be undergoing a major revival, only with different terms: "white supremacy" and "the alt-right."

**SPECIAL, IMPORTANT NOTE:** Elliott Light, author of *The Gene Police*, claims Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States and author of the Declaration of Independence, as a cousin; John Marshall, Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, as an uncle; Robert Morris, signer of the Declaration, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution, as a grandfather; and Joe DeJarnette, a prominent eugenicist, as a great-uncle.

## Meet Shep Harrington

I thought I would take some time to introduce a few of the characters in the Shep Harrington Small Town mystery series.

Interesting characters are complex entities with admirable qualities and confounding weaknesses. A character that is sometimes at war with himself is a character who is unpredictable and motivated, a character who might invent reasons to involve himself in a fight that isn't really his. Of course, the reasons must be believable or else the character will come across as silly or worse, stupid. But where the action is an extension of the character's persona, most readers will forgive the character who occasionally acts impulsively when he or she would be better served by taking a moment to consider the consequences.

My protagonist, Shep Harrington, is a compassionate, sometimes self-destructive, driven man who seems to attract trouble without actually seeking it.

We first meet Shep in the book *Lonesome Song*. Shep is at the viewing of Reilly Heartwood, a famous country singer who performed under the stage name C.C. Hollinger. He introduces himself to the funeral director, Jason Grubbs, who responds, "*Oh, yes, you're the one that went to prison.*"

In *Chain Thinking*, the next book in the series, Shep is confronted by a woman in a burgundy cloak with an oversized hood. When asked who she is looking for, she replies, "*An attorney who went to prison.*"

Shep had, in fact, spent three years in prison for a crime he hadn't committed. But the stigma is permanent. In *Lonesome Song*, he has a conversation with Reilly's sister, Sarah, a woman with a tough exterior and a sharp tongue:

*(Sarah) "You were accused and convicted of something you didn't do. You've been set free now. Tell me if you feel vindicated, if you feel like your reputation has been restored."*

*(Shep) "I'm a felon, a liar, and a cheat. I always will be."*

Even Robbie, Shep's closest friend and law partner, makes reference to his prison days when she's annoyed with him. In *The Gene Police*, Robbie, speaking to Reggie, makes her feelings quite clear:

*(Robbie) "I'm sorry, Reggie, but men in general are untrustworthy, and cops and ex-felons even more so."*

The betrayal of friends that led to his conviction and incarceration scarred Shep. He suffers from a form of depression he calls the empties. He described them in *Chain Thinking* this way:

*My pursuer was a creation of my mind. In prison, the beast was known as "the empties" -- a state of mind in which the future looks as bleak as the present, and where nothing is worth hoping for. A prisoner wrestling with the empties was dangerous and unpredictable. Many a hapless inmate escaped life by hanging himself or by cutting his wrists. A few inmates picked fights that couldn't be won.*

His life as he knew it may have been destroyed but not his compassion, especially for those he judges to be equally mistreated. Among his most adoring and adored acquaintances are four forgotten residents of the last poor farm operating in Virginia. Carrie, Harry, Cecil, and Jamie are

the supporting cast for the series and will be discussed in a later posting. But this scene in *The Gene Police* shows the soft side of Shep and his ability to recognize what is truly important:

*Carrie looked at me, her cheeks moist with tears. "We don't want you to leave us." She started sobbing. I took her hand and she pressed my hand against her cheek.*

*I looked at Frieda for help, but she was busy dealing with her own emotions.*

*"You are the only person who ever made me feel useful," said Harry.*

*Jamie handed me a paper on which he scrawled the words, "Being needed is as important as breathing."*

*Only a few moments actually define our lives. Marrying Annie was supposed to be one of those moments but wasn't. Going to prison was a defining moment for me, given that everything I've since become stems from that event. But looking into the eyes of these forgotten people, seeing what I meant to them and them to me, I had no doubt that this moment would resonate with me until I died. Even my well-practiced defenses could not deflect the sentiment written on their faces.*

Of course, it is naïve to believe that the fight against evil will be fair. Shep learns that doing good comes at a price. In *Chain Thinking*, Shep confronts an adversary and learns that the rules of engagement favor the bad guy:

*Arthur gave me a bemused look. "Power, Mr. Harrington, is more than money. You have money, but you have no power because you aren't willing to exercise it without reservation. You are too good a person to be challenging people like me and Howard Doring."*

*"I'll fight you in court," I said, sounding childish even to my ears.*

*"You can throw paper at me," he replied, "but I'm capable of killing everything and everyone you love, without hesitation or remorse. You can't defend yourself from that."*

Well, maybe it isn't a good idea to underestimate Shep. He manages, despite his shortcomings, to resolve the injustices he encounters, even if those resolutions are less than satisfying.

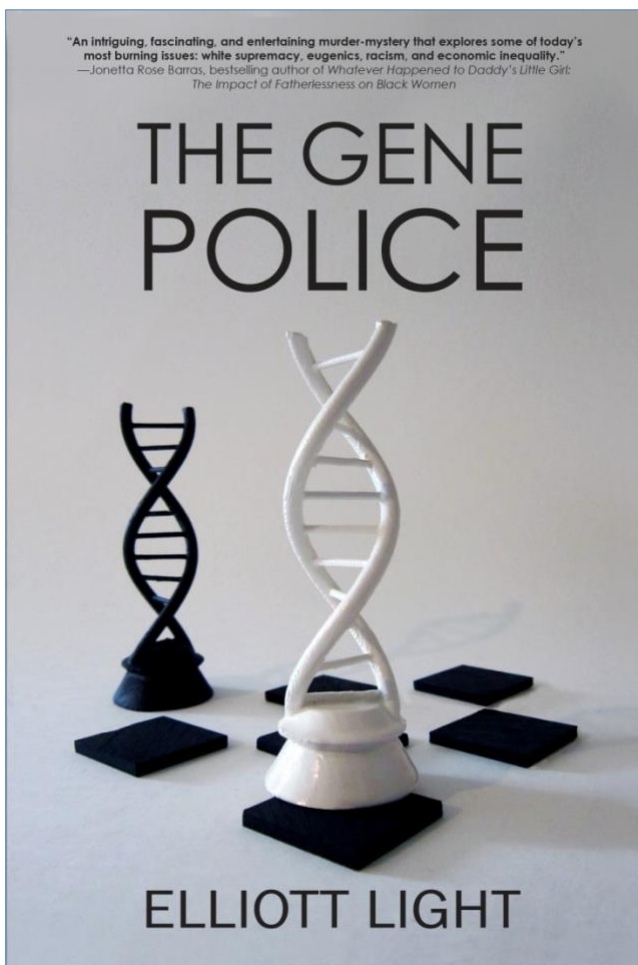
## A DIFFERENT KIND OF MYSTERY ... AND ONE THAT'S A GREAT READ.

“An intriguing, fascinating, and entertaining murder-mystery that explores some of today’s most burning issues: white supremacy, racism, and economic inequality.”

—**JONETTA ROSE BARRAS**, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *WHATEVER HAPPENED TO DADDY’S LITTLE GIRL: THE IMPACT OF FATHERLESSNESS ON BLACK WOMEN*

“A strong mystery supported by its powerful treatment of racial injustice.”

—BOOKLIST



“Light’s thought-provoking third mystery features attorney Shep Harrington . . . who learns that Sweetwater Hospital was run at the time by a prominent eugenicist, who shared Nazi beliefs about race. Light’s timely look at an almost forgotten dark chapter of recent American history, when doctors experimented on those considered racially inferior, more than compensates for the routine mystery.”

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“Brilliant! Absolutely brilliant! I was completely blown away how everything came together at the end. (And I have to admit that the happy content of the epilogue brought a tear to my eye.) The central theme of eugenics is highly relevant, the plot development and pacing are superb, as are the character development, and the novelist’s treatment of complex human emotions. The incorporation of technology into the problem-solving and the reflective descriptions of the environs, lifestyles, weather, and felines? Seemingly effortless and altogether captivating.”

—**CHUCK RIEGER**, FOUNDER AND CTO, MOBILECOMNETWORKS, INC.

“Elliott Light’s new novel, *The Gene Police*, is a well-crafted tale of mystery and murder. Seeds of the story harken back to unspeakable practices of ignorant and prejudiced people from the not-too-distant past. We know about the Nazis, and Mengele, but do we know what similarities there may have been to practices here in our own country? Believable, complex, sometimes bizarre characters with realistic and entertaining dialogue involve the reader in a compelling drama as

this page-turner unfolds. Light is shone on injustices through a fascinating back-story in a captivating Virginia setting, which keeps the imagination piqued throughout the tale.”

—**DIANA LEE JOHNSON, VIRGINIA-BASED AUTHOR OF NINE NOVELS**

“With his SmallTown Mysteries series, Elliott Light writes in the tradition of Agatha Christie: They both find that the most interesting adventures happen in small towns. He also writes about situations and beliefs with which readers grapple in modern society—heritage, humane treatment of animals, justice and the legal system, morality, racial politics, and eugenics, not to mention community relations and development. A somewhat hapless hero, Shep Harrington admits that one of the first lessons he learned as an amateur detective ‘was not to fall in love with a theory that explains the facts. Facts are themselves a creation of the mind.’ Like Christie, he looks at a situation from divergent perspectives and finds that truth is more elusive than we would like. Furthermore, with economy of style and with empathy, Light develops the characters that comprise Shep’s world. In particular, the women in Shep’s life are written with insight, humor, and appreciation for intelligence and initiative. Despite his distrust of lawyers and the legal system, two outstanding women, who are peers, are also lawyers. Nikki’s appearance at the end of *The Gene Police* leaves readers eager to know how that relationship will develop and what impact she will have on Shep’s outlook. Read *The Gene Police* for its philosophy, its handling of the issues of eugenics, and for an enjoyable story about an anti-hero from a small town in Virginia.”

—**SANDY STAHL, ASSOCIATE DEAN OF STUDENTS AND SENIOR LECTURER IN WOMEN’S AND GENDER STUDIES, VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY**

"A deftly written and absorbingly plotted contemporary murder-mystery that takes the reader on a fast-paced and disturbing journey back to the shameful romance some Americans in powerful positions had with the eugenics movement."

— **RANDALL MCFARLANE, RETIRED FORMER DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, FEDERAL HOUSING FINANCE BOARD**

“As history informs the present, that same history, if unacknowledged, has a way of coming back around to bite us in the ass. Elliott Light knows this, and his reluctant (though less so this time around, it would seem) detective will soon learn it as well, as he once again finds himself caught up in the aftermath of a murder. Light gives us all the elements of a good mystery, blended with a dark chapter in our own history -- a history that many would like us to forget, yet one with special relevance for the times we live in now.”

---**AYN LOWRY, FORMER EDITOR OF *THE WISE NEWS COMMUNIQUE* (A PUBLICATION OF THE WORLD INFORMATION SERVICE ON ENERGY)**

“Light masterfully creates a thrilling tale of mystery and murder while picking at the scab of eugenics. A must read!”

—**RICHARD MAY, RETIRED INVESTIGATOR, NORFOLK CIRCUIT COURT, NORFOLK, VIRGINIA**

“Eugenics, a word I haven't heard in decades, plays a major part in this unusual and very entertaining mystery!”

—**SONNY OCHS, FOLK MAVEN/DJ, WIOX RADIO, ROXBURY, NY**

“An engaging story and a shocking look at a rarely covered event in American history.”  
—**NANCY SYKES, RETIRED NEW YORK CITY CRIMINAL DEFENSE ATTORNEY AND THE AUTHOR'S HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY TEACHER**

"Elliot Light's cool, convincing voice echoes with smarts as his sleuth sifts clues in a historical ghost town protected by a lone, unlikely security guard. Bravo on an economical, engaging read."  
—**MARY HRBACEK, NEW YORK ART CRITIC; MEMBER, INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ART CRITICS**

“This novel will stay with you long after you put it down. And it will have you questioning this forgotten part of history.”  
—**JAN SYLVESTER, MANUFACTURING ENGINEER**

“*The Gene Police* not only entertains but educates the reader about the dark science of eugenics, a movement that focuses on creating a more perfect human race by eliminating ‘undesirable’ traits through forced sterilization and selective breeding. Light’s mystery begins with an initial inquiry into a possible link between the past death of an infant in a hospital and the murder of a photographer. Subsequent chapters keep the reader glued to the book by moving quickly through a series of events that lead to exposure of an area of science that often leads to racism, with support by an imperfect justice system. Not your ordinary mystery, but definitely a great read!”  
—**JOHN GAVITT, SPECIAL AGENT, RETIRED**

“In this third installment of Elliott Light’s novels, main character Shep Harrington is back, this time taking a stab at the world of eugenics, which is breeding to create the ultimate human, a person with the most desirable qualities. We meet Carl and Betty, who were sterilized after the death of their newborn baby. When, fifty years later, the DNA of that dead baby is found at a murder scene, things get a little tricky. Was that baby actually dead, and why were Carl and Betty sterilized? With the help of Betty’s nephew, the answers may not be as far away as they once thought. If anyone can, Shep is the one who can find the answers. Elliott Light has a way of creating characters that pop off the pages, and this book will have you immersed from the very first page. Shep is a kind-hearted character, who’s seen a lot of stuff in his life, and there is never a dull moment with him. This is one of those books that has quite a few different plot lines, but they all come together in the end. *Gene Police* was what first made me want to read the Shep Harrington Small Town Mystery series; it sounded so wonderful to me, something that I hadn’t read before, at least no series that comes to mind. Not only is the science of eugenics part of this novel, but throw in a murder mystery, and you’ve got a suspenseful, engrossing tale. I give this book 5 out of 5 stars—definitely a keeper here!”  
—**COMFY READING (THE BOOK BLOG FOR THE COMFY READER)**

“Elliott Light's new murder-mystery is a terrific ride—and it stays in your mind. Compelling characters, non-stop action, impossible to put down. It draws you in to a hugely important part of our recent history that is unknown to most of us, the eugenics movement and the abuses it engendered. This is the rare book that is irresistibly enjoyable and enlightening too.”  
—**RICHARD MOSS, WRITER, OXFORD AND HARVARD SCHOLAR**

“I would really like to write a great review for this book as I really enjoyed it. However, I don't seem to have the writing talent that Elliott Light has, so I will just say a few things. I liked the way the murder investigation is intertwined with the pseudo science of Eugenics. Light seems to be good at this sort of thing. Plus it has lots of cats, which is a real winner for me.”

— PATSY SACHS ON GOODREADS

“I gave this one to my mom to read. She said it was really good. Mom told me that she would love to read more of his books.”

—DEB THOMPSON ON GOODREADS

“*The Gene Police* artfully weaves eugenics, drug abuse, homelessness, racism, sexism, and other prejudices into a compelling mystery. Light sets up these issues perfectly, keeping the reader engrossed by the nature and style of his writing. His sentences are thoughtfully written with a nuanced sense of humor that makes the book fun to read and hard to put down. To top it all off, Light has fashioned a conclusion to the book that will delight people who like, and even want, an unusual murder mystery to have a ‘happy’ ending.”

—ED DAGER, SOCIOLOGY PROFESSOR EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

“*The Gene Police* is a work of fiction that wraps a murder mystery in elements of the eugenics movement. To be clear, it is not a treatise on the subject but should enlighten readers about this little known pseudo science and hopefully inspire some of them to delve deeper into its history, its proponents, and its impact on American life.”

— LINDA'S BOOK BLOG

“Shep's one of those unforgettable characters, and his relationship with Robbie is intense and fun. A great, well-written, intriguing story.”

— AMY'S BOOKSHELF REVIEW

“I became interested in reviewing this book because of some prior knowledge of the eugenics movement. The author, Elliott Light, does an astounding job of bringing the reality of this destructive, shabby, non-science to the reader. The book begins with questions, and evolves into a mystery that I just had to solve! So I felt compelled to dive in. Light helps the reader understand the racial dynamics of the past, and helps spread justice to the racial destruction of today's world too. I thoroughly enjoyed this read and, to any of you out there who have inquiring minds and want to turn fast pages, do pick this one up. Five stars out of five!”

—OGITCHIDABOOK BLOG

“*The Gene Police* is the third novel in the Shep Harrington small town mystery series and my introduction to both Shep and Elliott Light. Shep has inherited a large estate and money from his biological father and whilst attempting to settle things with the IRS, gets a visit from a state trooper named Reggie, who goes on to explain how his aunt supposedly lost her baby at birth due to a heart defect, but there are photos of a unknown woman with a baby on Shep's property from the time of the boy's ‘death.’ This soon turns into an investigation that Shep and his law partner Robbie were not expecting. I had not read any books in this series, so I wasn't sure whether I was going to know what was going on. It's pretty self contained as far as a book in a series can



be. I found that I had enough information to know what was going on. Being shrouded in mystery meant that I wanted to continuously read (well into the night too.) Shep is an interesting character and brilliantly complicated. Shep and Robbie make a good, believable team. The book contains intense plot elements; some are really quite harrowing. I wasn't crying; there was something in my eye. The twists and turns of the plot had me guessing up to the last page, and I found the writing style easy to like. If you love mystery, then really do give this book series a go."

—NOVEL KICKS FOR FICTION READERS AND WRITERS

## PRAISE FOR ELLIOTT LIGHT'S PRIOR TWO

### SHEP HARRINGTON SMALL TOWN MYSTERIES

#### Lonesome Song

“Unjustly disbarred lawyer-turned-amateur-sleuth Shep Harrington faces the demons of his past while investigating the mysterious death of a famous country singer in Elliott Light’s debut, the first volume in the planned Shep Harrington Smalltown Mystery series called *Lonesome Song*. It’s a solid mystery with a nostalgic heart. Its standout feature, however, may be the blurb section in the back – ‘offers more food for thought and literacy than the average,’ raves one reader.”

—PUBLISHER’S WEEKLY

“A fast-paced read rife with surprises. It sports some engaging characters, notably wry sleuth narrator Shep Harrington, a fair-play plot, and smart dialogue. Author Elliott Light knows his turf. Harrington is a disbarred lawyer who was convicted of a crime he did not commit. Light, a lawyer, was nearly indicted for something he didn’t do. Thus he comes by Harrington’s skepticism honestly.”

- THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

“A darkly compelling, splendidly written tale about a country-western singer whose death is abruptly ruled a suicide without investigation . . . A fascinating novel, *Lonesome Song* is very highly recommended reading for mystery buffs.”

—MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW

“Populated with unique characters, a compelling mystery, and an intriguing plot that kept me in suspense right to the end, *Lonesome Song* is quite a delightful book! Having lived in Northern Virginia (Burke when it was still farmland) and hiked all over hell and gone in Virginia and West Virginia, I could see the settings in my head and only imagine that perhaps I’d driven past a poor farm where the drama played out unseen by me and all the others speeding by, somewhere on I-66.”

—LEWIS PERDUE, AUTHOR OF THE ACCLAIMED MYSTERY-THRILLER “DAUGHTER OF GOD”

#### Chain Thinking

"When a writer attempts to introduce a social issue into his fiction, he can almost be sure that he will be accused of some kind of proselytizing. In *Chain Thinking*, the issue is animal rights, and the fiction is the story of Kikora, a chimpanzee, and Shep Harrington, a lawyer and detective *manqué*, and his battle not only to solve a murder, but to save the chimp from experimentation. Elliott Light has managed to weave these two parts together, and do it seamlessly."

—MARTHA GRIMES, BEST-SELLING MYSTERY WRITER, AND WINNER OF THE NERO WOLFE AWARD (BEST MYSTERY)

"Those who think that stories about legal rights for nonhuman animals have to be boring, tedious, complicated, or abstract are in for a treat. In *Chain Thinking*, the plain truths about our

inhumanity to other beings with whom we share our world are told in a way both exciting and funny. What animal rights lawyer wouldn't want to be like Shep Harrington (except for the part about going to jail)? And I guessed wrong about whodunnit!"

—**STEVEN M. WISE, LECTURER, HARVARD LAW SCHOOL, AND AUTHOR OF THE BOOKS *RATTLING THE CAGE: TOWARD LEGAL RIGHTS FOR ANIMALS* AND *DRAWING THE LINE: THE CASE FOR ANIMAL RIGHTS***

"Entertaining and enlightening."

-- **BOOKLIST (THE MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION)**

"The implicit argument for animal rights should elevate the profile of this one."

—**PUBLISHERS WEEKLY**

"Within this mystery, Elliott Light's reluctant but interesting detective, Shep Harrington, makes his own case for the need to break 'Chain Thinking' and morally look at an important topic for discussion -- the way we treat our fellow creatures."

—**NEVADA BARR, BEST-SELLING MYSTERY WRITER, AND "ONE OF THE MOST ACCLAIMED MYSTERY WRITERS OF OUR TIME" (WASHINGTON POST)**

"Elliott Light writes with an elegance that most of us can only manage by quoting others. Luckily, I'm a lot funnier than he is, or I'd have to give up this whole mystery novel thing and take up upholstery.

Elliott, you've gained a fan."

—**JEFFREY COHEN, AUTHOR OF *FOR WHOM THE MINIVAN ROLLS: AN AARON TUCKER MYSTERY*, AND *A FAREWELL TO LEGS: ANOTHER AARON TUCKER MYSTERY***

## A Q&A with *The Gene Police* Author Elliott Light

### 1. Let's start with an easy one. What is eugenics?



Let's start with a disclaimer. I am a writer of fiction who has read about eugenics. I don't pretend to be an expert on the subject. I have extracted some elements of eugenic teaching, blended them with a dose of imagination, and written a mystery novel. Now, with that said, what I learned about eugenics surprised me—actually fascinated me.

The term “eugenics” encompasses both a set of beliefs and a movement to implement those beliefs. In the late 1800s, the idea that human traits could be inherited took root with those who believed that such traits included character, intelligence and, in effect, worthiness. The movement to implement those beliefs resulted in laws that authorized governments to forcibly sterilize those deemed “unfit” and to prohibit marriages between certain “races.”

The theory was that undesired human behaviors such as laziness, drunkenness, criminal activity, promiscuity and even poverty were passed on to later generations. Ergo, only people without out these tendencies should be allowed to breed. Coupled with the belief that non-white races are inferior, eugenics taught that race mixing would lead to the end of the white race and the end of civilization as we know it.

### 2. But this was just a theory, right?

This is where things get interesting. Eugenics was part of college curriculums and advocated in popular text books such as *Applied Eugenics* by Paul Popenoe and Sowell Hill Johnson and discussed in mainstream literature such as *The Passing of the Great Race* by Madison Grant. At county fairs, contests were held under the banner “Fitter Families for Future Firesides.” These contests evaluated the “eugenics” worth of a family and awarded prizes to the most fit (similar to what was awarded for the best live stock.)

Eugenics became imbedded in economic, labor and immigration policy and even in discussions regarding the wisdom of our democratic principles.

One common theme among economists and other social commentators of the early 1900s was that the Anglo-Saxon “race” was being out bred by inferior races, a process that was referred to as “race suicide.” I could go on, but the point is that the concepts of eugenics

were deeply integrated into our culture until the end of World War II (and some would argue long after that).

**3. Eugenics seems like an odd topic for a murder mystery. So how did you become interested in eugenics?**

My great uncle Joseph DeJarnette was a major player in the Eugenics movement in Virginia. To be clear, *The Gene Police* is not about Uncle Joe. In a sad way, he believed he was morally justified in the positions he took. But the movement he supported produced some very cruel outcomes.

**4. So why do you think the term and the beliefs behind it are not well known?**

The history that we teach is often sanitized to soothe our collective conscience and to fit our current belief systems. For example, slavery has been portrayed as having a “good” side. The internment of the Japanese at the beginning of World War II has been rationalized as a necessary measure to protect our West Coast, but little is said about what happened to the property of these citizens after the war ended. A discussion of eugenics is made complicated by the way it was used to justify racial discrimination and to perpetuate the superiority of whites.

**5. Were you taught eugenics as a child?**

Tough question. Not overtly. What my parents believed about skin color and ethnic groups was not hidden from me. Other the other hand, I was never told what to believe. I recall my father commenting about Nat King Cole in racial terms while watching his show every week. I also remember him helping a black woman whose car broke down in a rain storm.

**6. So why did you decide to write about eugenics? It sounds like it makes you angry.**

I guess it does. I think I’ll leave it at that.

**7. But it should please you that eugenics has been debunked.**

Well, I’m not sure I can agree with that conclusion. We have better science now than when eugenics was formulated. So, in the wrong political climate, genetics might actually do more harm than eugenics. We may not talk about purifying the race, but we have the power to design children with certain attributes. The more we learn about genes and their manipulation, the more we have to be honest about our motives. At least currently, the decision to act upon one’s genetic make-up is the choice of the individual and not the state.

**8. Let’s change the subject. I see that the setting for *The Gene Police* is the small town of Lyle, Virginia. Is there a reason you chose this setting for the Shep Harrington series?**

I grew up in a small town atmosphere. Life is more intimate. Secrets are harder to keep, and yet secrets are common. With a limited geographic stage, characters can be more fully developed and their foibles exploited. As a child, I traveled through small towns such as Lyle and visited farms similar to the farm on which Shep lives. I never visited a poor farm, but it isn't hard to imagine what one looked like.

**9. And what about your main character? Is he drawn from your own experience?**

Let's say that Shep and I have a lot in common. We love cats. We were both accused of a crime we didn't commit. Only Shep went to prison and I didn't. So we both have a distrust of the "justice" system. There's a remoteness to Shep that is familiar to me. He is a lot braver than I'd be in the circumstances that I put in him.

**10. The main character of this book seems to have a visceral reaction to power. To what extent do you share this reaction?**

Power rules. We see it every day, in our streets, in our corporations, in our government, and in our institutions. If you get on the wrong side of one these power curves, heaven help you. I will say that I came to the edge of being sucked into the criminal justice system. Once inside this system, fairness, justice, and equality don't matter as much as winning, which meant only one thing: locking you up. An average citizen can't afford defensive counsel. Pleading guilty to a crime that wasn't committed is probably more widespread than we know. I was simply lucky that ultimately the right people were asked the right questions and I was cleared. But it might not have worked out that way. Shep knows this. I know this. Life pivots around certain experiences. I learned, the hard way, the cost of being naïve.

**11. Have you started writing a fourth book for the SmallTown® Mystery Series?**

I'm outlining my way through several story concepts to see if at least one of them can be told through Shep's eyes.

**12. Would you consider writing a different genre other than mystery?**

I've tried a few times to write a more conventional thriller. I don't know if I have the voice for it.

**13. How has your degree in Electrical Engineering contributed to the creation of *The Gene Police*?**

Not directly. But engineering, science and law are disciplines that are fact based. Racism and its fake science, eugenics, are ideologically based. The conflict between fact and ideology percolates through *The Gene Police*.

**14. How has your experience in the legal profession helped you in the publishing industry?**

Obviously legal training helps with understanding certain rights and reading contracts. More importantly, my legal experience helps in creating situations that my characters must solve.

**15. Would you ever consider opening your own “Poor Farm”?**

No, but my protagonist in *The Gene Police* does just that.

**16. How did you first become interested in the topic of eugenics?**

The Supreme Court Cases dealing with race fascinate me. I lived through the closing of schools in Virginia in response to the *Brown v. Board* decision. Virginia’s miscegenation law was struck down by the Court a few years before I went to law school. I’m not sure when I first encountered the term eugenics but at some point I realized that my great uncle was a well-known proponent of the Virginia Racial Integrity laws.

**17. Where did you find inspiration to write *The Gene Police*?**

I read an article in which a black woman had learned that her baby had no died at birth as she’d been told. Instead, the baby had been given up for adoption. Seeing the pain the woman’s face set things in motion.

**18. When did you first start writing novels?**

In the early 1980s, I bought an Atari 800 computer with a word processing program. The files were stored on a cassette tape that sometimes wouldn’t reload. Somewhere in that time frame I started writing just to justify the cost of the computer. In the early 1990s, when Grisham and Clancy were the rock stars of the paperback book, I realized that writing was something I needed to do. The Beatles “Paperback Writer” probably cinched the deal. I actually spoke to Grisham just after he published *The Firm*. He doesn’t remember me but I recall the conversation pretty vividly.

**19. What made you decide to stray from engineering and legal work and pursue writing?**

On a whim, I took writing courses offered by the county adult education system. I remember that of the thirteen attendees, twelve of us were lawyers. The common complaint was the law wasn’t creative enough. Additionally, a book offers a platform for expressing thoughts and feelings that are begging for exposure.

**20. You claim to be related to some famous people—Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall, and Robert Morris. Why does it matter to you, and why should it matter to readers?**

In the global sense, it doesn’t. Who you are matters, not who you’re related to. What makes these relationships relevant are the expectations they create. I was steeped as a child in the first family of Virginia lore (much as Senator Warren was taught about

Pocahontas). These were the intellectuals of their day. These founding fathers were enlightened thinkers credited with noble statements such as “all men are created equal.” But stripped of the folklore, they were slave owners and probably subscribed to the common belief of the time that white people were superior to all others. It matters because when juxtaposed to the myths, the truth about these men is disappointing. History is not always fond of the truth, so we repeat our mistakes and lament why our most vexing problems are never solved. Sorry for being so long-winded, but the question hit a nerve.

## **21. So you learned your abhorrence for white supremacy from your parents?**

Quite the contrary! My Great Uncle Joe DeJarnette was a progressive of his time who sought to spare the mentally ill the horrors of incarceration in prisons. He came to the Virginia Western State Hospital in 1889, became its superintendent in 1906, and served in that leadership role through 1943. He also became an advocate of forced sterilization of “the unfit,” supported the state law against interracial marriage, and backed racial segregation. He lamented that the Nazis were more efficient at sterilization than America. He communicated with prominent eugenicists within the Third Reich. Mother loved Uncle Joe and believed what he believed. Like Joe, my mother and my father were creatures of their time. Eugenics was a “science” that settled once and for all the supremacy of the white “race.” What could be wrong with believing in scientific fact? And if the white race was superior, why shouldn’t its members be entitled to the privilege of not having to associate with those beneath them? A betting person would look at that environment and give high odds that it would have produced a white supremacist if not a Grand Wizard.

## **22. Why do you think you didn’t turn out that way?**

Here’s the amazing, inexplicable, fascinating fact: Not one of us five children adopted the racist views of our parents or of Uncle Joe. How could that happen? I set out to write about eugenics in part to understand how my parents’ generation could believe so strongly in a doctrine designed to put a wedge between so-called whites and the rest of the population. The result was *The Gene Police*, a murder mystery that is as much a journey of personal discovery as a whodunit. I will admit that I didn’t find the answer I was seeking, but I formed a theory.

In my family, power ruled the day. Life was not fair, especially for the youngest and smallest. And when life isn’t perceived as fair, fairness becomes a cherished, tangible goal. For me, and my siblings, fairness trumped the racial bigotry that surrounded us.

My escape from eugenics was not perfect, though. Fairness, while it sounds conciliatory, is not enough. Fairness is not the same as equality. I see that now. Fairness is a legal construct that implies a decider—a Solomon-like decision maker who decides who wins and who loses. “Separate but equal” was fair to white folks. But there is nothing fair about being overtly or subtly looked upon as second class.



The take-away is this: My parents' view of the world died with them. Their view did not stick to me or to my siblings. If we stop teaching privilege, if we inform our children at a young age that they share the world with others equally, we can stop repeating the evil embodied in the eugenics movement of our ancestors, and the white supremacy views that lie below the surface in America today.

### **23. Why do you think eugenics is an important topic to revisit, especially now?**

What makes this particular time seem more divisive, more threatening, more discouraging than other upheavals is that it has exposed the American myth to an uncomfortable light. We are taught—no brainwashed—about American exceptionalism at a young age. We come to believe we are superior to all others in all things. We project a nationalism that is based on a self-perceived claim to the moral high ground. We are the land of the free. We tout our Constitution as the greatest document written by man. Our institutions, history, and values are the benchmark for the rest of the world to aspire to.

Even as we are confronted by facts that contradict this collective self-delusion, we are steadfast in our belief that we are exceptional, that destiny and God ordained us as the world's moral compass.

Recent events have pulled back the curtain on the American myth and exposed the fictions on which it is built. With the illusion of America fading, we are confused and fearful. The easiest response is to blame others. Identity politics provide targets, and the power brokers are more than happy to oblige.

We have struggled with race since the day the first white settlers arrived. We will continue to do so until we face our history head on. Eugenics didn't cause divisions but is rather a symptom of it. Understanding how science can be bent to morally justify the immoral ideology of white supremacy is a necessary step in this endeavor.

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF EUGENICS

BY ELLIOTT LIGHT

*The Gene Police* is the third in the SmallTown® mystery series. The story involves a murder (naturally) that is wrapped in elements of the eugenics movement that arose in the early 1900, permeated national policy for decades, and gave Hitler a “scientific” basis for hating Jews.

A typical definition reads like this:

*Eugenics*—a science that strives to optimize the inherited qualities of humans by dictating who can mate with whom.

Haven’t heard of it? Don’t be surprised. It’s not a topic that is taught in school (although it once was taught in many universities). Except for an occasional reference on recent television shows (e.g., *The Knick*), discussions of eugenics are limited to scholarly articles and threads on twitter and blogs. Social media tends to focus on references to famous eugenicists – Margret Sanger is one who is often mentioned—rather than why an understanding of eugenics is important today.

To be clear (hint, a disclaimer is coming), I am not a historian. I have read much about eugenics and will report what I have learned in postings here. But not every fact can be independently verified. We live in an age where if a statement is repeated enough by enough people, it is assumed to be accurate. I will do my best to avoid this trap, but my primary purpose in writing about eugenics is to expose as many people to the subject matter.

Sir Francis Galton is considered the father of eugenics. In the 1880s, he performed studies of the British upper class and determined that their success was largely due to their "exceptional" genes. Improving a race by improving its gene pool has a certain sophistic attraction, so much so that even black leaders supported the science as a way of improving the black “race.”

Eugenics as a science might have remained innocuous if it had not offered itself as an intellectual justification for claims of racial superiority made by progressive whites. In the early 1900s, white leaders were expressing concern that the Anglo-Saxon majority in the U.S. was committing “race suicide” by allowing inferior races to enter the country and dilute the white gene pool. Teddy Roosevelt gave speeches on the subject of white women having more babies. *The Passing of the Great Race* by Madison Grant published circa 1916 presented scientific proof that the Anglo-Saxon race was superior to all others and made a passionate appeal for keeping the white race “pure.”

By the 1920s, these fears resulted in stringent immigration laws, new and more stringent laws against interracial marriage, and laws that empowered state agencies to forcibly sterilize the unfit.

## ECHOES OF EUGENICS –AND HOW TO SPOT THEM

We are experiencing a period of societal churning. Old values have been reasserted as new and new values (or perhaps in some cases even older values) have been asserted to oppose them. The causes of this value clash are many, but one of the primary drivers is a response to globalization. For some, the breakdown of borders and trade barriers is the reason for loss of jobs, the decline of economic status, and a sense of control of person destiny (or liberty). Regardless of whether the “when I was a boy days” were truly “happy days,” they are missed with a sense of nostalgia and anger.

A counterforce to globalization is nationalism. Nationalism is based on group identity, which is often determined by race (skin color), religion, or both. The group asserts its power of exclusion by championing its identity as superior to all others.

Eugenic teachings were often directed to two distinct goals. The more benign implementation was to improve the health of society as a whole. The other goal was to perpetuate a white race without infection from any inferior race. A person could support the first goal without being a white supremacist. Indeed, much research is being done to find genetic sources of maladies such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes, to name a few that cross racial lines. Eugenics also offers those committed to achieving the second goal a scientific justification for the supremacy of the white race. When practiced by those with power, race supremacy is a rigid dogma that disavows equality and challenges the concept of democracy and fairness.

*The Passing of the Great Race* by Madison Grant was published in 1916 and celebrated its fourth edition in 1936. Mr. Grant was widely read in the United States and around the world. Hitler is said to have called it his “bible.”

This is what Mr. Grant had to say about democracy:

In the democratic forms of government the operation of universal suffrage tends toward the selection of the average man for public office rather than the man qualified by birth, education and integrity. How this scheme of administration will ultimately work out remains to be seen but from a racial point of view it will inevitably increase the preponderance of the lower types and cause a corresponding loss of efficiency in the community as a whole.

The tendency in a democracy is toward a standardization of type and a diminution of the influence of genius. A majority must of necessity be inferior to a picked minority and it always resents specializations in which it cannot share. *Grant at p.5.*

Equality was not a value to be treasured:

The days of the Civil War and the provincial sentimentalism which governed or misgoverned our public opinion are past, and this generation must completely repudiate the proud boast of our fathers that they acknowledged no distinction in "race, creed, or color," or else the native American must turn the page of history and write: "FINIS AMERICA." *Grant, Introduction To Fourth Edition at p. xxxiii.*

Racial inferiority was permanent and could not be "cured" by environment or education:

There exists to-day a widespread and fatuous belief in the power of environment, as well as of education and opportunity to alter heredity, which arises from the dogma of the brotherhood of man, derived in its turn from the loose thinkers of the French Revolution and their American mimics. Such beliefs have done much damage in the past and if allowed to go uncontradicted, may do even more serious damage in the future. Thus the view that the Negro slave was an unfortunate cousin of the white man, deeply tanned by the tropic sun and denied the blessings of Christianity and civilization, played no small part with the sentimentalists of the Civil War period and it has taken us fifty years to learn that speaking English, wearing good clothes and going to school and to church do not transform a Negro into a white man. Nor was a Syrian or Egyptian freedman transformed into a Roman by wearing a toga and applauding his favorite gladiator in the amphitheatre. Americans will have a similar experience with the Polish Jew, whose dwarf stature, peculiar mentality and ruthless concentration on self-interest are being engrafted upon the stock of the nation. *Grant at p.16.*

With this doctrine in place, eugenics demanded, and won, restrictive immigration policy:

"The Passing of the Great Race," in its original form, was designed by the author to rouse his fellow Americans to the overwhelming importance of race and to the folly of the "Melting Pot" theory, even at the expense of bitter controversy. This purpose has been accomplished thoroughly, and one of the most far-reaching effects of the doctrines enunciated in this volume and in the discussions that followed its publication was the decision of the Congress of the United States to adopt discriminatory and restrictive measures against the immigration of undesirable races and peoples. *Grant, Introduction To Fourth Edition at p. xxviii.*

One only has to read the news to hear echoes of this belief set. The old values are reflected in the slogan "make America great *again*." The slogan makes clear that America is not great now, but it doesn't inform about how this will be accomplished. Yet, the statement, when combined with "America First" and the attacks on free immigration is clearly a plea to nationalism. Eugenics promoted the fear of "race death" or "race suicide" to convince the masses that they needed to act to exclude those who were different. Today it is Muslims, Hispanics and, more recently, Jews.

The message of eugenics echoes from the past if the words have changed. The media, which today is represented by women, people of color, and immigrants, is under attack. Political power

is being used to define voting districts so as to disenfranchise minorities. Messages of fear are being promoted over messages of hope and cooperation, just as the proponents of eugenics did a hundred years ago.

Today, the eugenics movement of the early twentieth century is, unfortunately, largely the province of academics. But understanding how a “fake” science changed the laws and policies of the U.S., and resulted in the deaths of millions of people, is critical to how we react to the value wars being waged in the social and public media every day.

## **Using the Minimum Wage and Child Labor Laws to Purify the White Race**

Eugenics as a “science” was invented in the late 1800s during an era of progressivism. The progressive movement was intoxicated with a faith in science, a positive view of what the future might be, the power of government to improve the lives of citizens through regulation, and a utopian belief that humans could, through science and regulation, be made perfect. Both eugenics and progressivism coexisted with a deeply rooted belief in white supremacy.

Eugenics, without the overlay of white supremacy, advocates better offspring through the selection of better partners. To grossly oversimplify, eugenics teaches: “If you want smarter, healthier kids, mate with a smarter, healthier partner.”

White supremacists advocated (and continue to advocate) that the white “race” is superior to all others and must be preserved as “pure,” that is, without the infusion of genes from “unfit” races. Achieving this objective without resorting to euthanasia has proven difficult.

Progressives sought to improve life for the population as a whole through government regulation. To this end, they advocated regulation of working conditions, banning of child labor, capping of working hours, and fixing minimum wages, all which seem to be laudable objectives. But the progressives of the day were also drawn to eugenics (eugenics claimed to be scientifically based). And so many famous progressives supported, if not promoted, eugenic policies at the time.

Curiously, eugenic economists embraced many of the progressive concepts of the day, albeit for different reasons. In his article *Eugenics and Economics in the Progressive Era* (Journal of Economic Perspectives, Vol. 19, No., Fall 2005, pages 207–224), Thomas C. Leonard notes that:

A minimum wage was seen to operate eugenically through two channels: by deterring prospective immigrants ... and also by removing from employment the “unemployable,” who, thus identified, could be, for example, segregated in rural communities or sterilized.  
*Leonard, at p. 213.*

In discussing the fusion of progressivism and eugenics, Leonard describes the motives at work:

Consider Popenoe and Johnson’s very successful *Applied Eugenics* (1918), published as part of the Social Science textbook series edited by Richard T. Ely. Popenoe and Johnson argued for legislation that would abolish child labor and provide education for all

children, quintessentially progressive policies. But compulsory education and child labor bans, for Popenoe and Johnson, were desirable because the unfit poor would be unable to put their children to work and thus would have fewer children, a eugenic goal. Indeed, Popenoe and Johnson opposed free school lunches and textbooks for the poor on the grounds that subsidies of books and lunches would lower the cost of child rearing and thereby increase the number of children born to the unfit. *Leonard, at p. 218.*

So while today the minimum wage is promoted as a “fair wage,” at its inception, the minimum wage was also supported by eugenicist and white supremacists as an economic weapon. Basically, if wages are too high, employers won’t hire the unfit poor, and if the unfit can’t work, they won’t have children or their children will starve. Problem solved.

## **Trump and What We Need to Know About the “Science” of Eugenics**

Writing recently in *The New Yorker* on our president’s early rating success as the TV star of “The Apprentice,” Emily Nussbaum put it rather starkly: “[Trump is] hung up on eugenics, an unspoken contradiction of the show’s meritocratic themes.” (Nussbaum, Emily. “The TV That Created Donald Trump,” article from *The New Yorker*, <http://www.newyorker.com>, July 31, 2017.)

An examination of statements by Trump and his closest advisors lends credence to this observation.

“You have to be born lucky,” Donald Trump told Oprah Winfrey in 1988, “in the sense that you have to have the right genes.” His biographer Michael D’Antonio explained to Frontline that Trump and his family subscribe “to a racehorse theory of human development. They believe that there are superior people, and that if you put together the genes of a superior woman and a superior man, you get a superior offspring.” (Jones, Sarah. “Trump Has Turned the GOP into the Party of Eugenics,” article from the *New Republic*, <https://newrepublic.com>, February 15, 2017.)

So what is eugenics? Marilyn M. Singleton, M.D., J.D., answered the question this way:

Eugenics is a science that deals with the improvement (as by control of human mating) of hereditary qualities of a race or breed. The word is derived from the Greek word *eu* (good or well) and the suffix *-genes* (born). Eugenics is sometimes broadly applied to describe any human action whose goal is to improve the gene pool.

In the most general terms, it is the belief that the human population can be improved by affecting who mates with whom. A race, according to eugenics, can be improved by having those with the best genes mate and produce offspring that are equal or superior to their parents. Conversely, a race can be diminished by allowing a person with good genes

mate with a person with inferior genes. (Singleton, Marilyn. "Moral Detour." *Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons*, V. 19, No. 4 Winter 2014, p.114.)

She also succinctly states the key to how eugenics is applied: "Of course, an obvious problem is who defines which traits are desirable." (Singleton, "Moral Detour, p.114.)

In the purest application, the term eugenics can be applied to any race. But when eugenics was first conceived, political power in the U.S. and the rest of the western world was wielded by people who considered themselves white. Unfailingly, the "science" of eugenics was infused with the historic belief that the white race was superior to all others. Ergo, all other races were inferior.

With the political power of the progressive movement behind them, eugenicists at the state level enacted laws that defined who was *not* white and prohibited non-whites from marrying white people. They also enacted laws that allowed for the forced sterilization of "unfit" individuals. And of course, it was white folks who were the arbiters of who was "fit" and who was not.

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There exists today a widespread and fatuous belief in the power of environment, as well as of education and opportunity to alter heredity, which arises from the dogma of the brotherhood of man, derived in its turn from the loose thinkers of the French Revolution and their American mimics. Such beliefs have done much damage in the past and, if

allowed to go uncontradicted, may do even more serious damage in the future. Thus the view that the Negro slave was an unfortunate cousin of the white man, deeply tanned by the tropic sun and denied the blessings of Christianity and civilization, played no small part with the sentimentalists of the Civil War period, and it has taken us fifty years to learn that speaking English, wearing good clothes, and going to school and to church do not transform a Negro into a white man. Nor was a Syrian or Egyptian freedman transformed into a Roman by wearing a toga and applauding his favorite gladiator in the amphitheatre. Americans will have a similar experience with the Polish Jew, whose dwarf stature, peculiar mentality and ruthless concentration on self-interest are being engrafted upon the stock of the nation. (Grant at p.16.)

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Eugenics, at least as practiced in the U.S., was (and is) antithetical to our perception of America as the greatest democracy on earth—and one that welcomes the poor and needy. And yet it helped define public policy for more than five decades.

So why do most of us not know about eugenics and its proponents?

I have characterized eugenics as a “forgotten” science. This is not literally true. Many scholars have written about the historic implications of the U.S. embrace of eugenics as a philosophy:

Despite these contemporary remnants of America’s involvement in eugenics, and despite the fact that the movement shaped national policy and held sway in the upper reaches of society for many years, this chapter of American history is surprisingly absent from the common conception of the country’s past. It’s not that it has been ignored by historians or journalists. *The New Yorker* ran a lengthy four-part series on eugenics in 1984, and a number of books have been published on the topic. Many of these works approach the story of American eugenics as though it will be a surprise to the reader, which is probably a safe bet. Of the two other books on *Buck v. Bell* [a 1927 [U.S. Supreme Court](#) decision, never expressly reversed, ruling that a [state statute](#) permitting [compulsory sterilization](#) of the unfit, including the [intellectually disabled](#), "for the protection and health of the state" did not violate the Due Process clause of the [Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution](#)] that have appeared in the past ten years, one has the subtitle “The Secret History of Forced Sterilization and America’s Quest for Racial Purity,” while the other ends by noting that the history of eugenics in the U.S. is “often forgotten.” Cohen, too,



writes that “*Buck v. Bell* is little remembered today.” Yet it seems that the collective forgetfulness is not a matter of some well of information remaining untapped, but of our inability or unwillingness to soak up what is drawn out of it. (Denhoed, Andrea, “The Forgotten Lessons of the American Eugenics Movement,” an article from *The New Yorker*, <http://www.newyorker.com>, April 27, 2016.)

Whether it is fair to label Trump a eugenicist, it is important that people understand the way his Administration is channeling eugenic values. The Trumpian slogan “make American great again” appears to refer to some unspecified time when things were better, perhaps when the power of minorities and women wasn’t on the rise, when people of color accepted second-class status, and when whites had privileges reserved for “the superior race.” The “America First” policy has turned into both an attack on free immigration and a plea for nationalism. The recent events in Charlottesville underscore the perils of using such rhetoric.

Eugenics promoted the fear of “race death” or “race suicide” to convince the masses that the white race was under attack from non-white individuals. The Trump administration has encouraged us to fear Muslims and Hispanics. While the founders of the eugenics movement disdained democracy, the Trump administration appears to support voter suppression tactics intended to disenfranchise minorities.

These observations are indeed important and worthy of greater examination and of additional media attention. But more important is the need to look past the academic intricacies of eugenics and focus on largely ignored lesson of the eugenics movement: the ease with which our parents and grandparents accepted a plainly racial philosophy wrapped in an obviously flawed (fake?) “science,” that left nearly 70,000 Americans sterilized and, worse, formed the philosophical pretext for the Holocaust, which murdered six million Jews.

We cannot continue to ignore the moral failures of our past and expect that they won’t be repeated. We must hope that a thorough airing of these missteps, through education and dialogue, will bring us to a common sense view of eugenics and race supremacy that was espoused years ago:

The more scientifically bred animals are, the less brain they have. If you want a dog who will be an intelligent and sympathetic companion, which do you choose—the dog bred by ‘science,’ or the dog bred by the natural selection of mutual love, the thoroughbred or the mongrel? All experience says the latter. Therefore, suppose the Eugenists had their way and established a state. What would the inhabitants of that state be like in a few generations? They would be tall, broad, muscular, beautiful, delicate to a degree, useless save for athletic contests or beauty shows, always in the doctor’s hands—[those of] a Eugenics doctor, of course—brainless, incapable of affection, almost wanting in courage, to a great extent sterile; and in the end, if the state did not die of inanition first, some more virile and intelligent race, say the Hottentots or Andamese, would come and eat its inhabitants. The Eugenic Utopia would end in the digestive apparatus of a savage. *Sic transit gloria Eugeniae*. Nothing could be more certain than that. (H. Fielding-Hall, “Eugenics and Common Sense.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1914, p.351-52.)

Now there's an image that can't be misunderstood or easily forgotten.

*Elliott Light, a lawyer and an engineer, is the author of two published social-issue novels, and of a forthcoming mystery (The Gene Police, Bancroft Press, 2018) revolving around eugenics.*

## **The Curse of “White Superiority Complex”**

By Elliott Light

Neo-Nazi. White Supremacy. Race Identity. Immigration. Muslim Bans. White Nationalism. Eugenics. Black Lives Matter. White Privilege.

Almost every day, something appears in the media that reminds us how racially charged the Trump era is. In response, speakers and columnists denounce hate and plead for unity, promising if we would only listen to each other with open minds and hearts, tensions would ease. Yet, after we watch the back and forth between those blowing the dog whistles and those asking the dog not to bark, the feeling that lingers at the end of the day and returns with the first light is a sadness, as if mourning the loss of something that can't be identified, like bye-bye American Pie but worse.

With all the clamor over race, perhaps the most difficult to process are the reports that a majority of American whites (55%) believe that discrimination against whites exists in the U.S. Curiously, only a small percentage claimed to be victims of discrimination personally. (“Majority Of White Americans Feel Discriminated Against: Poll,” Charles Ventura, USA Today.com, Oct. 26, 2017). Like most white males, I wasn't aware that my identity was in some way tied to the color of my skin. Why should I? I grew up with the privileges afforded white people and, consequently, never had to actually think about being white. So why are white people suddenly so self-aware?

It would be easy to look at this as a recent phenomenon, as a manifestation of fear in an aging white population that feels left behind. Whether justified or not, politicians and the media are constantly reminding us that the world is a dangerous place, that terrorists, mostly radicalized Muslims, are plotting to kill us. If it isn't terrorists, it's a swarm of immigrants threatening to steal our jobs and our “culture.” Many immigrants don't speak English or do so with heavy accents. People of color are everywhere. We fear that we are being outnumbered. And then there's the media spewing its fake news about, well, everything.

Now for the difficult truth: White Americans have always been self-aware. Our colonial ancestors wrote laws to prohibit white interaction with slaves and Native Americans. States entering the Union as “free” states wrote exclusionary laws discouraging emigration by free slaves. Asian immigrants were precluded from voting, sitting on juries, testifying against whites, and owning real property. Eugenics, a pseudo-science supported by progressives of the early 1900s, produced laws designed to prevent dilution of the white race by non-whites. Immigration

policy of the 1920s set racial quotas that favored “white” races. At the outbreak of World War II, 120,000 Japanese-Americans were incarcerated.

Like it or not, white Americans have always suffered from what I call White Superiority Complex (WSC). White people are smarter, more ethical, and more entitled than non-whites. We think it, judges have taken judicial notice of it, and our laws and practices prove it. We know this, even if we choose not to admit it. We may abide by unwritten political correctness rules, but we think what we can’t speak (unless, of course, you are Donald Trump).

So what is going on? Why is race identity so visible now? What is race identity anyway?

“Race is the foundation of identity. That’s kind of more of a touchy-feely version of this, but it’s maybe the most important one. And that is that we understand ourselves as coming from someplace. We understand ourselves as being part of a bigger story. We’re part of Europe, we’re part of this big European story that traces back to prehistory, that includes Greece and Rome, that includes the Middle Ages and the tumults that came afterward, that includes coming to America, and so on. We’re part of this big, you could say a big, narrative about who we are. We aren’t just individuals. We aren’t just some, you know, raceless, genderless soul, or brain, existing in the world, interacting with others. No. We have roots.” (Transcript: Richard Spencer Interview by James Allsup: “The Alt-Right’s Future in Trump’s America,” Posted on April 19, 2017 by Jack Martel; <http://sonsofeuropa.com>).

This is a curious and telling statement. From this perspective, America is not the great melting pot. Rather, we are a mosaic of distinct cultures—cultures that can be manipulated and exploited to further some ideological purpose. And manipulated we have been. The so-called liberals have proclaimed themselves the champions of immigrants and people of color. The so-called neo-conservatives, in reaction to the left, promise to defend whites against threats to the “white culture.” It is on this field where the parties engage each other while accomplishing nothing. In the end, modern political discourse is about retaining power by creating fear, raising money, and suppressing the vote of the other side.

Aside from the mandatory platitudes about fairness, equal protection under the law, and democracy, the noise of race identity suppresses all discussion about policy. It is policy, not culture, that determines the health and effectiveness of our democracy. The democratic process has been high-jacked by money, by gerrymandered districting, by vulnerable voting machines, and by outright voter suppression. While the machinery that supports democracy rusts, we are distracted (intentionally) by salvos of provocative race-baiting tweets and statements that promote retaliation.

Healthcare. Immigration. Equitable tax reform. Infrastructure. Environmental protection. Nothing changes. Nothing gets done. It’s trench warfare modern-style. And, unless something amazing happens, nothing will. This looks like a death spiral.

What makes this particular time seem more divisive, more threatening, more discouraging than other upheavals is that it has exposed the American myth to an uncomfortable light. We are taught—no brainwashed—about American exceptionalism at a young age. We come to believe we are superior to all others in all things. We project a nationalism that is based on a self-perceived claim to the moral high ground. We are the land of the free. We tout our Constitution

as the greatest document written by man. Our institutions, history, and values are the benchmark for the rest of the world to aspire to.

Even as we are confronted by facts that contradict this collective self-delusion, we are steadfast in our belief that we are exceptional, that destiny and God ordained us as the world's moral compass.

The Trump presidency has pulled back the curtain on the American myth and exposed the fictions on which it is built. The idea of a perfect union in which people are endowed with "unalienable" rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness has been lost in the muck of the swamp that was supposed to have been drained. Our government can no longer "secure these rights" because it is dysfunctional. We may love our Constitution, but not as a framework for governing. We don't read it and, when it gets in the way, we ignore it. How can Congress function when a significant number of its members object to the existence of the very government they promised to serve?

With the illusion of America fading, we are confused and fearful. The easiest response is to blame others. Identity politics provide targets, and the power brokers are more than happy to oblige.

And yet with that all that said, we may have a rare opportunity to redefine who we want to be. Are we Americans or (Group Identifier)-Americans? Are we the world's greatest democracy? How do we treat our poor and our sick? What is our role in helping the oppressed and needy around the world? Are we protectors of the earth or simply its pillagers? Perhaps it's time for a new round of Federalist Papers, a time to own our moral failings as we own our accomplishments.

Whatever the answer, it is clear that we cannot continue down the current path if we expect to be great again.

*Elliott Light, a lawyer and an engineer, is the author of two published social-issue novels, and of a forthcoming mystery (The Gene Police, Bancroft Press, 2018) revolving around eugenics.*

## **Our Fear of Equality**

**By Elliott Light**

The civil rights movement of the sixties was both inspiring and disappointing. Americans of all colors marched to end racism. We marched to confirm the principle that all people are created equal. We marched to correct a moral failure of our ancestors, the founding fathers, and even our own parents. And while the intentions were good, fifty years later, we are still faced with the curse of institutionalized racism.

Almost every day, something appears in the media depicting the conflicts between "white" people and "non-white" people. In response, speakers and columnists denounce hate and plead

for unity, promising if we would only listen to each other with open minds and hearts, tensions would ease.

Yet, after we watch the back and forth between those blowing the dog whistles and those asking the dog not to bark, the feeling that lingers at the end of the day, and that returns with the first light, is a sadness, as if mourning the loss of something that can't be identified, like bye-bye American Pie but worse.

Our bouts with racial tension are like an illness that we can't quite shake and for which there is no apparent cure. Why is it that with all of the good intentions, with all the town hall meetings, we remain afflicted with racial strife?

One piece of this puzzle may be a failure to see the American culture for what it is. Writing for the majority in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (19 Howard 393, 15 L.Ed. 691, 1857), Chief Justice Taney observed:

They had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the Negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold, and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic, whenever a profit could be made by it. This opinion was at that time fixed and universal in the civilized portion of the white race. It was regarded as an axiom in morals as well as in politics, which no one thought of disputing, or supposed to be open to dispute; and men in every grade and position in society daily and habitually acted upon it in their private pursuits, as well as in matters of public concern, without doubting for a moment the correctness of this opinion.

According to Justice Taney, the superiority of whites was part of the American DNA, fixed, universal, and not open to dispute.

This mindset was not limited to blacks from Africa. Three years earlier, in the case of *The People v. Hall*, the California Supreme Court reversed the murder conviction of a white man whose conviction was based on the testimony of a Chinese man. First, the Court construed the California Crimes and Punishment Act of 1850 that provided “[n]o black or mulatto person, or Indian, shall be permitted to give evidence in favor of, or against, any white person” as covering all non-whites, including those of Chinese descent. Arguing that it would be against public policy to imply that Chinese immigrants were entitled to rights of white citizens, the Court made clear that the inherent inferiority of the Chinese “race” was at the core of its decision: “a race of people whom nature has marked as inferior, and who are incapable of progress or intellectual development beyond a certain point, as their history has shown; differing in language, opinions, color, and physical conformation; between whom and ourselves nature has placed an impassable difference is now presented, and for them is claimed, not only the right to swear away the life of a citizen, but the further privilege of participating with us in administering the affairs of our Government.”

The “us” versus “them” paradigm reflects the universal belief in white supremacy and, logically, the distaste for pure democracy. *The Passing of the Great Race* by Madison Grant was first published in 1916; its fourth edition came out in 1936. Mr. Grant's work was widely read in the

United States and around the world. Hitler is said to have called the book his “bible.” This is what Mr. Grant had to say about democracy:

In the democratic forms of government, the operation of universal suffrage tends toward the selection of the average man for public office rather than the man qualified by birth, education and integrity. How this scheme of administration will ultimately work out remains to be seen, but from a racial point of view, it will inevitably increase the preponderance of the lower types and cause a corresponding loss of efficiency in the community as a whole.

The tendency in a democracy is toward a standardization of type and a diminution of the influence of genius. A majority must of necessity be inferior to a picked minority and it always resents specializations in which it cannot share. (Grant at p.5.)

Equality was not a value to be treasured:

The days of the Civil War and the provincial sentimentalism which governed or misgoverned our public opinion are past, and this generation must completely repudiate the proud boast of our fathers that they acknowledged no distinction in "race, creed, or color," or else the Native American must turn the page of history and write: "FINIS AMERICA." (Grant, *Introduction to Fourth Edition* at p. xxxiii.)

Grant was a believer in the “science” of eugenics. Broadly, eugenics “is the belief that the human population can be improved by affecting who mates with whom. A race, according to eugenics, can be improved by having those with the best genes mate and produce offspring that are equal or superior to their parents. Conversely, a race can be diminished by allowing a person with good genes to mate with a person with inferior genes.” (Singleton, Marilyn. “Moral Detour.” *Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons*, V. 19, No. 4 Winter 2014, p.114.) Singleton also succinctly states the key to how eugenics is applied: “Of course, an obvious problem is who defines which traits are desirable.” (Singleton, “Moral Detour, p.114.)

Grant believed that the superior race, the “white” race, should be the decider. Racial inferiority, concluded Grant, was permanent and could not be “cured” by environment or education:

There exists today a widespread and fatuous belief in the power of environment, as well as of education and opportunity to alter heredity, which arises from the dogma of the brotherhood of man, derived in its turn from the loose thinkers of the French Revolution and their American mimics. Such beliefs have done much damage in the past and, if allowed to go uncontradicted, may do even more serious damage in the future. Thus the view that the Negro slave was an unfortunate cousin of the white man, deeply tanned by the tropic sun and denied the blessings of Christianity and civilization, played no small part with the sentimentalists of the Civil War period, and it has taken us fifty years to learn that speaking English, wearing good clothes, and going to school and to church do not transform a Negro into a white man. Nor was a Syrian or Egyptian freedman transformed into a Roman by wearing a toga and applauding his favorite gladiator in the amphitheatre. Americans will have a similar experience with the Polish Jew, whose dwarf stature, peculiar mentality and ruthless concentration on self-interest are being engrafted upon the stock of the nation. (Grant at p.16.)

With this doctrine in place, white supremacists won restrictive immigration policy in the U.S.:

"The Passing of the Great Race," in its original form, was designed by the author to rouse his fellow Americans to the overwhelming importance of race and to the folly of the "Melting Pot" theory, even at the expense of bitter controversy. This purpose has been accomplished thoroughly, and one of the most far-reaching effects of the doctrines enunciated in this volume and in the discussions that followed its publication was the decision of the Congress of the United States to adopt discriminatory and restrictive measures against the immigration of undesirable races and peoples. (Grant, Introduction to Fourth Edition at p. xxviii.)

Reading the headlines, it would seem that Americans are again gripped by the ghost of eugenic principles. Immigration policy, Moslem bans, and even prison reform policies echo the old fears about the loss of white culture. A majority of American whites (55%) believe that discrimination against whites exists in the U.S. Curiously, only a small percentage claimed to be victims of discrimination personally. ("Majority of White Americans Feel Discriminated Against: Poll," Charles Ventura, USA Today.com, Oct. 26, 2017).

What is making white folks uneasy is that in the years ahead, whites will no longer control the debate. While often well-meaning, the superior power of white negotiators has almost always skewed the debate over civil rights to a discussion of fairness. Even separate but equal was discrimination wrapped in the morally satisfying principle that white people could be fair while excluding non-whites from the full privileges of citizenship. But fairness is *not* equality.

Achieving equality requires more than removing the legal barriers that deny the right to vote, to a fair trial, to feel safe walking in a white neighborhood. Equality requires recognition that a serious confrontation with American racial discord can only be achieved if the "whites" at the table understand the roots of American racism, not in order to shame them but to make them aware of how entrenched the fear of equality actually is.

This fear is reflected in the Trumpian slogan "make American great again," a slogan that appears to refer to some unspecified time when things were better, perhaps when the power of minorities and women wasn't on the rise, when people of color accepted second-class status, and when whites had privileges reserved for "the superior race."

To make America great, we must assure that all people are created and treated equally.

*Elliott Light, a lawyer and an engineer, is the author of two published social-issue novels, and of a forthcoming mystery (The Gene Police, Bancroft Press, 2018) revolving around eugenics. Visit his website at [www.smalltownmysteries.com](http://www.smalltownmysteries.com) or send an email to [elliott.light@smalltownmysteries.com](mailto:elliott.light@smalltownmysteries.com) for more information.*



# **Not Just a Moral Imperative, Racism Threatens Our National Security**

**By Elliott Light**

The Russians aren't stupid. As *USA Today* reported (May 11, 2018, "We Read Every One of the 3,517 Facebook Ads Bought By Russians. Here's What We Found"), half the Facebook ads during the 2016 presidential campaign attributable to the Russians were about race.

Why would they do that?

Generations of Americans have been taught about American exceptionalism. We are indoctrinated at a young age to believe that we are superior to all others in all things. We project a nationalism that is based on a self-perceived claim to the moral high ground. We are the land of the free. We tout our Constitution as the greatest document written by man. Our institutions, history, and values are the benchmark for the rest of the world to aspire to.

Even as we are confronted by facts that contradict this collective self-delusion, we are steadfast in our belief that we are exceptional, that destiny and God ordained us as the world's moral compass. Our shortcomings are dismissed as mere impulses that are the exception, not the rule. When challenged we point to one of our many accomplishments, as if a "good" cancels a "bad."

The most emotionally charged vestige of our past is how we've dealt with the non-white segments of our population. For most "white" Americans, the discussion of race is akin to bringing up memories of an infamous uncle, a man whose deeds were so ghastly as to drive the family to change its name.

While we may want to keep the memory of our morally corrupt relative hidden away, it appears the Russians have figured out a way to weaponize him.

I have such an uncle. In fact, I have a number of relatives that have fed the exceptionalist narrative over the years. My blood runs thick with the genes of famous people. Cousin Thomas Jefferson, President and author of the Declaration of Independence, Uncle John Marshall, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and Granddaddy Robert Morris, signer of the Declaration, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution. Great people. White people. Slave owners.

And then there's Great Uncle Joe DeJarnette. A progressive of his time who sought to spare the mentally ill the horrors of incarceration in prisons, he came to the Virginia Western State Hospital in 1889, became its superintendent in 1906, and served in that leadership role through 1943. He also became an advocate of forced sterilization of "the unfit," supported the state law against interracial marriage, and backed racial segregation. He lamented that the Nazis were more efficient at sterilization than America. He communicated with prominent eugenicists within the Third Reich.

Mother loved Uncle Joe and believed what he believed. Like Joe, my mother and my father were creatures of their time. Eugenics was a "science" (fake) that settled once and for all the supremacy of the white "race." What could be wrong with believing in scientific fact? And if the white race was superior, why shouldn't its members be entitled to the privilege of not having to associate with those beneath them?



For most of the last century, non-Hispanic whites accounted for about 80% of the U.S. population. Racial conflict, while providing for disturbing footage on the evening news, never threatened the majority of the population or the institutions that held the country together. Whites controlled everything. For sure, the Russians exploited the racial hatred of the 1950s but the demographics of the day didn't provide a grand opportunity for serious mischief.

Last fall, USA Today reported that a majority of American whites (55%) believe that discrimination against whites exists in the U.S. ("Majority of White Americans Feel Discriminated Against: Poll," Charles Ventura, USA Today.com, Oct. 26, 2017). The white majority's grip on dominance and power is slipping away. By 2060, non-Hispanic whites demographic group will account for only 44% of the population.

Enter the irascible Russians. Race, it appears, is the wedge issue of choice. USA's findings regarding the Russian's use of Facebook are sobering:

- Of the roughly 3,500 ads published this week, more than half — about 1,950 — made express references to race. Those accounted for 25 million ad impressions — a measure of how many times the spot was pulled from a server for transmission to a device.
- At least 25% of the ads centered on issues involving crime and policing, often with a racial connotation. Separate ads, launched simultaneously, would stoke suspicion about how police treat black people in one ad, while another encouraged support for pro-police groups.
- Divisive racial ad buys averaged about 44 per month from 2015 through the summer of 2016 before seeing a significant increase in the run-up to Election Day. Between September and November 2016, the number of race-related spots rose to 400. An additional 900 were posted after the November election through May 2017.

Whatever the objectives of the ads may have been, the seriousness of the effort reflects a Russian determination that our racial divisions are a vulnerability worth exploiting.

What to do? How do you counter a campaign to divide the country on racial lines by an enemy that can't be seen? You can't shoot them. Nuclear weapons are useless.

The answer may lie in my past, in an amazing, inexplicable, fascinating fact about my family: Not one of us five children adopted the racist views of our parents or of Uncle Joe. The take-away is this: My parents' view of the world died with them. While we are by no means perfect, the extreme views of my parents and relatives did not stick to me or to my siblings. It is, therefore, possible in one generation to cast aside a set of beliefs-- even in an environment as racially charged as the one I grew up in.

Before the election of 2016 I might have written an essay similar to this one in which I would end with a plea to strive for the moral high ground. I would have pointed out that in dealing with racial issues that fairness is not enough. "Separate but equal" I would have observed, was to white folks fair.

But not now. Equality isn't just a moral imperative, it's a matter of national security and survival. The defense against the exploitation of our racial divisions is to heal them, and to do so with a sense of urgency. No more panels exchanging bubble-wrapped platitudes. We need to confront our history of white supremacy, not to shame or blame, but to learn why we think what

we do. We need to stop teaching privilege, whether overtly or in more subtle ways. We need to inform our children at a young age that they share the world with others equally.

If we expect our nation to survive, we need to live up to the myths handed to us by our forbearers. Time is of the essence.

*Elliott Light, author of The Gene Police (Bancroft Press, 2018), claims Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States and author of the Declaration of Independence, as a cousin; John Marshall, Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, as an uncle; Robert Morris, signer of the Declaration, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution, as a grandfather; and Joe DeJarnette, a prominent eugenicist, as a great-uncle.*

## **The Perils of Mixing Fiction with a Message**

My second book, *Chain Thinking*, was a murder mystery plain and simple. Well, maybe not plain or simple. The story swirls around the theft of a chimpanzee from a test lab and the murder of a lab scientist. Shep (my main character who's an attorney and reluctant sleuth) is gifted the chimp by a mysterious woman who demands that he trust her. When the authorities arrive to take the chimp back to the lab, he reacts instinctively and tries to assert that the chimp has legal rights.

In reviewing *Chain Thinking*, Martha Grimes wrote the following:

"When a writer attempts to introduce a social issue into his fiction, he can almost be sure that he will be accused of some kind of proselytizing. In *Chain Thinking* the issue is animal rights and the fiction is the story of Kikora, a chimpanzee, and Shep Harrington, a lawyer and detective *manqué*, and his battle not only to solve a murder, but to save the chimp from experimentation. Elliott Light has managed to weave these two parts together, and do it seamlessly."

In *The Gene Police* the investigation of a murder takes Shep and his law partner, Robbie, into the dark pseudo-science of eugenics.

The danger with both of these story lines is that *the book* becomes identified with *the message* and loses its identity as a murder mystery. The writer is faced with the need to expose the reader to the message without losing the reader with talking-head sequences in which characters simply recite facts. The writer must also temper his or her zeal for the particular message in order not to violate the "show, don't tell" rule of writing.

In both of these books, I tried to use these teaching moments as an opportunity to characterize the characters involved. How they react to the fact—surprise, disgust, shock, or indifference—says something about them as characters. If two characters react differently, I have an opportunity for conflict.

As a final observation, the message should have consequences for the characters and the plot. In *Chain Thinking*, the message—animal rights—determines how justice is ultimately rendered. In

*The Gene Police*, the message—eugenics—drives the story through to its dramatic resolution. If at the end of the book the message doesn't have consequences, the book has become subservient to the message.

## Intriguing Excerpts from *The Gene Police*

The experience exposed a system designed to value conviction rates over truth—a system that regards sentences as final and irrevocable. For me, the most important lesson learned was that it's far easier for an innocent person to get into prison than out. (pg. 2)

Certainly I'd learned something meaningful but unable to grasp what it was, I stepped outside into a cloud of snow. What I couldn't foresee was that I was now on a path into a past hidden for more than fifty years—a past that some people were determined would never be revealed. (pg. 44)

“You couldn't have made this up. A young woman, a lesbian, who once pretended she was a man so she could take war photographs, kidnaps a brown baby, changes her name, and fades into history, until she is savagely beaten to death fifty years later. I imagine she had lots of secrets.” (pg. 57)

Robbie gave me a soft peck on the cheek. “A Valentine's Day date at a mental institution. Not every girl receives an offer like that.”

I laughed. “Be careful. I might leave you there.” (pg. 63)

“When the farming stopped, nature was quick to put things back the way God intended. The locust came first, followed by the pines. Maybe God felt bad about the black folk who spent their lives in bondage and got tired of looking at the fields where their blood and sweat were spilt for nothing. Maybe that's why it's all hidden and forgotten.” (pg. 74)

Stars pricked holes in the black dome, sending ancient light from distances that were incomprehensible. Still, I stared at them, wondering, as humans have wondered for eons, what it all meant. With the vastness of the universe as a reference, I supposed that nothing I did or thought mattered very much. But I lived in a small space with other humans where trivial things like skin color mattered a great deal. (pg. 91)

Tomorrow, I would play my part in the human drama. I would discuss taxes and deal with Reggie. I would care about who killed Abigail. But for this brief moment, staring into an eternity, I found peace in the realization that in a larger context, what I did, said, and thought really didn't matter. (pg. 92)

I placed a plastic bag of bones on the table. “These are some of the bones that Gaylord found on the hospital grounds. They could be animal bones, but to me they look like little fingers. If I'm right, dredging up the past is exactly what we should be doing.” (pg. 112)

I sat in a cushioned chair washed in a sunbeam and closed my eyes. I was eager to enjoy the moment and to stop the chatter in my head, but the effort was futile. My future and Abigail's past took turns spewing out questions I couldn't answer. (pg. 130)

I stood in the foyer with the front door open for a few minutes and allowed fresh memories to wash over me. My mother was there, Reilly Heartwood was there. I could hear voices and smell the rich aromas of fried chicken and okra. The images were so real that I thought I could touch them. (pg. 131)

“My DNA led you here? And you’re not cops?”

“No,” said Robbie. “We’re attorneys.”

“Funny how that sounds only incrementally less threatening,” said Paul. (pg. 134)

“In time, the idea of a pure race will resurface as something new. History will repeat itself because we refuse to stare it in the face and deal with it. I am one minor victim of this mindset.” (pg. 140)

“If I were younger, in good mental health, and wealthy, I would take great pleasure in punishing them. That would be the right thing to do. But I have to answer to my demons. They demand retribution for my sins, and only drugs which cost lots of money can quiet them.” (pg. 158)

“Some white people think they are better than colored people. A person born to colored parents who’s too light can pretend to be white. It’s hard for the white folks to know who to hate. That’s why they want to kill the babies.” (pg. 161)

Willet had arrived at the farm with a gun that probably didn’t work and wasn’t loaded. My gun worked fine and my budget allowed for bullets to feed it. I packed it and headed for Sweetwater. (pg. 166)

“I learned from a Jew who had survived a Nazi concentration camp that my father advocated the annihilation of the Jews. Is that irony or just coincidence? I always get them confused.” (pg. 186)

“Deep down, she was as bad as they were. When she told me she’d destroyed the papers that would expose them, I hit her. I don’t remember hitting her after that, but I did. So spare me the lecture on guilt. I’m out of sympathy for humankind.” (pg. 198)

“You are truly one messed-up man,” said Nikki, my head propped in her lap.

“That’s not an original conclusion,” I said.

“I suspect not.” (pg. 201)

We gazed silently over the pasture, the warm sun washing our faces. As I felt her pull close to me, I couldn’t help but wonder how I was going to keep my past from ruining my future. (pg. 206)

## 20 QUESTIONS FOR THE AUTHOR

Have you started writing a fourth book for the SmallTown Mystery Series?

Would you consider writing a different genre other than mystery?

How has your degree in Electrical Engineering contributed to the creation of *Gene Police*?

How has your experience in the legal profession helped you in the publishing industry?

Would you ever consider opening your own “Poor Farm”?

How did you first become interested in the topic of eugenics?

Where did you find inspiration to write *Gene Police*?

When did you first start writing novels?

What made you decide to stray away from engineering and legal work and pursue writing?

Why do you think eugenics is an important topic to revisit, especially now?

Shep is passionate about uncovering truths and finding justice – are you the same way?

Your wife, Sonya, had a bit of an impact in writing *Chain Thinking* – did she contribute any parts in *Gene Police*?

You seem to write about a lot of issues dealing with ethics – what other causes are you passionate about?

Did you have trouble finding information on the topic of eugenics when beginning your research?

Do Shep and Nikki have a future together?

Will Robbie be present in the rest of the series?

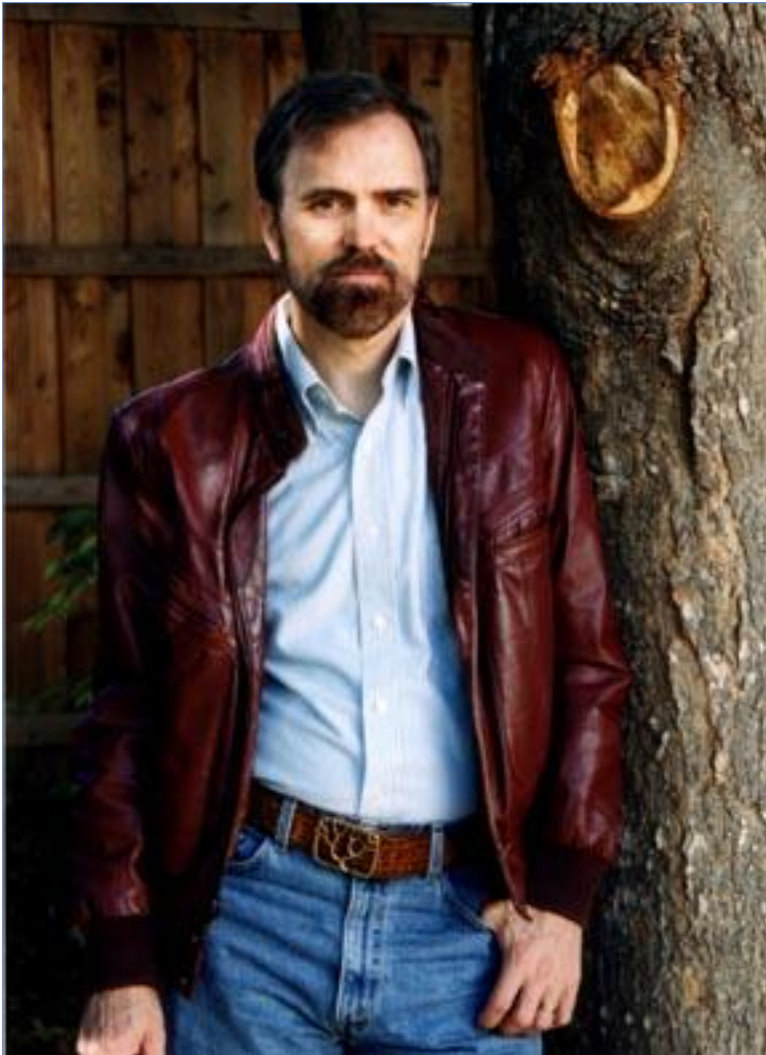
How does the fictional town of Lyle, Virginia compare to your hometown of McLean, Virginia?

Have you thought about creating a television show out of this SmallTown Mystery series?

In what ways are you similar to Shep?

How are you and Shep different?

## ABOUT ELLIOTT LIGHT



Elliott Light grew up outside Washington, D.C. in McLean, Virginia before the beltway encircled the capital city, before farms were turned into housing developments, and before open fields became mega-malls.

He claims Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States and author of the Declaration of Independence, as a cousin; John Marshall, Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, as an uncle; Robert Morris, signer of the Declaration, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution, as a grandfather; and Joe DeJarnette, a prominent eugenicist, as a great-uncle.

The small town of Lyle is his creation and reflects a mixture of true life and fiction drawn from the place he grew up and the places his relatives lived.

Light attended the University of Virginia, receiving degrees in Electrical Engineering and Law. He has several patents to his name.

After stints as an environmental lawyer and a high tech lawyer, he practiced patent law in a private law firm.

Now retired, he resides in Naples, FL with his wife, Sonya, and their much beloved cats. *The Gene Police* is his third published novel.