

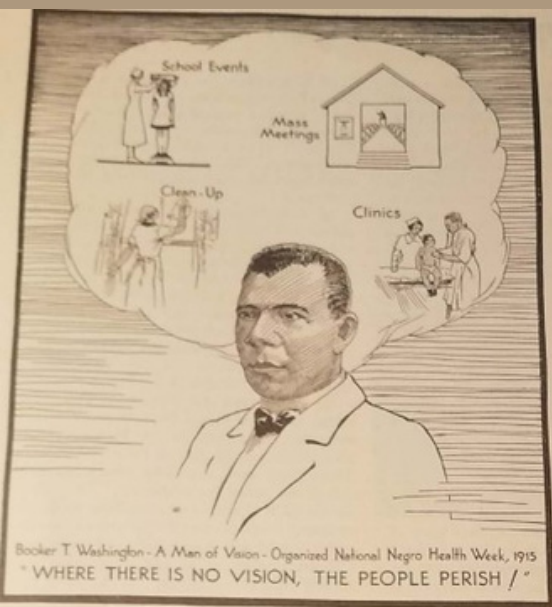
THE PROGRAM IN THE
HISTORY OF SCIENCE &
MEDICINE
AND
STEM & HEALTH EQUITY
ADVOCATES PRESENTS

AYAH NURIDDIN,
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Race Hygiene: Eugenics, Black Public Health, and Structural Inequality

HQ 276
320 YORK STREET
3:45 P.M.

hshm.yale.edu



Yale students, faculty, and staff may attend in person. All others may join via Zoom.

As part of a multi-faceted approach to struggles for racial justice, African Americans in the first half of the twentieth century embraced the possibilities of eugenics for achieving racial equality. I argue that they mobilized what I call black eugenics, which I define as a hereditarian approach to racial uplift that emphasized social reform, public health, and reproductive control as strategies of biological racial improvement. African Americans were interested in using eugenics to challenge ideas of racial susceptibility to disease, particularly to infectious diseases like tuberculosis and syphilis. They were also invested in challenging beliefs that African Americans were inherently susceptible to forms of insanity. These assumptions about racial susceptibility were rooted in a long history of racial science that marked African American bodies as diseased and depraved. By crafting their own public health and mental health interventions, African American physicians, scholars, and reformers embraced a vision of eugenics that argued for better environmental conditions, education, and access to health care as ways to biologically uplift the race. In doing so, they sought to disprove that racial susceptibility was an inherent quality of the race. This would show that eugenically inflected public health and mental health work could improve the collective stock of the race and ultimately its future.