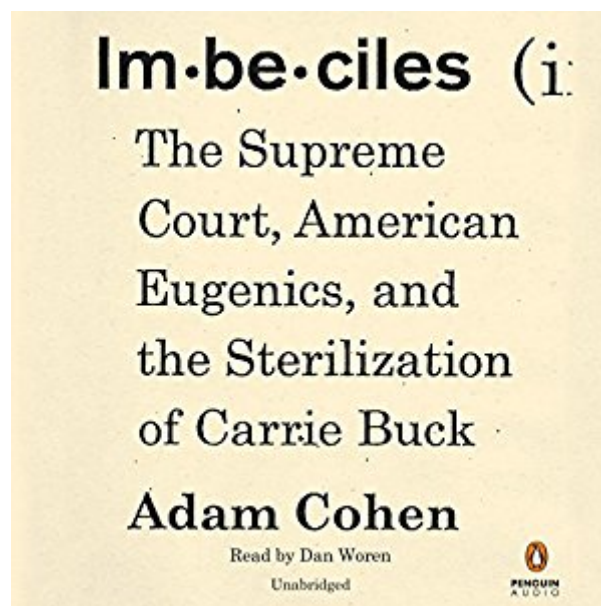




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# Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, And The Sterilization Of Carrie Buck



## Synopsis

One of America's great miscarriages of justice, the Supreme Court's infamous 1927 *Buck v. Bell* ruling made government sterilization of "undesirable" citizens the law of the land. New York Times best-selling author Adam Cohen tells the story in *Imbeciles* of one of the darkest moments in the American legal tradition: the Supreme Court's decision to champion eugenic sterilization for the greater good of the country. In 1927, when the nation was caught up in eugenic fervor, the justices allowed Virginia to sterilize Carrie Buck, a perfectly normal young woman, for being an "imbecile". It is a story with many villains, from the superintendent of the Dickensian Virginia Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded who chose Carrie for sterilization to the former Missouri agriculture professor and Nazi sympathizer who was the nation's leading advocate for eugenic sterilization. But the most troubling actors of all were the eight Supreme Court justices who were in the majority - including William Howard Taft, the former president; Louis Brandeis, the legendary progressive; and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., America's most esteemed justice, who wrote the decision urging the nation to embark on a program of mass eugenic sterilization. Exposing this tremendous injustice - which led to the sterilization of 70,000 Americans - *Imbeciles* overturns cherished myths and reappraises heroic figures in its relentless pursuit of the truth. With the precision of a legal brief and the passion of a front-page exposé, Cohen's *Imbeciles* is an unquestionable triumph of American legal and social history, an ardent accusation against these acclaimed men and our own optimistic faith in progress.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The author writes about *Buck vs. Bell*, the 1927 supreme court decision on Virginia sterilization law

as a blatant violation of the fundamental purpose of the law, "the strong should not harm the weak" He presents scientific, political, historical and cultural context of the law, and influential persons and their personal history. The author points out the common theme of moralizing diseases by the people of prestigious, upper, elitist classes, and selectively ignoring of socio economic factors in public health concerns, and the opportunistic and condescending attitudes by the powerful. Surprisingly the decision has never been overturned and as of 2010, in California, over 100 female inmates were sterilized. The lives of Carrie Buck and her mother, sister, and her daughter did not count to the powerful, they were just means to their professional conviction or personal glory, however, they, the powerless, lived as kind and loving people. (this reminded me of a scene from a movie, Philomena, a great scene about her persevering character against evil done to her).

Adam Cohen has written an outstanding book on a subject (eugenics) very few Americans and very few lawyers know anything about. He analyzes the epic Supreme Court decision that endorsed involuntary sterilization and informs us of the broad support enjoyed by the eugenics movement early in the last century. The revelation that Nazi war criminals used the Supreme Court's decision as part of their legal defense at the Nuremberg trials underscores how devastating the decision really was. And it's still the law of the land today! This is a very sad story told in a very well written book. I recommend it highly.

In the 1920s eugenics reared its ugly head first at the Colony for Epileptics and the Feeble -minded. Thought of the day was that eugenics would improve genetics of future generations. People who were referred to institutions became wards of the state. States wanted to pass laws that would allow sterilization to most of its patient's. Defective traits were those deemed offensive to the middle-class. A test case was needed to go to the sSupreme Court...Buck v Bell was designated to accomplish this. In reading this informative and insightful book you will learn of the mania and misin-formation that was used to further the cause of eugenics.

A good read and a difficult one recalling how this country and legal system failed the poor and the women in this country

I learned a lot about prejudice in America in this book and will never feel the same about revered people. The book is well written and is an expose of well educated people and their regard for poorer, uneducated people in this country during the time of Oliver Wendell Holmes and his

supreme Court.

Superb book about a gross miscarriage of justice and one of the worst decisions issued by the US Supreme Court. The author well describes the characters and issues involved in the case and crafts a compelling and powerful conclusion.

Excellent research on the ethical problems associated with the Eugenics movement. I use this book in my Ethics course.

The story was very disturbing to know there were prominent leaders in our country who believed in this horrible idea of a perfect nation by promoting their proud and selfish solutions. on the unfortunate and poor people. Neither me or my friends knew we had this terrible thinking in this country's past.

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