

Virginia to compensate victims of 20th-century eugenic sterilization program

Lawmakers in Virginia have agreed to pay compensation to people who were forcibly sterilized between 1927 and the early 1970s. The decision makes Virginia the second state after North Carolina – out of more than 30 with eugenic programs during the twentieth century – to provide restitution to those sterilized by their state governments.

Virginia passed its Eugenical Sterilization Act in 1924. Almost immediately, the Virginia Colony for the Epileptic and Feeble-minded selected a test case that would allow other sterilizations to proceed: Carrie Buck, a 17-year-old young woman committed to the Colony by her foster parents after she gave birth to an illegitimate child conceived when she was raped by one of their relatives.

Buck's court-appointed attorney called no witnesses to challenge the charges made about her mental health, or to question the science behind the eugenic theory espoused by so-called expert witnesses. The Amherst County Circuit Court quickly affirmed the sterilization law, as did the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals. The *Buck v. Bell* case then went before the United States Supreme Court, which upheld it by a vote of 8 to 1 on May 2, 1927. In his opinion, Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. agreed with the "expert" witnesses at Buck's original trial, asserting in a now infamous comment that "three generations of imbeciles are enough."

A few months later, Carrie Buck became the first person in Virginia to be sterilized under the new law. Over the next 50 years, another 8,000 persons were sterilized in six Virginia facilities. Two thirds were women, most of them poor or African American.

Some 63,000 people were subsequently sterilized in similar programs across the US, more than 20,000 in California alone. The Virginia state program is also considered to have provided a model for other nations, including Nazi Germany.

Read full, original article: [Virginia Votes Compensation for Victims of its Eugenic Sterilization Program](#)