

Science, Pseudo-Science, and Fiction

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STIRPICULTURE: SCIENCE-GUIDED HUMAN PROPAGATION AND THE ONEIDA COMMUNITY

by Alexandra Prince

Abstract. Between 1869 and 1879, the communal Christian group the Oneida Community undertook a pioneering eugenics experiment called "stirpiculture" in upstate New York. Stirpiculture resulted in the planned conception, birth, and communal rearing of fifty-eight children, bred from selected members of the Oneida Community. This article concerns how the Oneida Community's unique approach to religion and science provided the framework for the creation, process, and eventual dissolution of the stirpiculture experiment. The work seeks to expand current understanding of the early history of eugenics in the United States by placing its practice more than two decades earlier than is generally considered. Additionally, this article situates the Community's leader John Humphrey Noyes as an early eugenics and social scientific thinker. Finally, the treatment provides a case study for the transitional period in mid to late nineteenth century America whereby scientific modes of epistemology were accommodated within or supplanted by theological worldviews.

Keywords: eugenics; genetics; natural theology; John Humphrey Noyes; Oneida Community; religion; science; stirpiculture; theology and science; worldview

Every Sunday evening, the newborn babes of the Oneida Community were carried into the community's Big Hall to be publicly weighed on a commercial scale, their increasing growth celebrated by the community's applause and playing of the new kettle drums. These honored children were products of the Oneida Community's experiment with science-guided propagation, or stirpiculture. As the children gained in pounds, so did the

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Oneida Community's aspirations for an attendant elevation of its future community and American society. In 1867, twenty years before Francis Galton would coin the term eugenics, and forty years before eugenics is regarded to have begun in the United States, John Humphrey Noyes, leader of the Christian communal movement the Oneida Community, combined the theories of Plato, Galton, Darwin, and agricultural breeders to devise the eugenicist stirpiculture experiment, deriving the term from the Latin word *stirp*, or stock. Noyes, along with a committee, paired Oneida Community men and women who were approved to procreate according to their perceived spiritual and intellectual superiority. Between the years 1869 and 1879, the experiment resulted in the planned conception, birth, and rearing of fifty-eight children selectively bred from members of the Oneida Community. Rather than have children be the haphazard result of human passion, Noyes and his community sought to produce children under the new dictates of science, in a system of human conception and rearing they envisioned would serve as a model for future generations. Despite its pioneering status, the experiment was relegated to the shadows of the community's history, while later eugenicists' interest in stirpiculture would be precluded by the experiment's context in a socially subversive Christian environment.

Historical considerations of the Oneida Community to date have largely focused on the community's social and sexual history, the personhood of Noyes, or the community more broadly as a representative of American utopian movements of the nineteenth century. Few accounts have dealt directly with the stirpiculture experiment. Stirpiculture and the Oneida Community represent a useful case study for scholars to examine the transition between religious and scientific worldviews during the mid-nineteenth century in America. As the natural sciences and positivism emerged with works by Charles Lyell, Auguste Comte, and Charles Darwin, the dominant theological lens of the world gave sway. But what stirpiculture demonstrates is that many individuals and groups devised accommodationist approaches to the new scientific discoveries. The following treatment will thus argue that the Oneida Community's embrace of scientific pursuits within their religious community served to facilitate, dismantle, and later discredit the stirpiculture experiment. Moreover, despite the experiment's dismissal by later eugenicist thinkers, stirpiculture will be situated as the first positive eugenics experiment in history. Whereas former treatments have framed Noyes as simply the leader of the Oneida Community, this work positions him as a social scientific thinker, a representative of the growing nineteenth century interest in linking social uplift with control of human development and sexuality. As such, thorough reference will be made to Noyes's social scientific tracts, as well as to the complexities of Oneida Community life as it prepared for, executed, and managed the first attempt at improving the human race within the framework of science.

COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

After a brief settlement in Putney, Vermont, Noyes's communal society settled in Oneida, New York in 1848, beginning with eighty-seven individuals predominantly from Protestant New England backgrounds (*First Annual Report* 1849). The group organized under the name the Oneida Community, each member subscribing to Noyes's Christian Perfectionist theories predicated on two interpretative conclusions. First, Noyes taught that the widely anticipated return of Jesus Christ had already taken place during the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, albeit in spiritual form (*Handbook of the Oneida Community* 1867). Thus, Noyes maintained that Christ's gospel message provided full and immediate redemption for mankind such that man could assume a state of sinless perfection in his present life. Such views were in direct repudiation of orthodox Christian understandings of the inherently sinful nature of man and the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Noyes's understanding of Christ's return informed his belief that the laws of man had been overturned in favor of the law of heaven, whereby such earthly institutions as marriage, capitalist economics, gender relations, and individualistic ethos were nullified. Noyes's followers therefore forfeited their rights to personal property, money, and spousal exclusivity in order to participate in Noyes's variant of Christian communalism, which he termed Bible Communism. Monogamous or "simple" marriage was rejected in favor of what Noyes called complex marriage, wherein each adult man and woman were communally married. Community members' conduct was regulated by mutual criticism, a system whereby the strengths and weakness of all individuals, except John Humphrey Noyes, were periodically assessed, either in subgroups or by the whole community (*First Annual Report* 1849). Like their contemporaries the Shakers and the Mormons, the Oneida Community modeled themselves after the communal paradigms of early Christian communities established in the first century CE. Such early or "primitive" Christian movements, as described in the Acts of the Apostles, were considered to have lived in a more genuine reflection of Jesus' teachings (*Handbook of the Oneida Community* 1867). For Noyes and his followers, the interim period between these early Christian communities and the rise of the primitive Christian movement in America had witnessed the decay of Christ's message—a state which the Oneida Community sought to rectify in communal manner and deed. The attraction of Noyes's vision can be measured by the expansion of the Oneida Community's membership. Just two years into the experiment, there were eighty-seven members; by 1851, the number had grown to 205. All the Oneida Community members subscribed to Noyes's interpretation of Christian Perfectionism and would eventually live in the "Mansion House," an expansive brick building.

Why did Noyes's Perfectionist Christian community become the backdrop for the earliest eugenics experiment in America? Part of the answer involves the character of scientific enthusiasm both within the Oneida Community and more broadly in the environs of mid-nineteenth century America. Science during this period was widely referred to by intellectuals as the maidservant of religion, a tool principally useful in demonstrating the truth of the Bible and better exhibiting God's creation. As described by American geologist Edward Hitchcock in 1852, the ideal man of science "calmly surveys the phenomena of nature, to learn from thence the great plan of the universe as it originally lay in the Divine mind" (Hitchcock 1857, 95). As a comparatively novel system of epistemology, science had been historically subordinated to a religious worldview predicated upon revelation and faith in the Bible (Mandelker 1984, 78). Throughout the colonial and antebellum periods of American history, and up to the founding of the Oneida Community, religious authority had maintained hegemonic control over cultural outlooks and academic institutions. But as inquiry into the natural sciences continued the contradictions between revealed Christianity and the emerging discoveries of the Earth's history and human origins met in a dramatic clash.

Even as Noyes was developing his Perfectionist Christian interpretations, he was also avidly consuming the scientific works which would soon chip away at theology's historical hold on dominant epistemological frameworks. Noyes read the works of Plato, Charles Darwin, Francis Galton, the geologist Charles Lyell, and French positivist philosopher Auguste Comte. For Noyes and many of his contemporaries, however, this blending of religious biblical worldview based in revelation with positivist and evolutionary theory posed no epistemological dilemma. Remembering his Yale training "to follow the truth," Noyes wrote he "traveled far enough into the regions of free-thinking to shake hands with the scouts of Positivism, and yet I have no thought of abandoning Bible religion . . . I have followed Lyell into the geological ages . . . and even Darwin into his endless genealogies, and yet I am as sure [as ever] that Christ is king of the world" (Klaw 1993, 199).

In large part it would be the scientific enthusiasm of the Oneida Community, heralded by Noyes, which this essay argues was integral in forming the social and intellectual atmosphere out of which the stirpiculture experiment would emerge. In this way, the Oneida Community presents an interesting case study for the transition period between theology and science as dominant worldviews. And while Noyes was certainly the orchestrator of the stirpiculture experiment practically and philosophically, it is important to underscore that community members were not blind followers of Noyes's ideas, but were independently committed to scientific knowledge. In fact, as will be discussed, the intellectual independence and private pursuit of knowledge inculcated in community

members would later undermine Noyes's vision for science-guided human propagation.

THE EXPERIMENT BEGINS

The subject of controlled propagation was a consideration of the Oneida Community from the beginning. The topic was discussed as early as 1848 when the Oneida Community prepared its *First Annual Report*. "We are not opposed to procreation," the work explained, "but we are opposed to involuntary procreation. We are opposed to excessive and, of course, oppressive procreation, which is almost universal. We are opposed to random procreation, which is unavoidable in the marriage system. But we are in favor of intelligent, well-ordered procreation. We believe the time will come when scientific combination will be applied to human generation as freely and successfully as it is to that of other animals" (*First Annual Report* 1849). Yet, this time would not come for another two decades. Instead, Noyes and his community actively discouraged conception among members arguing the group needed to reach a point of stability and wealth before successfully incorporating more children. The community was not entirely without children however, as children were regularly introduced into the community when their parents joined, or as accidental conceptions occurred. It was not simply the avoidance of conception and birth that the community guarded against, but what they viewed as the uncontrolled haphazard conception of life endemic to American society, a view propagated by Thomas Malthus in his 1798 work *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Rather than have children be the consequence of intentional planning into the most favorable conditions for life, many children, he argued, were only the unplanned byproducts of animal passion. Due to their dual interests in scientific advancement and Christian faith, community members were interested in the topic of controlled propagation for two ends. First, they believed science-guided propagation would eliminate from society the increasing numbers of children suffering from poverty and poor health. Second, they understood themselves to be the primary actors in establishing Christ's Kingdom of Heaven on Earth and therefore responsible for populating the Kingdom with spiritually advanced individuals. Members of the Oneida Community thus invested themselves in the stirpiculture experiment with the idea that they were breeding an advanced spiritual race to serve as a model for future generations (John Humphrey Noyes and Theodore Richards Noyes 1872).

By 1866, Noyes's communal experiment at Oneida was at peak maturity with nearly 300 members. The communal orchestration of daily life and the economic security of communal manufacturing at the Oneida Community had been successfully realized. Community members reported on the subject of propagation in their published *Handbook*, explaining:

“The Community is waiting for light; but in the meantime holds firmly that this [propagation] is one of the most important interests of society, and should not be left to blind chance or selfish, uncivilized passion, but should be placed under the control of scientific guidance, equal at least to that which is applied to perfecting the breeds of valuable animals” (*Handbook of the Oneida Community* 1867). After rectifying man’s relationship with God and right relations between the sexes, the moral and scientific imperative of scientific human propagation was the most pressing issue confronting the Oneida Community. Just as the scientific exploration of transportation had met its achievement in steam power, Noyes reasoned human propagation was to be the next practice to come under “the light of science” (John Humphrey Noyes 1872).

By 1869, the light the community was waiting for appeared, and the stirpiculture experiment began as thirty-eight men and fifty-three women pledged in writing their dedication to Noyes and the experiment: “We most heartily sympathize with your purposes in regard to scientific propagation,” wrote the men, “and offer ourselves in forming any combinations that may seem to you desirable.” The women’s section of the contract followed with the pledge to be “martyrs to science” and the promise to avoid the tendency toward philoprogenitiveness, a phrenological term for the special love between mother and child. “We have no rights or personal feelings in regard to childbearing,” pledged the women, “which shall in the least degree oppose or embarrass him [Noyes] in his choice of scientific combinations” (Hilda Herrick Noyes and George Wallingford Noyes [1923] 1967, 282–90). The scientific language of the contract points to the men and women’s understanding of the experiment’s importance beyond the community, as well as the requisite discipline and dedication involved. Thus, while the Oneida Community pursued the stirpiculture experiment with the idea they were breeding an advanced spiritual race to serve as a model for future generations, they also firmly grounded their pursuit in the progress of science. In doing so they embarked on an experiment which sought to accommodate religious convictions within their scientific aspirations.

Stirpiculture operated under the Lamarckian theory that characteristics obtained during the parent’s lifetime, such as intellectual and spiritual gains, could be passed down from parents to children (Wyatt 1976, 63). Having read Francis Galton’s views on inheritance, which argued for the transmission of nonphysical attributes from parents to children, Noyes made spiritual maturity the primary criterion in selecting and approving couples to procreate. In 1875, a stirpiculture committee was formed comprised of six men and six women under the leadership of Noyes’s son Theodore. A Yale-trained medical doctor and known religious skeptic, Theodore directed the committee to place greater emphasis on the couple’s exhibition of superior physical health rather than their spiritual status. The committee approved applications from couples and also made suggested unions.

During the committee's fifteen months of control, a majority of couples were approved, with only nine out of fifty-one applications denied (Parker 1935, 260). Once sanctioned for procreation, couples continued to have intercourse until the woman became impregnated. And while the woman was only permitted to have sex with her designated partner during this period, in a form of temporary monogamy, the man had the liberty to engage sexually with other women outside the stirpiculture experiment. Once the couple had conceived, the news was announced at the daily evening meeting, and the couple was celebrated in a wedding-like fashion (Wyatt 1976, 60). This public proclamation of this news was consistent with the view that "stirpicult" children belonged to the entire community. It also provided a space for reinforcing Noyes's understanding that the experiment was not only a community endeavor, but would set a paradigm for future science-guided human propagation.

Over the course of stirpiculture, from 1869 to 1879, fifty-eight live children were successfully brought into the community. On average, the men who fathered children were 12.2 years older than their female partners, with twenty-eight of the children being fathered by ten men, and the remaining thirty each having a unique father. Noyes fathered nine children, more than any other man in the community. This high number of children born to "Father Noyes" was consistent with the experiment's emphasis on combinations between superior parents. And as both leader of the community and director of the experiment, Noyes was considered to be the most spiritually and intellectually adept, and therefore justified in fathering more children (Hilda Herrick Noyes and George Wallingford Noyes [1923] 1967, 286).

THE FRAMEWORK OF STIRPICULTURE

The stirpiculture experiment was a complex process involving not only the science-guided creation of fifty-eight humans, but decades of community life before and after the children were born to facilitate the births and then cultivate the lives of the children. In addition to the scientific enthusiasm of the Oneida Community, there were three aspects of community life—complex marriage, male continence, and communal child rearing—that were essential components of the stirpiculture experiment. Without these practices, the stirpiculture experiment would not have had the necessary foundation and social systems in place to carry out the process of breeding children scientifically as Noyes envisioned.

Members who joined the Oneida Community as couples were required to forfeit their monogamous partners to the entire community in order to participate in the community's system of complex marriage. This practice reflected the Oneida Community's communist ideal wherein all adults were communally married to every other adult member of the opposite

sex. More than a system of sexual control, complex marriage was the central social pivot point of the community, a backbone of community governance (Wayland-Smith 2016, 163). To regulate the regular and non-monogamous couplings of community adults, Noyes's mandated a practice of birth control called male continence. Also known as *coitus reservatus*, male continence involved the withholding of ejaculation during intercourse to prevent insemination. On July 26, 1866, Noyes disseminated his views on contraception in the community's newspaper *The Circular*. In an essay entitled *Male Continence, or Self-Control in Sexual Intercourse*, Noyes argued there were two aspects of sexual intercourse—the social and the propagative, the distinction of which is entirely one of male choice. When conflated, children were haphazardly born to parents who sought only to engage in the social aspect of sex. Noyes insisted unwanted pregnancies resulting from amative passions were injurious to the child conceived. This essay elaborated ideas first published by the Oneida Community in 1849 in their *First Annual Report*. Claiming that a majority of children were conceived in such a perfunctory manner, the Oneida Community opined that such infants were condemned to “lie nine months in their mother's womb under their mother's curse, or a feeling little better than a curse” (*First Annual Report* 1849). This indiscriminate creation of life was not only harmful to the fetus, but detracted from its ability to form into the best possible individual and therefore the best possible member of society. In arguing as much, Noyes and his community joined many of their utopian contemporaries in situating sex “at the center of life” (Horowitz 2002, 251). Historian Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz has skillfully placed Noyes within this “fourth framework” of sexual representation during the nineteenth century whereby heterosexual expression became the central consideration of social and personal identity (Horowitz 2002, 270).

Like many others, Noyes was particularly inspired by Thomas Malthus's views on the necessity of population control guided not by the vicissitudes of misfortune, but rather human-orchestrated scientific models which raised the standard of life (Malthus [1798] 1993). Thus removing restrictions on sexual union, allowing for the effects of the propagative act, and exercising the restraint prescribed by the Shakers and Malthus, Noyes's method of birth control seemingly reconciled all the inherent difficulties of the foregoing resolutions. In terms of the population at the Oneida Community, male continence proved to be a highly effective contraceptive technique. This curtailment of the community's birthrate was essential to allowing the community to mature into a stable economic and social experiment. And this stability was in turn a prerequisite cited for the start and qualification of the community to embark on the stirpiculture program.

In addition to complex marriage and male continence, the third essential component of the stirpiculture framework was communal childcare. While complex marriage and male continence created the ideal community

environment before stirpiculture commenced, the Oneida Community's system of communal child care maintained ideal conditions after the stirpicults were conceived. Communal child care was in part instituted to allow Oneida women to bear children without forfeiting their regular work occupations in the community, while simultaneously ensuring women and their children did not form "special" bonds. Infants born under stirpiculture remained with their biological mothers until nine months of age, after which the babies were removed to the Children's House where their mothers could only care for them at night (Wyatt 1976, 60). At eighteen months, the children were entirely subsumed within the Children's House and contact with their biological parents was sporadic and brief so as to prevent what the community called "stickiness," or selfish attachment. This form of communal child rearing allowed for the propagation and proper upbringing of children without the formation of individual nuclear families antithetical to the community's communist beliefs.

THE ESSAY ON SCIENTIFIC PROPAGATION

The complexities of stirpiculture and its philosophical framework are contained in John Humphrey Noyes's *Essay on Scientific Propagation*. While the content of the essay circulated in the community through Noyes's nightly evening talks, and daily informed the workings of the stirpiculture experiment, it was not formally published for outsider consideration until August 1870 when it appeared in the periodical *The Modern Thinker*. The work synthesized years of Noyes's scientific investigations into enlightened breeding methods and social science. Interestingly, though it was published nearly twenty years before Francis Galton would coin the term "eugenics," Noyes's essay was in fact the first tract published in America to explicitly address the subject of science-guided human propagation. Furthermore, despite the essay being the earliest eugenics tract which evolved into the first human breeding program in America, since its publication in 1870 the work has been generally dismissed as part of the broader Oneida Community, consistent with their perceived social and sexual peculiarities. Thus subsumed within the community's ideology and the concomitant dearth of scholarship on stirpiculture, the *Essay on Scientific Propagation*, and in turn John Humphrey Noyes's pioneering role as an early American social scientist and eugenicist, has remained in the shadows of the Oneida Community experiment. Noyes's essay combined with the community's background in and affinity for scientific thought provided the theoretical framework for embarking on such a radical experiment in human generation.

To make his case for stirpiculture, Noyes systematically addressed the thought of Plato, Francis Galton, and agricultural breeders, arguing stirpiculture was the inevitable culmination of all such views on breeding. Scientific propagation, according to Noyes's essay, was the "predestined

center” toward which the development of the physical sciences had been pointing, the “nucleolus” of sociology, and the foundation upon which a scientific society would be built (John Humphrey Noyes and Theodore Richards Noyes 1872). The refrain of Noyes’s work was to “breed from the best” and breed “in and in,” referring to the successful breeding of animals from superior specimens and the subsequent mating of their progeny. To lend the legitimacy of antiquity to his words, Noyes began his work with a reference to Plato’s *Republic*, in which Plato queries Glaucon on the merits of breeding animals in their prime, and the logic of transferring this practice to humans (Cornford 1941, 158). This point sets the stage for a persistent theme in Noyes’s essay, namely, that with all the attention employed in perfecting livestock and plants, the human soul was suffering, allowed to degenerate from one generation to the next contributing to the overall decay of the human race. To emphasize that his views also had contemporary merit, Noyes quoted from popular sources of his day, pointing out how many learned voices had begun responding to Charles Darwin’s recently published views on science-guided propagation. Darwin’s work *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life Published* (1859) and *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication* (1868) had given credence to the superiority of science-guided propagation. Darwin’s proof of the dramatic improvements in animal and plant form through selective breeding paralleled the long-standing knowledge of agricultural breeders. For Noyes and other radical thinkers of the time such as Victoria Woodhull and George Bernard Shaw, these conclusions sparked a larger question—what about humans (Kevles 1985, 21)? Along with his reformist contemporaries, Noyes was also motivated by a growing anxiety concerning the future of American society. During this time, the definition of marriage, the role of the family in engendering civic virtues, and social organization were widely debated topics which found experimentation in numerous religious and civic organizations. Successive economic panics during the 1820s and 1830s, the growth in urban poverty as immigrants poured into America, and the solidification of capitalism as the primary economic engine of the nation all informed Noyes’s fear of social degradation. In reflecting on this environment, Noyes wrote in 1837, “God has set me to cast up a highway across this chaos, and I am gathering out the stones and grading the track as fast as possible” (Vickers 2013, 8).

While the push for planned human breeding remained marginal in the 1870s, many voices vented their enthusiasm for the practice in popular written sources. “We exhibit beautiful animal stock,” according to Noyes’s quote of the Session of the American Institute of Homeopathy, “but deformed, erysipelalous, rickety, narrow-chested, dyspeptic, teeth-rotten, flabby-muscle, scrofulous, crooked-backed, bad-jointed girls and boys, with diseased kidneys, diseased livers, and bad nerves” (John Humphrey

Noyes and Theodore Richards Noyes 1872). In the same vein, Noyes quoted a piece from the *Galaxy*: “The world is full of weedy, homely, suffering human beings, and who is to blame? A man has as good a right to be handsome as a pig, a woman as a horse, certainly” (John Humphrey Noyes and Theodore Richards Noyes 1872). In his own words, Noyes colorfully wrote:

And every success in practical breeding has added emphasis to the law that commands man to improve his own race by scientific propagation. Every melting pear, every red-cheeked apple, every mealy potato that modern skill presents us, bids us go to work on the final task of producing the best possible varieties of human beings. . . . What are all our gay cattle fairs, but eloquent reminders of the long-neglected duty of scientific human propagation? (John Humphrey Noyes and Theodore Richards Noyes 1872)

The conclusions of Francis Galton especially appealed to Noyes, who aimed not only to effectively breed physically superior humans into his community, but morally and intellectually adept ones as well. To this end, Noyes cited the recent findings in Galton’s work *Hereditary Genius* (1869) regarding inheritance. A cousin of Charles Darwin, Francis Galton concluded the laws of physiology applied to humans just as to animals, demonstrating, in the words of Noyes, “that not only the physical qualities of individuals and races, but their intellectual, artistic, and moral characteristics, and even their spiritual proclivities, are as transmissible as the speed of horses” (John Humphrey Noyes and Theodore Richards Noyes 1872). Through what Ernst Mayr would later term “soft inheritance,” Galton argued non-physical qualities, such as intelligence, acquired during a parent’s lifetime were transmissible to their offspring. The idea provided Noyes with the scientific foundation he needed to fully defend his vision of stirpiculture in the Oneida Community and beyond. It was not simply a matter of propagating physically superior humans for Noyes, but rather breeding more intelligent, spiritual, and moral individuals to build a better society.

Noyes reached the crescendo of his work by dismissing all his previously cited sources outright, faulting the thinkers for their inability to translate their scientific considerations into practicality and action. The only barrier to manifesting such wisdom, Noyes argued, was simply sentimentalism. “We are too selfish and sensual and ignorant to do for ourselves what we have done for animals,” he protested, “and we have surrounded ourselves with institutions corresponding to and required by our selfishness and sensuality and ignorance” (John Humphrey Noyes and Theodore Richards Noyes 1872). Even Galton’s impassioned plea that “the needs of centralization, communication, and culture call for more brains and mental stamina than the average of our race possess,” while strongly resonating with Noyes, was ultimately insufficient for its failure to call for actualization (Pearson

1914, 160). “Duty is plain; we say we ought to do it—we must do it; but we cannot,” wrote Noyes with frustration. “The law of God urges us on; but the law of society holds us back. This is a bad position. Either our convictions ought to become stronger and deeper till they break a way into obedience, or we ought to be relieved of them altogether” (John Humphrey Noyes and Theodore Richards Noyes 1872).

The Essay on Scientific Propagation, despite never once mentioning the Oneida Community, was received by readers as an exposition of the community with all its perceived peculiarities and unorthodox practices. Noyes protested that his work was “written in conscious allegiance to science alone, and should be judged by itself, apart from the reputation of the Oneida Community” (John Humphrey Noyes and Theodore Richards Noyes 1872). For too many readers, however, the author’s position as leader of a fringe religious community overshadowed their reading of *The Essay* as a work deserving serious consideration. Always willing to clarify their views to the public, the Oneida Community responded by republishing the essay with an appendix explaining the intent of the essay and frankly outlining their views on human propagation:

The Oneida Community is not ashamed to confess that its object has been from the beginning to find out God’s way of bringing these two businesses [scientific generation and regeneration] together; that it has been working for this end in its discovery and practice of Male Continence and in all the discipline of Communism. . . . And finally the Oneida Community is not ashamed to confess that within the last four years it has made an attempt or at least a humble beginning of an attempt to reduce the theory of Scientific Propagation to practice, and has had very encouraging success. (John Humphrey Noyes and Theodore Richards Noyes 1872)

The community followed the appendix with a medical report written by Theodore R. Noyes entitled *Report on Nervous Disease in the Oneida Community*. The essay was written in response to a review published in the *New York Medical Gazette* of Noyes’s *Essay on Scientific Propagation*. In it, the authors challenged the Oneida Community’s statistics of mental and nervous disease, implicitly suggesting the community suffered from mental illness due to their subversive sexual practices. To dispel the notion, Theodore prepared his medical report and the community submitted it to the *Gazette* where it was then published. The report concluded that the Oneida Community suffered no more from illness than average Americans. Furthermore, Theodore demonstrated that the community’s practice of male continence was in no way linked to nervous disease. Intended to be an exposition of the community’s twenty-two year practice of male continence and two years of stirpiculture, the editor of the *Gazette* wrote the report was “intrinsic evidence of entire honesty and impartiality” (John Humphrey Noyes and Theodore Richards Noyes 1872). Despite the community’s aspiration for the stirpiculture experiment to stand as a model of

science-guided propagation for society, the stirpiculture experiment made little impact within the scientific community after the publication of the *Essay on Scientific Propagation*. The controversial religious and sexual basis for the community's eugenics experiment would continue to overshadow outsiders' consideration of the experiment as a legitimate scientific pursuit.

THE COMMUNITY'S ENGAGEMENT WITH SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT

The Oneida Community's attempt to realize scientific advance with the stirpiculture experiment was built upon a strong foundation of scientific inquiry promoted from the start of the community's founding. The most concrete reflection of the community's commitment to scientific investigation was the community's extensive library, located in a centrally positioned room in the Mansion House where both men and women were encouraged to study books and a range of other publications. From 1859 to 1880, for example, the community subscribed to several scientific periodicals such as *Nature* and the *Journal of Applied Chemistry*, as well as fifty different newspapers (Oneida Community Collections, Syracuse University). The majority of these newspapers were progressive and socialist in nature and reflected the enthusiasm for science growing not just in the Oneida Community but America more broadly. Scientific lectures, articles, and even pieces of poetry eulogizing science were widely featured. As science historian Donald Zochert explains, nineteenth century newspapers were the predominant form of scientific dissemination being "both the mold and the mirror of popular attitudes toward science" (Zochert 1974, 449). It was during this period that a democratization of scientific thought occurred in America with the newspaper as a primary conduit to the common man. Like many of their nineteenth century contemporaries, the Oneida Community's interest in science was kindled and reflected in such publications.

This private cultivation of scientific knowledge in periodicals was then reinforced with community-wide activities. As a trained medical doctor, Theodore Noyes led community members in conducting experiments in a laboratory he fashioned out of their former ice house. He oversaw members as they conducted experiments in analytical chemistry and applied the scientific knowledge they accrued from their studies. In addition to the library and laboratory, scientific ideas were regularly exchanged in the upper sitting room of the Mansion House, a popular place for community members to converge. "Positivism, Calvinism & Spiritualism are viewed and reviewed with not infrequent digressions to water-powers, silk-manufacture, and stirpiculture" noted one community member of an informal conversation in the sitting room (Klaw 1993). Beyond the library, the laboratory, and the upper sitting room, the largest venue for scientific dissemination in the Oneida Community was the Meeting Room where daily evening lectures

were held. These gatherings functioned much like New England town meetings and were the primary engines of democracy and communication at Oneida. Every evening the entire community gathered in one place to discuss community issues, listen to lectures by “Father” Noyes, and enjoy performances. Meeting notes were recorded by community volunteers. Surveying the subjects discussed, it is evident the community regularly listened to science-based lectures, with topics ranging from geology to the positivist theories of Comte.

On April 10, 1864, for instance, the community gathered to discuss the rise of scientific themes in the community’s newspaper, *The Circular*. Noyes is recorded as explaining that while some older members of the community might not like the shift, undeniably “a scientific spirit” was “coming to control the paper and the Community” (John Humphrey Noyes 1864). Noyes’s brother George Washington Noyes defended the turn of tide against criticism, remarking: “If a person tells me that, because I am turning to science, I am losing in moral force, I tell him that he is the one who is losing, because he remains stationary” (John Humphrey Noyes 1864). During the discussion, Noyes commented that he had stopped reading the Bible ten years earlier, explaining that he had been called by God to focus his attention to science and he “cannot get away from the calling.” He warned the proclivity to become stagnant in “old-fashioned religion” would not only do a disservice to the community, but starve it (John Humphrey Noyes 1864). Progress and expansion would be the goals of the community and science would be the instrument of such growth. Noyes was clear and uncompromising in his enthusiasm to pursue science as a community, explaining that *his* group would not fall subject to the same stagnation as other experimental communities of the time; that new views such as science would be promoted rather than suppressed. “The tendency is for the authorities and central parts of a sect to become fixed,” explained Noyes, “and then heresies and novelties break out among the small folks. I believe the reverse of that is going to be the case here. I am going to be the heretic. Novelty is to be the order of things, and old folks take notice, that if you are afraid of novelties, I shall trouble you” (John Humphrey Noyes 1864). This stern warning was directed toward certain aging members of the community whose Christian convictions were increasingly threatened by the influx of scientific ideas. Noyes further argued for the acceptance of science into a Christian community by drawing a comparison between the community and a child being weaned from its mother. Just as a child does not lose its connection with its mother after being weaned, the community would not lose its fellowship with the Bible just because of its new association with science. Instead, like any child expected to excel beyond their parents, the Oneida Community would build upon its parental biblical foundation. “We will go along with inspiration.” Noyes concluded, “into any branch of science, asking no favors of anybody” (John Humphrey Noyes 1864).

RESULTS AND SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

Despite Noyes and other members' "confidence that Bible Communism could be dipped in the acid bath of science without getting burned," for others the contradictions would continue to gnaw (Wayland-Smith 2016, 145). But whereas formerly the opposition came from the older members, the contention that would ultimately fracture the community would be the growing scientific persuasions which engendered the stirpiculture experiment and took hold of the younger generation. This ideological rift would largely contribute to the eventual breakup of the religious community.

The maturation of the stirpicults coincided with a shift in worldviews from one predominantly predicated in Biblical revelation, which could accommodate scientific findings, to one inflexibly attached to empiricism. As will be recalled, Noyes actively fostered the Oneida Community's enthusiasm about science, viewing it as a means to individual perfection and progression. But for Noyes and the first Oneida Community generation, maintaining a belief in the divinity of Christ and the authority of the Bible along with a scientific outlook was not mutually exclusive. Rather, Noyes maintained that "God designs to bring science and religion together and solder them into one" (Klaw 1993, 199–200). Unlike Noyes's generation, the Oneida Community youth were exposed to a new scientific understanding of the world based in positivism which actively sought to discredit a Christian religious worldview. In part, and somewhat ironically, this view was facilitated by community elders who encouraged those youth interested in science to study at Yale in the 1860s.

But the education the Oneida youth received at Yale was vastly different from the education John Humphrey Noyes and his contemporaries had experienced there. From the 1860s onward, science had emerged as a distinct discipline within academia with a competing interpretative epistemology. In 1847 the Sheffield Scientific School was founded, and several of the Oneida youth sent to Yale enrolled in its combined applied sciences and liberal arts program. Their education underscored a scientific worldview which emphasized empiricism, and increasingly became insoluble with their parents' religious worldview undergirded by revelation and faith. As the younger Oneida cohort returned from Yale, they thus brought with them worldviews steeped in science and deeply rooted in positivism and German rationalism rather than the Bible Communism of their parents (Mandelker 1984, 132). As sociologist Ira Mandelker explains, "young community members studying science, medicine, and philosophy returned home with more than specialized knowledge; they brought skepticism, doubt, and absolute rational criteria for knowledge and facts" (1984, 132). This development precipitated a "war between religion and science" according to Robert Allerton Parker in his account of Noyes and the community, *A Yankee Saint* (Parker 1935, 261). Yet,

despite complaints from the older community members of the declining spirituality of the youth, Noyes remained steadfast that perceived conflicts between science and religion were not insoluble:

For my part I consider the success of our young men in science as the effect of inspiration, and I claim their victories as the victories of faith. . . . They will be the beginning of a new class of scientists, more humble and more successful than the world has ever seen; and then they will cast their crowns at the feet of faith, and turn their whole strength into our religious meeting. (quoted in Mandelker 1984, 141)

Despite Noyes's hopes, the younger generation and the stirpicults continued to distance themselves from the community's religious practices. To address this waning religiosity, in 1869 the Oneida Community created the "Embryo College" to educate Oneida youth at the college level in the subjects of mathematics, algebra, chemistry, and physics while simultaneously inculcating them with a sense of Bible Communism (Mandelker 1984, 142). Certain youths whose scientific persuasions were viewed as particularly threatening were singled-out. Daniel Bailey and Joseph Skinner, for instance, were chastised for their derisiveness toward the community's religion—Bailey for his pronounced interest in German poetry, German thought, and positivism, and Skinner for fostering tension between science and the elders' domineering religious beliefs (Mandelker 1984, 141). Stirpicult Pierrepont Noyes recalled in his 1937 memoir *My Father's House* how the new generation's scientific leanings threatened his father's command of the community and in part spelled its demise. The "scientific enthusiasm," he wrote, "which, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, was challenging old beliefs, undermined respect for his [Noyes's] spiritual, not to say mystical, leadership" (Pierrepont Noyes [1937] 1966, 160). Another child of the community, Jessie Kinsley, recalled the schism in her book, attributing the religious doubt of the new generations to the "Darwinian Theory of 1850 to '54," which she explained "had much later penetrated—partly through college life, partly through the purchase of books—into our little circle" (Kinsley and Kinsley Rich 1983, 42).

To the Oneida Community elders, the most troublesome of the religious skeptics was the very man who succeeded Noyes in 1877, his son Theodore. As previously noted, Theodore was a Yale-trained medical doctor and was influential in inculcating scientific knowledge in the Oneida Community. He was responsible for setting up the ice-house turned chemistry laboratory to train fellow Oneida men and women and prompted the shift in the stirpiculture committee's preference for superior physical qualities rather than moral and religious ones. In August 1878, the Oneida Community published Theodore's essay *Report on the Health of Children in the Oneida Community*, in which he implicitly denied his father's founding idealist vision for stirpiculture. Instead, Theodore explained the

community's adoption of stirpiculture was only the byproduct of a discrepancy between a high death rate and children born. He began his essay by referring to the "radical ideas about scientific propagation," and then outright dismissed the significance of stirpiculture as it was considered by his father:

It must not be thought, however, that the Community pretends to unusual knowledge upon this latter subject [scientific propagation]. It had in general attempted little further than laying a veto upon combination for parentage which were obviously unfit. . . . Neither must the reader imagine that the Community regards its children as remarkable products of scientific propagation. They are such children as would be found among the common people, were a little attention paid to the most obvious principles of stirpiculture. (Theodore Richards Noyes 1878)

Theodore cited the 1870 United States Census to describe the relative good health of the Oneida Community children, and proudly reported the comparatively low instances of fatality and disease among the children compared to the national average. However, he contributed these accomplishments only to the superior sanitary conditions of the community, and "a little common sense applied to the mating of men and women for propagation" (Theodore Richards Noyes 1878). Theodore made no mention of the philosophical practices of stirpiculture, that he himself sat on the stirpiculture committee approving and rejecting couples, nor that the stirpiculture children were intended to model the characteristics of a new race to populate the Kingdom of Heaven. The essay reveals Theodore's unconcern for the spiritual elements of stirpiculture, and more broadly the practice of Bible Communism under which framework it was fashioned. Despite his irreverent views, Theodore remained his father's choice as successor. The community bemoaned the decision, and repeatedly rejected Theodore's promotion. "Something in me . . . recoils at the idea of putting a man in for leader who has not found God," wrote community member Harriet Worden in her diary in 1875 (Robertson 1972, 63). Despite the criticism, Theodore became leader of the Oneida Community in May 1877.

John Humphrey Noyes continued as patriarch of the Oneida Community even as Theodore assumed primary leadership. In his personal writings, Noyes interpreted divisive tensions at Oneida and the growth of an individualist spirit antithetical to the group's Christian communism as a direct product of the religious skepticism observable in the youth. "The troubles of the Community as a whole," Noyes wrote, "are really due to the lack of religious experience and religious character in the Community" (Roach 2001, 798). Theodore and the younger generation's perceived godlessness continued to grate against the Oneida Community's vanguard as it struggled against the community's new wave of irreligiosity.

Ultimately Theodore served only eight months as leader of the Oneida Community before control was reassumed by his father. During his time

in command, Theodore emphasized the nonreligious business portion of the community, and worked effectively in shifting the group from principally a religious community to the joint-stock company it would later become reincarnated as. Commenting on Theodore's religious skepticism in 1877, community member Frank Wayland Smith wrote in his journal: "Theodore does not believe in the divinity of Christ. . . . He believes in the doctrine of evolution implicitly, and will not undertake to define the Creator or First Cause. While leader for the past six months his endeavor has been to secularize the Community and subordinate religion" (Robertson 1972, 63). The tenor of Theodore's time as leader and his struggle with the devout older generations reflected a growing trend of the community's maturation away from Bible Communism and toward a scientific and capitalist frame of mind.

In addition to highlighting generational ideological friction, stirpiculture contributed to the downfall of the community in other ways. The experiment encouraged monogamous-like associations between approved couples in a community otherwise predicated on stamping out such close relationships. And for those couples denied the right to procreate and form attachments, a deep resentment brewed. Increasingly, the power wielded by Noyes and his committee to reject couples fed a spirit of insubordination and individualism which would ultimately splinter the communal society (Foster 1981, 119). A noteworthy example is the case of Mary Jones and Victor Hawley, a tumultuous relationship revealed in the diary of Hawley discovered in the 1980s and transcribed by historian Robert S. Fogarty. Despite their protests and appeals, Jones and Hawley were denied the right to procreate by the committee after Mary was concluded to exhibit a strong tendency toward philoprogenitiveness, and was deemed "too sickly" and "affected" in the mind (Fogarty 1994, 40). Jones and Hawley were repeatedly censured for their "special" relationship and ordered to separate for two months, yet their affection for one another persisted despite the community's efforts to dissuade their "selfish" attachment. Hawley demonstrated his frustration with the stirpiculture committee's rejection in a letter to Noyes dated March 10, 1876: "Knowing that Mary would like to have a child by me I would rather have one by her than to have one by someone who does not wish to have one by me. . . . I will frankly say that I would like a baby by Mary" (Fogarty 1994, 50–51). Despite their protests, the community refused to approve of the relationship. After much mental turmoil and the stillbirth of Jones' child to another man, Jones and Hawley permanently seceded from the community in 1877.

In principle, there was no outright prohibition against having children in the community. Rather, each member was called to dedicate themselves to the goals of the experiment and conduct their actions accordingly. Noyes was clear that self-government was the only acceptable basis for scientific propagation. Participation instead must be

guided by “the free choice of those who love science well enough to ‘make themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven’s sake’” (John Humphrey Noyes and Theodore Richards Noyes 1872). Yet, as has been described by Ellen Wayland-Smith in her recent work, Noyes was highly averse to relinquishing control over community members’ actions (Wayland-Smith 2016, 158). The stirpiculture experiment had put in stark relief a growing discontent with Noyes’s uncompromising power and the system of complex marriage which regulated sex and relationships within the community more broadly. The intractability of Noyes’s authority became especially tenuous as belief in the spiritual basis for his leadership eroded.

“The division is generally known in the O.C. and its effects on the young people deplorable,” wrote community member Frank Wayland-Smith in 1879. “The young are fast breaking away from all sense of moral accountability. They are independent, scorning advice, and some are really impertinent in their self-assertion” (Robertson 1972, 107). Within four months of the community’s decision to abolish complex marriage in 1879, thirty-eight couples formed monogamous bonds and entered into traditional marriage agreements (Roach 2001, 804). By encouraging close relationships for science-guided procreation, stirpiculture in effect undermined the central communal force of Noyes’s vision of Bible Communism. As Noyes had always feared, monogamous marriage and the nuclear family unit had become the greatest threat to the Oneida Community’s communal ideal.

This internal conflict was heightened as the Oneida Community increasingly became the object of external public scorn and vitriol. Professor John Mears from nearby Hamilton College levied a clerical opposition group against Noyes and his community’s subversive sexual practices. Fearing imminent arrest, Noyes fled to Canada on June 21, 1879, under the cover of night. He settled in a stone cottage at the top of Niagara Falls and delegated responsibility for the Oneida Community to an administrative council of nineteen members (Mandelker 1984, 145). The stirpiculture experiment ended on August 26, 1879 as the community voted to formally abandon the practice of complex marriage, the central tenet of the community’s social and religious life. Nonetheless, even from his abode above Niagara Falls, Noyes continued his involvement in the Oneida Community through visits from community members and correspondence. For instance, in reaction to the community’s decision to abandon his system of complex marriage, Noyes prepared a paper entitled *The Future of Stirpiculture* on November 4, 1879. In the work, Noyes argued that while complex marriage had been discontinued, it is “not necessarily the giving up of the attempt to start a superior breed of men and women” (John Humphrey Noyes 1879). Complex marriage, he explained, fruited a “splendid collection of children” which, if properly directed “may become

permanently a superior race" (John Humphrey Noyes 1879). Acknowledging the shift to monogamous marriage yet still desirous of advancing his cause of science-guided and purposeful propagation, Noyes proffered a system of "circumscribed marriage," which would satisfy two of his tenets of stirpiculture—breeding from the best and breeding "in and in," or successive inbreeding (John Humphrey Noyes 1879). The stirpicults were already considered to be bred from a select group of individuals in the Oneida Community and, in order to continue the experiment, Noyes encouraged the now monogamous stirpicults to form social circles such that their children would propagate with one another. While Noyes's suggestions found little traction in the former Oneida Community, eighteen of the stirpicults did intermarry and many procreated. However, because the couples were not formed under the dictates of scientific selection, like those formed under the stirpiculture committee, the requisite continued generations of breeding "in and in" Noyes dictated in order to demonstrate the proposed advantages of stirpiculture never occurred. In this way, just as stirpiculture informed the end of the Oneida Community, the end of the community in turn halted stirpiculture, rendering it only one generation into a proposed multigenerational human breeding experiment.

STIRPICULTURE AND ITS LEGACY

With John Humphrey Noyes's death in 1886 came the final end of the Oneida Community's discourse on stirpiculture. Noyes's religious community based on Bible Communism disbanded, and a joint-stock company, Oneida Company, Ltd., was born from its religious ashes. Despite the rising interest in eugenics theory in America and abroad, the Oneida Community's pioneering participation in the field of science-guided human propagation was largely overlooked by eugenicist thinkers and social scientists save for a few examples. Famed women's rights advocate and social reformer Victoria Woodhull adopted Noyes's term for her pamphlet "Stirpiculture or the Scientific Propagation of the Human Race" published in 1888 (Woodhull 2005). In 1891, anthropologist Anita Newcomb McGee from Johns Hopkins University wrote an assessment of the Oneida Community's children entitled *An Experiment in Human Stirpiculture*. She noted stirpiculture boys for being "broad-shouldered and finely proportioned" and the girls "robust and well-built" (McGee 1891, 324). However, Newcomb McGee well understood the destructive role stirpiculture played in the Oneida Community, explaining that the "Spirit of Monogamy" had by consequence "infected" the community. "Stirpiculture," she wrote, "was intended to insure the future of the church and the community, yet stirpiculture destroyed them both" (1891, 323). Despite stirpiculture's role in dividing the community, Newcomb McGee

ultimately concluded that “our race would doubtless be greatly benefited by more attention to the laws of breeding” (1891, 325).

The term stirpiculture was also utilized in 1899 by physician and Christian physiologist John Harvey Kellogg. According to biographer John C. Wilson, Kellogg was well aware of Noyes’s stirpiculture experiment, using the term to refer to human breeding in his own evolving eugenicist writings (Wilson 2014, 149). Echoing Noyes, Kellogg lamented in his article “Stirpiculture” that “a vastly greater amount of attention is given to horticulture, floriculture, pisciculture—even to the breeding and cultivation of oysters—than to stirpiculture” (Kellogg 1899, 234). Even as such prominent social thinkers incorporated Noyes’s term and ideas in print, stirpiculture failed to create the national social impression originally intended.

It would not be until forty-two years after the end of complex marriage and the experiment that stirpiculture was formally presented to the scientific community. Hilda H. Noyes, M.D., and George Wallingford Noyes, themselves products of the stirpiculture experiment and raised in the Oneida Community, presented their findings at the Second International Eugenics Congress held in New York City in 1921. The first Congress had been held in London in 1912 as an international forum for eugenicist thought, and the Second Congress in 1921 was noted as a “high water-mark for eugenics movements” (Richards 2004, 478). Despite being the only paper which dealt explicitly with an experiment in human breeding written by two scientists who themselves were products of eugenics, the paper by the two stirpiculpts did not receive any attention in the coverage of the Congress or in eugenicist writings thereafter (Little 1922). The dearth of attention stirpiculture garnered can be attributed to its background in the Oneida Community, and the concomitant dismissal of nonmonogamous fringe religious movements more generally, as the incorrect context for “legitimate” positive eugenics. It seemed the moral imperatives of the eugenics field were interesting to the Congress’s participants only in a limited way. This view is substantiated by geneticist Martin Richards, who explains how two aspects of the Congress signal the administrators’ deliberate distancing from the stirpiculture paper. First, the welcome address by paleontologist Henry Fairfield Osborn underscored the importance of monogamous marriage “to be safe-guarded by the state as well as by religion as a natural and hence as a patriotic institution” (Richards 2004, 478). Richards has explained how this speech, combined with further comments on the sanctity of monogamy during the leading address by Major Leonard Darwin, President of the British Eugenics Education and son of Charles Darwin, were attempts by the Congress to present eugenics as a discipline resonant with the dominant emphasis on monogamous marriage as the safeguard of society. Articles and commentaries following the Congress also failed to make mention of the stirpiculture

paper, and instead echoed the Congress's call for the moral and patriotic necessity of eugenics ("Want More Babies" 1921). Ultimately, eugenics within the framework of a Christian communist society which practiced a form of marriage subversive to monogamy was viewed as inconsistent with the dominant framework of eugenics. It was for this reason perhaps that the stirpiculture experiment is rarely cited by historians of eugenics as the first eugenics experiment. By contrast, the *British Eugenics Review* named the 1921 Ungemach Gardens experiment in Strasbourg as the first positive eugenics experiment. This French eugenics experiment, unlike stirpiculture, upheld monogamous models of marriage. Thus, perceptions of the stirpiculture experiment as subversive to monogamy and dominant social norms precluded its consideration in the historical narrative of eugenicist thought and practice.

CONCLUSION

Many unanswered questions concerning the community's stirpiculture experiment, its specific sexual practices, and the effect it had on the daily emotional and social lives of its participants remain unanswered, largely due to the deliberate burning of records by Oneida Ltd., the commercial successor of the religious communal movement. Whether out of concern for the privacy of the individuals mentioned in the diaries or an interest in divorcing Oneida Ltd. from its peculiar social and religious origins, company officers were instructed to burn a truckload of boxes. Inside were unknown numbers of accounts relevant to the study of the Oneida Community (George Wallingford Noyes and Foster 2001, x). However, collating information available from Noyes's social scientific works, the publications of the Oneida Community, diaries of community members, and the records of Oneida Community Collection maintained by Syracuse University Library, the essential story of stirpiculture and the individuals involved in this fascinating experiment emerges. The character of the Oneida Community as a socio-religious movement notably devoted to the pursuit of science created the context for stirpiculture to develop from Noyes's vision into a decade-long experiment. Ultimately, the scientific enthusiasm which gave rise to the experiment eventually contributed to the fracture rather than the preservation of the Oneida Community as Noyes intended. The community's divorce from the religious framework instituted by Noyes echoed a larger shift in the country's expanding scientific worldview, one increasingly incommensurate with religious faith and revelation. This interest in science and scientific propagation would only expand in the later nineteenth century as more social scientists, like Noyes before them, interpreted the writings of Charles Darwin and Francis Galton regarding inheritance and the potential perfection of the human race. As a result of its unorthodox social and religious framework, stirpiculture as the

first eugenics experiment on the American landscape continues to remain in the shadows of the Christian communal movement from which it was born—a relic not only of the experimental fervor of the mid nineteenth century, but a community whose practices continue to appear subversive and radical a century past their time.

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