

To: News Editor

For Immediate Release

## Could Canadians have been the Perfect People?

(WINNIPEG-March 28, 2005) Eugenics, a program in the '20s and '30s to improve Canadians by sterilizing the "feeble-minded" ^ was astonishingly popular with the nation's well-educated and influential, says the new issue of *The Beaver*.

Author Allan Levine, a Winnipeg historian and writer, says the tremendous appeal of the eugenics movement was based on hope and partly on fear – hope for building a stronger and more intelligent populace, and fear that the trend was going in the opposite direction.

"Progressive-minded Americans and Canadians," he says, "watched in trepidation as their respective countries were swamped by foreigners, who not only challenged the supremacy of the Nordic or Anglo-Saxon race, but also brought to their cities poverty, slums, crime, prostitution and corruption."

They feared, he says, "national deterioration."

The movement attracted such Canadian leaders as Helen MacMurchy, the first woman offered a job in the Toronto General Hospital's department of obstetrics and gynecology and head of the federal division of maternal and child welfare; Nellie McClung and Judge Emily Murphy, well-known supporters of women's rights; and Charles Clarke, a famous psychiatrist at Toronto General Hospital.

Alberta legislated eugenics programs in 1928; British Columbia did the same five years later. Alberta's legislation was on the books until 1972.

Eugenics came into full force when the Nazis came to power in Germany. "By the end of the Second World War, says Mr. Levine, "the Nazis, who had transformed their forced sterilization program of more than 400,000 individuals into a massive killing machine, had likely murdered 140,000 physically handicapped and mentally ill people."

"At one mental institution in Nazi Germany," he notes, "the staff toasted with beer the cremation of the ten ^ thousandth patient ^ a child-gassed to death."

The 84-year-old *Beaver*, *Canada's History Magazine*, is published by Canada's National History Society.

The *Beaver* article is adapted from "*The Devil in Babylon: Fear of Progress and the Birth of Modern Life*," published by McClelland Stewart.

The new issue of *The Beaver* hits newsstands April 1.

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*Canada's National History Society is a Winnipeg-based, charitable organization devoted to popularizing Canadian history through its publishing and award recognition programs. In addition to publishing The Beaver magazine and Kayak: Canada's History Magazine for Kids, History Society activities include the Pierre Berton Award, and the Governor General's Awards for Excellence in Teaching Canadian History.*

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