**Origin of the Word Moron: Eugenics, Racism and Henry H. Goddard**

By Allen Butler
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*Henry H. Goddard*

It is hard to go through a day without hearing the word "moron" used at one point or another. We probably use the term liberally ourselves. Moron is one of our favorite epithets used to describe those we consider stupid or foolish.

The modern popularity of the word moron belies its dark and somewhat disturbing origins, springing from the mind of American psychologist and eugenicist Henry H. Goddard. At the turn of the 20th century Goddard was one of the foremost American researchers in the study of "feeble-mindedness" and the introducer of the Binet system of intelligence testing to the English language.

In the 1910's Goddard became world-famous for his ideas about "feeble-mindedness" particularly his belief that it was a hereditary trait. His seminal work, The Kallikak Family, studying two strains of the same family (one strain considered normal, the other considered "defective" became an international bestseller and became extremely popular in Germany under the Nazi regime. He personally instituted a testing system at Ellis Island in order to keep these "feeble-minded" people out of the United State used to reject an estimated 80% of potential immigrants and forcing them to be deported back to their home country.

It was in the midst of Goddard's work on intelligence testing that he coined the word "moron." He created a classification system for those on the bottom end of the intelligence scale: people whose IQ was between 0-25 would be classified as idiots, people with an IQ between 25 and 50 would be imbeciles and those with an IQ between 50 and 75 would be classified as Goddard's own invention: morons. He derived the word from the ancient Greek moros meaning dull or foolish.

Goddard believed that morons and the feeble-minded in general were a threat to America, and believed that an America filled with the feeble-minded was unfit for democracy. Aside from his work limiting immigration of the so-called "feeble-minded" into the United States, Goddard hoped for a plan of sterilization of the retarded, believing this would ultimately remove mental defects from the American population. Realizing that such a view would not fly in the world of public opinion, however, Goddard advocated what he felt was a more benign option: the segregation of the feeble-minded into specially designed colonies. This of course never happened.

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