

American National Biography (Oxford University Press, 1998)

DUGDALE, Richard Louis (1841 - 23 July 1883), merchant and social scientist, was born in Paris, France, the son of Richard John Dugdale, a manufacturer and journalist, and Anna (maiden name unknown). Richard John Dugdale lost most of his fortune through the upheavals of 1848, thus the Dugdales returned to their native England, immigrated to New York City in 1851, and moved to Indiana in 1858. Richard Louis Dugdale returned to New York city in 1860 and enrolled in night classes at Cooper Union. Though he was first employed as a stenographer, Dugdale inherited a small sum of money that enabled him to invest in commercial and manufacturing concerns. Financial success freed him to devote his energies to the sociological studies that consummated his historical importance.

Living in several houses in Greenwich village before settling at No. 4 Morton Street after 1871, Dugdale, a life-long bachelor, became active in many social reform clubs and developed an intense interest in the causes of poverty and crime. He was an officer of The Society for Political Education, the New York Social Science Society, the New York Association for the Advancement of Science and the Arts, the New York Sociology Club, and the Civil Service Reform Association. Dugdale was appointed to the executive committee of the Prison Association of New York in 1868. In 1874 the Prison Association asked him to inspect county jails. Dugdale was intrigued by the high incidence of kinship among inmates. Thus, he used his own funds in an extended investigation of one large kin group living in and around Ulster County, New York whom he dubbed, "The Jukes." In 1875, Dugdale reported his findings to the Prison Association. Two years later he published this report with "Further Studies of Criminals," a study of New York State prison statistics, through Putnam's Press under the title "*The Jukes*": *A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease, and Heredity*.

The Jukes made Richard L. Dugdale an international figure in social reform circles. It went through seven editions in the twenty-five years following 1877. From the beginning, *The Jukes*, was subjected to two divergent readings. One focused on Dugdale's concern for early childhood development, advocacy for penal reform, his concern with intemperance in pregnant women, and his pre-occupation with syphilis; all environmentalist positions. The second interpretation claimed that *The Jukes* was a eugenic tract in which poverty and crime were portrayed as inevitable results of bad stock. In a memorial for Dugdale in 1884, his associate, Edward M. Shepard, interpreted *The Jukes* as an advocacy tract for public health reform in the areas of water purification, sewage removal, temperance, and venereal disease. Franklin H. Giddings, a sociologist, who introduced *The Jukes'* fourth edition reprint in 1910, warned readers of a false, "impression quite generally prevails the 'The Jukes,' is a through-going demonstration of 'hereditary criminality,' ... It is nothing of the kind..." Giddings was referring to eugenicists such as Oscar McCulloch, David S. Jordan, and Charles B. Davenport who had claimed Dugdale as one of their own. The eugenic label has had considerable currency in scholarly literature during the twentieth century as is evidence by Nicole Hahn Rafter's 1988 *White Trash* which cast Dugdale as the founder of the

eugenic family studies.

As the decades passed, *The Jukes* became one of those works probably more often cited than read. This is one reason for the endurance of the eugenic interpretation. Dugdale simply was not a eugenicist; *The Jukes* was not a eugenic tract. He did not advocate for the application of breeding practices to humans. To the contrary, Richard L. Dugdale was a public health reformer. He thought physiological disorders were the chief cause of social ills, and wrote that “the cure for unbalanced lives is a training which will effect the cerebral tissue, producing a corresponding change in career.” Dugdale’s scientific approach to social problems made *The Jukes* historically significant. The study of crime and poverty was not, in his view, so hopeless a proposition as was implied by the idea of original sin. He believed that human behavior was reducible to two causes: heredity and environment. These entities were knowable through science and malleable to human will. Thus, social reform could reach lasting progress if it rested on a scientific knowledge of society.

Dugdale’s ill-defined use of the category “Juke Blood” may be another point of confusion over his work. He claimed that “Juke Blood” was a primary cause of pauperism and crime, but the qualities of “Juke Blood” were not, as some have assumed, only determined by genetic material. As others of his day, Dugdale did not make clear distinctions between somatic, congenital, and genetic sources of physiological disorders. He classed all three under the category of “Juke Blood” as part of an implicit understanding of heredity. A few times he used the logic of acquired characteristics in discussing heredity. In fewer passages he would implicitly assume a causal relationship suggesting Mendelian traits, even though Gregor Mendel’s study on the color of garden peas was probably unknown to him. As is evidence by his focus on syphilis, Dugdale was more often concerned with “ante-natal” physiological disorders that he supposed resulted from a deprivation of nutrition at a crucial junction of fetal development. So too, he discussed the importance of early childhood development. He argued that labor could fortify the will in the control of impulses, discussed the importance of shame felt by one receiving charity, and treated acts of theft as rational economic action in a long passage. The fact that Dugdale judged behavior from a harsh ethnocentric point-of-view and did not make allowances for cultural power struggles in his analysis of social problems hardly made him either a hereditarian or a biological determinist. *The Jukes* was an openly speculative work which proposed dozens of inter-relationships between biology and environment in an attempt to explain social ills. Dugdale was a leader in a generation of Americans who worked to fashion a science of society in order to prescribe social policies; the cures sought by these first social scientists challenged the moral order of American society by positing that conscious choice had little to do with human behavior. In 1883 Richard L. Dugdale died in New York City of a long-term heart ailment.

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