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Belegarbeit

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Thema:

History of David Starr Jordan and Eugenics

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Table of contents

1. Intro	
1.1 About my assignment	03
1.2 Personal motivation	03
2. 28. Feb 1905	04
3. David Starr Jordan	
3.1 His background	05
3.2 His idol	05
3.3 Personal life	06
4. Stanfords	
4.1 Their offer	07
4.2 "I have been poisoned.."	08
5. Aosta	09
6. The Idea of Eugenics	09
7. Think a bit deeper	11
8. Bibliography	13
9. STATUTORY DECLARATION	15

1. Introduction

"Society must concern itself not chiefly with the isolation, temporary or permanent, of the individual murderer, thief, or forger, but with the extermination or repair of the genetic, educational, or industrial defects which cause the production of criminals."¹

– Charles Eliot

Few people are aware of the "Sterilized criminals" in the United States of America.

1.1 About my assignment

My assignment questions whether Sterilization is fair or not, and discusses the work and life of David Starr Jordan, one of the most famous American Scientists of the 19th Century and one of the first ideologists of Eugenics.

My assignment takes a look at Jordan's life, from his childhood until his last breath. My assignment also asks from where he got this idea and why he tried to add it to the law of the US Constitution and what was its after effect in a Narrative form in order to make it more understandable and clearer for readers.

1.2 Personal motivation

My motivation to study this topic, comes from my personal interest in the lives of scientists and the origin of their ideas.

Eugenics is currently implemented in the laws of many countries including Australia, Brazil, Singapore, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

These laws are very subjective, there are many people who are for it and support these laws, however, equally as many people are against it. It is my goal to present the reader with the basic ideology of Eugenics and to allow them to form their own opinion of the subject. That's why I'll try my best to express it neutrally and allow the reader to choose if they agree or disagree with it at the end.

1 Charles Eliot, The New York Times

2. 28. Feb 1905 (Back to the future)

It was a special day, the last day of the two-week holiday in Hawaii therefore it had to end with a picnic on a beautiful beach.

Jane, with her servant and one of her close friends, filled their basket with a bunch of tasty fruits and walked to the beach to enjoy their last meal of their holiday. Only two weeks ago, on Jan 14th 1905, Jane was in great danger. The glass of water which she drunk before she went to sleep was full of Strychnine poison, which has the potential to “result in respiratory failure and brain death within 15 to 30 minutes following exposure.”² Luckily, Jane noticed her exposure immediately and before the poison had began to take effect, she forced the contents of her stomach up.

Jane didn't have any idea who wanted to kill her. In order to forget this traumatic incident, she decided to travel to Hawaii to relax a bit and get away from where the incident occurred. After two weeks she was ready to go back to California to continue her work as founder and finance manager of one of the biggest and most famous Universities in the whole US.

At the farewell picnic, the four ladies enjoyed their meal and went back to their residence to pack before departing the island the next morning.

At about 11 pm, Jane said good-night to everyone, went back to her room, took her pills and went to bed. 15 min later a loud scream was heard from her room. Residents of other rooms rushed to her assistance, Jane's body was on the floor, ceasing uncontrollably.

A few minutes later, the hotel's doctor ran to her room and tried to resuscitate her.

At 11:30 pm Jane Stanford was pronounced dead. Her final words to her doctor were:

“I have been poisoned, This is a horrible death to die.”³

The 76-year-old founder of Stanford University had been murdered...

2. N.n., Strychnine - Signs & Time course

3. Julia Flynn Siler, Jane Stanford murder mystery

3. David Starr Jordan

3.1 His background

It all started with a few maps which were drawn with pencil on some thatch notebooks. These maps showed some parts of their farm, roads and even some parts of the city of Gainesville. For Little David Starr Jordan, it was a very good way to perceive the chaotic world out there.

David Starr Jordan, the youngest son of the Jordan family, was born in 1851 in Gainesville, New York City and grew up on a farm.

For this shy little boy, the world was too big to handle. That was why his older brother, Rufus, taught him to draw maps, in order to understand and master the world around him. The two brothers did many Journeys together in order to fill out their maps with more details like the type of trees, stones, flowers or even animals which they found. Rufus was giving his brother the courage to adventure and with his brothers help, David was finding his inner passion for exploring the world around him.

Their parents however, were not as satisfied as David with the adventures. When their mother found David's maps, she burned them all in order to teach her younger son that he should not waste his time. The farm is a place of hard work and effort and drawing such "useless maps" of the roads which everyone knows about was a waste of valuable time that could be used for something else. David did not want to make his family disappointed in him and that is why he stopped drawing maps. Only in his free time did David secretly continue his adventures and journeys.

Several years later, in 1861, the American Civil war began between the Confederate States of America and the United States of America, a collection of 11 southern states that wanted to be independent and have their own country. Their conflict with the northern States (Inc. New York) initially began due to the long-standing disagreement over the institution of slavery.⁴ Rufus, who was against slavery, joined the northern army (United States of America) and was sent to war.

Shortly before being dispatched to the front line, Rufus contracted typhus and died. David Starr Jordan lost his closest and best friend.

After the death of his brother, Jordan got even more shy than before and he focused on his studies. "In 1872, Jordan obtained a Master's in Science in botany, instead of a Bachelor's degree, because of his extra undergraduate work as an instructor in botany."⁵

David remained an introvert after he graduated. His aim was to become a professor of botany. Unfortunately, as most educational institutions searched for active and charismatic professors, which could control and lead

the classes with their energy, the introverted David had to give up his desire to study and look for another job.

3.2 His idol

In the middle of the 19th century, David was introduced to the work of Louis Agassiz, "a Swiss-born natural scientist, a professor of zoology and geology in the predecessor of the Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, and a prominent supporter of racial segregation and white supremacy"⁶ who was a visiting professor at Cornell. Agassiz was also a taxonomist. He examined living organisms and classified them into different groups according to their biological characteristics. He believed that the tree of life is like a ladder,

4. Cf. N.n. "10 facts: What everyone should know about the civil war"

5. Jill Briggs "David Starr Jordan (1851-1931)"

6. C. Imrscher, Louis Agassiz: creator of American science. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt p. 41-84

with lesser creatures at the bottom and advanced creatures such as humans at the top. In his opinion humanity was at the top of the ladder and thus, being in the highest possible position, allowed humanity to understand the language of God and the purpose of life.

David was so inspired by Louis Agassiz that he decided to continue his work. Among all creatures, David had a special interest in fish and went to the sea in order to find and expose all of the secrets of this sacred creature of god.

In the minds of most prominent scientists of the time believed in Creationism, which means that each creature was designed and created separately by God and was living on earth. For this reason, when a young scientist named Charles Darwin opposed these ideas, many people's attention was drawn to him.

Darwin questioned all of the beliefs of previous scientists and claimed that all creatures, even humans, started from the same point and that this process has never stopped and still continues evolving.

It was his opinion, that the whole existence of the world was formed from a series of accidents that caused the development, transformation and formation of various creatures, including humans.

Agassiz hated Darwin. In his opinion Darwin was a fraud who was destroying the image of scientists, and by questioning the place of man among God's creations he was disrespecting nature.

Agassiz was a man of god, and due to this, could accept no other version than his of the origin of species. This does not however mean that his theory was right or that it was fair. It was the opinion of Agassiz that not only humanity was at the top of the ladder, however at the top there was also a hierarchy. He did not believe in racial equality and believed that white people held a higher place on the ladder of life than other human races.

Although the vast majority of the scientific community believed in God, they accepted Darwin's opinion and the theory of evolution became one of the world's standards of natural science.

Young David Starr Jordan, although respecting Agassiz, gradually accepted this theory, however he connected his own opinion to it. He thought that the amount of effort each creature puts into its life, causes the evolution of that particular species. Indeed, if a creature tried to survive and did something to adapt, it gets a higher place in the ladder of life, but if a creature wasted time and had a worthless life then it should take a lower position. He wholeheartedly believed in this theory without any true evidence and reason.

3.3 Personal Life

David spent most of his time in the oceans and discovered and recorded hundreds of different species of fish. His ability to find new marine and fish species was so great that in the 1880s the US government hired him as one of its own explorers and funded his research. David, who was in a comfortable financial situation, got married and had three children in a short period of time. Shortly after his marriage, Indiana University hired him as its general manager. With a good job, beautiful wife, three cute little kids and a big collection of around 100 fish (which no one ever saw), his life seemed to be peaceful. Sadly, his life was not to remain this way.

On a stormy autumn night, lightning hit his house in Indiana causing it to burn down. Not only did he lose his house, but his precious collection of rare and exotic fish with races that no one ever seen before were also lost. In the following 6-month period David also lost his wife and only child to separate illnesses. Each of these events alone was enough to destroy a person's will to live.

In spite of these unfortunate events, David Starr Jordan was very optimistic as a few weeks after these events, he once again continued his scientific expeditions with the goal of rebuilding his collection. His goal was to create a bigger and greater collection of fish, which over the following years, he did.

The news of his recent expeditions and research soon reached a middle-aged couple, Leland and Jane Stanford, who were planning to establish a new university in California.

4. Stanfords

4.1 Their Offer

The Stanfords were an educated and wealthy couple who lived in California. Leland made his fortune during the "Gold Rush" in California and was subsequently considered one of the most powerful people in the western states of America. Leland and Jane had lost their one and only son, Leland Stanford Jr., due to typhoid in 1884. To memorialize their son, the couple decided to establish a new educational institution, which should be the best in the state of California. On establishing the new university, they began their search for a Rector.

In 1890, they offered David the position of Rector and asked him to migrate to California. David however, was not quite sure about accepting their offer.

Leland was a conservative Republican who held different political views than David, and Jane was a strong believer in spirit summoning. She continuously using sand to summon the spirit of her deceased son.

The combination of strong political and non-scientific beliefs of the Stanford Family made David a little skeptical. He did not want to work for

people who could potentially limit him during the most productive years of his life, however Leland assured him that the Stanford Family would not interfere with his work and that David would have the possibility to continue his expeditions during his employment at the University.

The combination of this flexibility to continue his life's work, the excellent income which the Stanfords offered, and the Californian climate and the University's proximity to the ocean, were the reasons David accepted this job. At the age of forty, he started working as the first Rector of Stanford University. In 1891, Stanford University received its first intake of students and the educational institution officially started working. During his administration, he could manage and spend the Stanford family's infinite money as he wanted. He installed a large statue of Louis Agassiz, his idol, in the courtyard of the university and established the first recorded collection of specialized and preserved fish species in the university. After that, he and his new wife, Jessie Knight (who was 20 years his junior), bought a large estate in California and with a grant from the university, started a new series of expeditions. David and his wife traveled to the four corners of the world and at each stop, they recorded dozens of new species of fish and added them to the university collection. A collection which spanned over 1000 species was accumulated much sooner than anyone thought possible.

David had a special management style. He filled the management team of the university with his relatives, didn't tolerate any criticism and if someone tried to oppose his decisions, he would easily dismiss them and have them replaced with someone else. In addition to his extreme management style, he would spend long periods away from the university in search of his favorite fish. This caused David to gain many enemies, however with the complete support of Leland Stanford, no one dared to express their opposition directly.

On June 21st, 1893, everything changed with the death of the founder of Stanford University. With Leland's death, Jane had become the main funder of the university.

Unlike her husband, Jane was not satisfied with David. She believed that David was running Stanford like a mafia and his absence had caused the academic quality of the university to drop. She even hired a spy to gather enough evidence to fire David. In 1904, everything was ready to replace David, but Jane Stanford's sudden death disrupted the plan.

4.2 "I have been poisoned..."

Strychnine is a toxic, colorless and bitter poison. Only a few drops of this chemical causes a poisoned person to lose control of their body, have convulsions, writhe in pain and die painfully in just a few minutes

This was the same poison used in the first attempt to take Jane's life only one month earlier. This time however, the assassin dissolved the poison in water, disguising the taste making it impossible to detect.

After Jane's death, seven different doctors in Hawaii performed autopsies on her body and all confirmed that trace amounts of Strychnine were present in her Jane's stomach. The official cause of death of the 76-year-old Stanford University founder was poisoning. This was later accepted as the cause of death by the jury in the court case.

1500 km away, the news of the poisoning reached David Starr Jordan. He disagreed with the findings of the doctors and sailed to Hawaii. On arrival he bribed a local doctor to say Jane wasn't poisoned, but that had died of overeating that day.

Died because of overeating, 11 hours after the food was eaten. It didn't make sense at all.

Despite the discovery of Strychnine traces in her stomach, the reports of witnesses present at the scene and the opinion of expert doctors, David did not succumb. He announced in a statement that Hawaiian doctors tried to hide the truth in order to profit from Mrs. Stanford's fortune and trafficked her organs.

David's prestige was so high that after his statement, no one questioned Jane Stanford's cause of death. Following David's own death, the case was reopened and the bribe of the Hawaiian doctor was discovered. Poisoning became the official cause of death but so much time had passed that the identity of the assassin and their reason for her poisoning were consigned to history.

In California, the board of directors at Stanford University, aware of Jane's displeasure and reports of David's inefficient management, removed David from the university administration and gave him a ceremonial position with no executive powers.

David decided to embark upon a new expedition in order to hide his anger at this decision. During this expedition, he came across an Italian town called Aosta. This city was really special cause Aosta was a city belonged to disabled people.

5. Aosta

In the middle of the 19th century, the Catholic Church turned the city of Aosta into a place to care for people who, for some reason, were ostracized from society. These reasons varied from displaying physical weakness to having mental disabilities. In this coastal city, these disabled people received help, were taken care of from the church, and could continue their lives without any stress. Aosta was literally a paradise of humanity, where good deeds and benevolence abounded and those who had no chance of survival in other parts of Europe were happy and at peace here.

In spite of that, seeing such a place made David Starr Jordan angry. In this city, he saw all things that his teacher Louis Agassiz had taught him were wrong. David wondered how a handful of people with special needs continued to live on the charity of others and destroyed his view of the *Ladder of Life*.

David thought helping these people would cause their incomplete and weak genes to continue and keep the next generation of humans away from progress and improvement. People who, with their incapacity, only led to the decline of man in the *Ladder of Life* and ruined the position of man as the highest of God's creations.

The experience of being in Aosta and trying to find a way out of this 'crisis' introduced David to a dangerous idea, one that had only been introduced in Europe a few years ago and wasn't very popular, except for in the opinions of a few people.

6. The idea of Eugenics.

In 1883, when the book "*El origen de las especies: El mance*" or "*On the Origin of Species*" by Charles Darwin was published, Francis Galton, one of Darwin's relatives, who was fascinated the ideas presented in this book, proposed an interesting theory. On the website called "National Library of Medicine" it is pointed out that:

"... a program to artificially produce a better human race through regulating marriage and thus procreation."⁷

He believed that if natural selection is what leads to the survival and strengthening of the generation of living organisms, then humans can also engineer this natural selection and improve the quality of human genes by removing the weak members of society.

If someone was lazy, had committed a crime or was impoverished, it would be better if their genes were removed from the human race and the opportunity to reproduce was available only to people who were educated, had a good financial status, and were successful in life.

The suggestion of some was to pay more money to educated people for each child. Others suggested legalizing polygamy among the wealthy. Some others considered the invitation to increase the population among able-bodied people as the only solution. But when David Starr Jordan heard about this theory, he suggested what in his mind was a much simpler way to make a superior race of human.

"...people he deemed 'unfit' should not reproduce and, in many cases, should undergo compulsory sterilization."⁸

He began to perfect the theory. According to him, these "unfit" people were divided into three categories

7. Dominique A. Marson, Sir Francis Galton: the father of eugenics

8. Stanford eugenics history project, The Problematic Legacy of David Starr Jordan

- Fools or not intelligent people
- Addicts or alcoholics
- Promiscuous people or sexual rapists

These were people who he called “unfit” and believed that in order “to improve the natural, physical, mental, and temperamental qualities of the human family”⁹ and to create a better human race in the future, all of them had to lose the chance of reproduction.

He brought this idea/theory with him to the USA and in 1898, he wrote and published the first article about it. He wrote about the benefits of Eugenics in scientific journals, taught his students the methods of identifying “unfit” people in his classrooms, and emphasized its importance in scientific conferences.

Very soon, the theory of removing “unfit” people from society began to spread in America. Some hospitals killed patients suffering from physical disabilities by injecting drugs. In some other places, children born with disabilities were left to die, and some doctors sterilized African-American and poor women without their knowledge.

David Starr Jordan, who had now found the purpose of his life, wanted to add the process of sterilizing the inefficient people of the society to a part of the American constitution.

In 1907, Indiana State, where David had been teaching for a long time, legalized the sterilization of disable people for the first time in USA. Two years later, California, David’s second home, also legalized and passed this law and then one state after another began to consider and register sterilization laws.

Someone committed a crime?

Didn’t get good marks in exams?

Had an illicit relation with someone else’s partner?

All this was enough for that person to be forcibly sterilized and thus lose the ability to reproduce forever.

Eugenics lessons were now taught in universities such as Harvard, Brown and even Stanford and students learned the criteria for distinguishing the able-bodied from disabled (unfits).

Even one of the books written on this subject in 1916 reached the hands of one of the European leaders and became his favorite book.

Young Adolf Hitler in his memoirs quoted “*The Passing of the Great Race*” written by Madison Grant as one of the main sources for his ideology, and based on it, he implemented the sterilization law in Germany.

“In 1927, the US Supreme Court case *Buck vs. Bell* set a legal precedent that states may sterilize inmates of public institutions.”¹⁰

After it, hospitals, medical centers and prisons no longer had to perform sterilization secretly and each institution could deem a person “unfit” and sterilize that person according to their own diagnosis. A biased selection process which was against African-Americans, Women and low-income people occurred.

Hundreds of African-Americans in 1960, more than 2000 Indigenous women in 1970 and in total, more than 60,000 people in the last century lost the ability to have children because of this law and because of David Starr.

9. Karen Norrgard, Human Testing, the Eugenics Movement

10. Nathalie Antonios & Christina Raup, *Buck V. Bell* (1927)

This law still exists in the United States and is still implemented in some parts of the country. According to newly published reports, between 2006 and 2010 alone, more than 150 women in the prisons of the USA were sterilized without their knowledge, to prevent the continuation of their weak genes.

On September 19th 1931, David Starr Jordan passed away. After his death, hundreds of people gathered in California to commemorate him and in the years after his death, many tributes were dedicated to his memory. His name is now engraved in the psychology department of Stanford University and his Sculpture is in the library of the University, even one the mountains in California is named in his honor.

David Starr Jordan, a scientist who spent his childhood drawing farm maps with his brother, an adventurer that discovered more than a fifth of all the species of fish in the world, a person who spent his middle and old age promoting peace in the world, had managed to register and implement one of the most deadly and unequal laws of the country he intended to serv.

7. Think a bit deeper

Was David really right?

Does preventing the reproduction of people who are less intelligent or physically disabled or who have problems in their lives for any reason really help to improve the human race and improve the position of humans in the tree of life?

It seems that David did not pay attention to two points in his research:

The first point is the influence of the environment in the formation of some human traits. Scientific researches have shown that characteristics such as the tendency to commit crimes, financial status and even intelligence are capabilities that are formed in the environment and sometimes its effect can be greater than the effect of our internal genes. “..environmental influences, including parenting, affect personality. Based on genetic data, researchers have concluded that environment accounts for approximately 50 to 70 percent of personality.” ¹¹

The second point, is that Darwin mentions in his research the success of natural selection in preparing organisms for survival in harsh conditions, and that reason is diversity.

The diversity of compounds is what has made organisms develop from single-celled particles to complex organisms, come from the sea to land, learn to walk, and develop complex brains for advanced thinking. The point that causes this progress is the formation of abilities that the creatures themselves are unaware of that they are going to use one day. The basis of natural mutations is the formation of capabilities that make an organism resistant to unexpected conditions. So, it is fundamentally wrong to guide selection and limit genes to continue the generation.

Proponents of Eugenics, like David Starr Jordan, saw a future for humans that is the same as the current situation, but the diversity of combinations makes an organism prepare for a future that is not the same as the current situation and against unforeseen dangers.

In other words, creativity can be found in combinations that no one normally pays attention to.

Maybe if Jordan looked at his notes, he would realize this. In one of his notebooks, he wrote about catching fish, he wrote that most people try to catch fish with nets, hands or other classic methods. These methods however are time consuming, boring and outdated. He reminds the reader that just by trying a few new combinations, he has managed to find a new and easy way to catch fish.

“His favorite trick for catching the peskiest of fish, the ones that evade capture by darting into the cracks of tide pools? Poison. The particular variety he recommends? A dangerous and powerful substance, one he once described as ‘the bitterest thing in the world.’ Strychnine.”¹²

- Lulu Miller, “Why fish don’t exist”, p.123

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9. STATUTORY DECLARATION

I declare that I have authored this thesis independently, that I have not used other than the declared sources / resources, and that I have explicitly marked all material which has been quoted either literally or by content from the used sources.

Dec. 2023

Date

[Signature]

Signature