

BETTER BRED

DAVID STARR JORDAN AND THE ART
OF MAKING BETTER MEN & NATIONS

Essays on the dysgenics of war, with its destruction of the strongest, procreation by the weakest, and civilization forever suffering from the absence of those who could have been, with a diagnosis on the decline of men, a remedy for how to rebuild them, and further reflections on the social order, by the founding president of Stanford University, David Starr Jordan.

wherein

WARRIORS CULLED
BLOOD METAPHORIZED
POTENTIALITY ACTUALIZED
PROCESSES SELECTED
FUTURE PROPAGATED

with

THE CAUSE OF POOR GOVERNANCE
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORD "NO"
WAR AS REVERSE SELECTION
SURVEY OF AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

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Foreword, Summaries, and Footnotes
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FOREWORD

Professor and ichthyologist¹ by trade, David Starr Jordan was elected president of Indiana University in 1884—at the young age of 34. He held that position until 1891 when, upon recommendation from the president of Harvard, he was appointed as the founding president of Stanford University. Alongside his tenure at Stanford, Jordan would also serve as chief director of the World Peace Foundation, until finally resigning his academic post in 1916. He devoted his remaining years to writing on ichthyology and politics until his death at age 80 in 1931.

Born of humble roots out east,² Jordan died an intellectual titan in the west, having spent nearly three decades molding the brightest minds of America’s next generation. He waged a war against war itself, writing extensively on its horrors and dysgenic³ impact on humanity; he encouraged young men to get a college education, cultivate moral character, and abstain from harmful temptations and vice. By most regards, he was a model citizen and fierce advocate for western liberal democracy.⁴

And yet, in 2020, the Board of Trustees for both Indiana University and Stanford University voted to remove his name from all commemorative titles across the campuses.⁵ The Trustees at Indiana University unanimously approved a vote to

-
1. Biologist who studies fish.
 2. His hometown, Gainesville, New York, had a population of 1,760 in 1850, the year before his birth. By 2016, it had grown to 2,100.
 3. Deterioration of genetic quality, typically by the perpetuation of less desirable traits.
 4. See “Endnote” to “Endnote” (page 311) for an overview on Jordan’s general political philosophy.
 5. Generously, Jordan’s presidential portrait was allowed to remain in the Presidents Hall at Indiana University.

creatively retitle Jordan Hall the Biology Building, Jordan River the Campus River, and Jordan Avenue Parking Garage the East Parking Garage. Likewise, the Trustees at Stanford University voted affirmatively to rename Jordan Hall, Jordan Quad, the Jordan Modulares, and Jordan Way.

So what did Jordan do or say to earn such a complete reevaluation of his legacy? He advocated for *eugenics*, an idea with an innocuous definition but a disturbing legacy:⁶

Eugenics (yoo-jen-iks), n.:

(1) Pertaining or adapted to the production of fine offspring, esp. in the human race.

(2) The investigation of... the condition under which men of a high type are produced.

Producing “fine offspring” of a “high type”—is that not the aspiration of every loving parent since the dawn of time? Do parents not toil, sweat, bleed, and stress to provide their children with more opportunity, more experiences, more education, and more life skills than they had?

David Starr Jordan wasn’t un-commemorated for his belief in eugenics *per se*, but rather for insensitive opinions he held on race and for the eugenic movement’s historical legacy, especially regarding forced sterilization.⁷ He did believe some races were genetically more “fit” than others,⁸ and he did advocate for quasi-sterilization⁹ if a jury of peers rendered the judgment. These opinions are incompatible with the contemporary

6. *Oxford English Dictionary*, Volume 3 (D-E), 1913.

7. On race, for example, Jordan believed “mixed” Americans were superior to “pure” Africans, but that while there exists a racial hierarchy, “this does not imply that the lower man or the lower race need be robbed, enslaved or exterminated” (Page 50). The history of forced sterilization is well-documented, but most notably it was employed by German National Socialists, as well as by various eugenics-related institutions of which Jordan was a member.

consensus on medical ethics and the role of genetic inheritance on intelligence, and it is right for them to face scrutiny.

While Jordan may have been wrong on these issues, one can't deny that he held a deep commitment to the betterment of society; that he sought to enhance human potential, secure collective well-being, and end the devastation and destruction that warfare exacts on individuals, families, and communities. This is not just a noble pursuit—it is one which is continually pursued to this day, by people of all color, creed, and geography.

Such a commitment naturally led Jordan to research the root causes of, and major contributors to, human *flourishing* (and its corollary, *decay*), both individually and collectively. What makes great men—men of virtue and honor, men who strive daily to not only better their own lives, but also their neighbors and nation? And what makes weak men—men of sloth and intemperance, men who don't strive to better themselves, much less the communities and society in which they live?

This collection presents Jordan's answers to these important questions, in three themes: genetics, education, and environment. With genetics, the die was cast when we were born, and although we may have influence over how our genes *express* themselves, our genetic foundation was already laid at conception. Only future generations may benefit from greater knowledge in this domain. With education and environment, Jordan believes we can actively influence how our genetic potentials are *actualized*. We can choose many of our adversi-

8. Jordan believed genetics, education, and environment were co-determinants in one's destiny. Genetics provides the foundation of *potentiality*, while education and environment *actualizes* these potentialities. Genetic "fitness" in this context is a judgment that the underlying potential of some races was more suitable to building and maintaining civilization than others.

9. e.g., reversible vasectomies.

ties; we can control how we respond to them; and we can organize together to build institutions which protect and nourish the members of our communities.

Before his death by a series of strokes, David Starr Jordan reflected on his life:

I'm ready for death whenever it comes. I have lived a full life, and I have found life good... [I lived] three full lives—I have been a naturalist and explorer in one, a teacher and finally president of Stanford University in another, and I have worked in the cause of international peace in a third.¹⁰

If we could only all be so lucky.

Minor edits accompany each text for readability, and italics were added at the editor's discretion. Where edits were made in italicized passages, the original text was included in the footnotes.

H. C. Earwicker
Editor

10. "Dr. David Starr Jordan Dies, Family with Educator as Passes Away," Healdsburg Tribune, No. 269, September 19, 1931.

BLOOD OF THE NATION

*History and heredity reciprocal influences; blood as metaphor for inherited qualities; same selective processes which govern animal breeding apply to humans; war culls the nation's best, leaves weaker men to propagate future generations; no group evolves collectively; indiscriminate charity preserves unfitnes; blood determines potential, education and character actualize it.*¹¹

In this paper I shall set forth two propositions: the one self-evident, the other not apparent at first sight but equally demonstrable. *The blood of a nation determines its history.* This is the first proposition. The second is, *The history of a nation determines its blood.* As for the first, no one doubts that the character of men controls their deeds. In the long run and with masses of mankind this must be true, however great the emphasis we may lay on individual initiative or on individual variation.

Equally true is it that the present character of a nation is made by its past history. Those who are alive today are the resultants of the stream of heredity as modified by the vicissitudes¹² through which the nation has passed. The blood of the nation flows in the veins of those who survive. *Those who die without descendants can not color the stream of heredity.* It must take its traits from the actual parentage.

The word "blood" in this sense is figurative only, an expression formed to cover the qualities of heredity. Such traits, as the phrase goes, "run in the blood." In the earlier philosophy it was held that blood was the actual physical vehicle of heredity, that the traits bequeathed from sire to son as the char-

11. First published in *Popular Science Monthly*, Volume 59, 1901.

This version is from a 1910 republication in book form.

12. Variations.

acteristics of families or races ran literally in the literal blood. We know now that this is not the case. We know that the actual blood in the actual veins plays no part in heredity, that the transfusion of blood means no more than the transposition of food, and that the physical basis of the phenomena of inheritance is found in the structure of the germ cell and its contained germ-plasm.

But the old word well serves our purposes. The blood which is “thicker than water” is the symbol of race unity. In this sense the blood of the people concerned is at once the cause and the result of the deeds recorded in their history. For example, wherever an Englishman goes, he carries with him the elements of English history. It is a British deed which he does, British history that he makes. Thus, too, a Jew is a Jew in all ages and climes,¹³ and his deeds everywhere bear the stamp of Jewish individuality. A Greek is a Greek; a Chinaman remains a Chinaman. In like fashion, the race traits color all history made by Tartars, or negroes, or Malays.

The climate which surrounds a tribe of men may affect the activities of these men as individuals or as an aggregate; education may intensify their powers or mellow their prejudices; oppression may make them servile or dominion make them overbearing—but these traits and their resultants, so far as science knows, do not “run in the blood”; they are not “bred in the bone.” Older than climate or training or experience are the traits of heredity, and in the long run it is always “blood which tells.”

On the other hand, the deeds of a race of men must in turn determine its blood. Could we with full knowledge sum up the events of the past history of any body of men, we could indicate the kinds of men destroyed in these events. *The others would be left to write the history of the future.* It is the “man

13. Environments.

who is left” in the march of history who gives to history its future trend. By the “man who is left” we mean simply the man who remains at home to become the father of the family as distinguished from the man who in one way or another is sacrificed for the nation’s weal or woe. If any class of men be destroyed by political or social forces or by the action of institutions, they leave no offspring, and their like will cease to appear.

“Send forth the best ye breed.” This is Kipling’s cynical advice to a nation which happily can never follow it. But could it be accepted literally and completely, the nation in time would breed only second-rate men. By the sacrifice of their best or the emigration of the best, and by such influences alone, have races fallen from first-rate to second-rate in the march of history.

For a race of men or a herd of cattle are governed by the same laws of selection. Those who survive inherit the traits of their own actual ancestry. In the herd of cattle, to destroy the strongest bulls, the fairest cows, the most promising calves, is to allow those not strong nor fair nor promising to become the parents of the coming herd. Under this influence the herd will deteriorate, although the individuals of the inferior herd are no worse than their own actual parents. Such a process is called *race-degeneration*, and it is the only race-degeneration known in the history of cattle or men. The scrawny, lean, infertile herd is the natural offspring of the same type of parents. On the other hand, if we sell or destroy the rough, lean, or feeble calves, we shall have a herd descended from the best. It is said that when the short-horned Durham cattle first attracted attention in England, the long-horns which preceded them, inferior for beef or milk, vanished “as if smitten by a pestilence.” The fact was that, being less valuable, their owners chose to destroy them rather than the finer Durhams. Thus the new stock came from the better Durham parentage. If conditions should ever be reversed and the Durhams were chosen for destruction, then the long-horns might again appear, swelling in numbers as if by

magic, unless all traces of the breed had in the meantime been annihilated.

In selective breeding with any domesticated animal or plant, it is possible, with a little attention, to produce wonderful changes for the better. Almost anything may be accomplished with time and patience. To select for posterity those individuals which best meet our needs or please our fancy, and to destroy those with unfavorable qualities, is the function of artificial selection. Add to this the occasional crossing of unlike forms to promote new and desirable variations, and we have the whole secret of selective breeding. This process Youatt¹⁴ calls the “magician’s wand” by which man may summon up and bring into existence any form of animal or plant useful to him or pleasing to his fancy.

In the animal world, progress comes mainly through selection, natural or artificial, the survival of the fittest to become the parent of the new generation. In the world of man similar causes produce similar results. The word “progress” is, however, used with a double meaning, including the advance of civilization as well as race improvement. The first of these meanings is entirely distinct from the other. The results of training and education lie outside the scope of the present discussion. By training, the force of the individual man is increased. Education gives him access to the accumulated stores of wisdom built up from the experience of ages. The trained man is placed in a class relatively higher than the one to which he would belong on the score of heredity alone. *Heredity carries with it possibilities for effectiveness. Training makes these possibilities actual.* Civilization has been defined as “the sum total of those agencies and conditions by which a race may advance independently of heredity.” But while education and civilization may greatly change the life of individuals, and

14. William Youatt (1776–1847), English veterinarian.

through them that of the nation, these influences are spent on the individual and the social system of which he is a part. So far as science knows, education and training play no part in heredity. The change in the blood which is the essence of race progress, as distinguished from progress in civilization, finds its cause in selection only.

To apply to nations the principles known to be valid in cattle-breeding, we may take a concrete example, that of the alleged decadence of France, It is claimed that the birth-rate is falling off in France, that the stature is lower, and the physical force less among the French peasantry than it was a century ago. If all this is true, then the cause for it must be in some feature of the life of France which has changed the normal processes of selection.

In the present paper I shall not attempt to prove these statements. They rest, so far as I know, chiefly on assertions of French writers, and statistics are not easily obtained. It suffices that an official commission has investigated the causes of reduced fertility, with chiefly negative results. It is not due primarily to intemperance nor vice nor prudence nor misdirected education, the rush to "ready-made careers," but to inherited deficiencies of the people themselves. It is not a matter of the cities alone, but of the whole body of French peasantry. Legoyt, in his study of "the alleged degeneration of the French people," tells us that it will take long periods of peace and plenty before France can recover the tall statures mowed down in the wars of the republic and the First Empire," though how plenty can provide for the survival of the tallest this writer does not explain. Peace and plenty may preserve, but they can not restore.

It is claimed, on authority which I have failed to verify, that the French soldier of today is nearly two inches shorter than

the soldier of a century ago.¹⁵ One of the most clever of recent French books, by Edmond Demolins, asks, "In what consists the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon?" The answer is found in defects of training and of civic and personal ideals, but the real cause lies deeper than all this. *Low ideals in education are developed by inferior men.* Dr. Nordau and his school of exponents of "hand-painted science" find France a nation of decadents—a condition due to the inherited strain of an overwrought civilization. With them the word "degenerate" is found adequate to explain all eccentricities of French literature, art, politics, or jurisprudence.

But science knows no such things as nerve-stress inheritance. If it did, the peasantry of France have not been subjected to it. Their life is hard, no doubt, but not stressful; and they certainly are not helpless victims of any form of enforced psychical activity. The kind of degeneration Nordau pictures is not a matter of heredity. When not simply personal eccentricity, it is a phase of personal decay. It finds its causes in bad habits, bad training, bad morals, or in the desire to catch public attention for personal advantage. It has no permanence in the blood of the race. The presence on the Paris boulevards of a mob of crazy painters, maudlin musicians, drunken poets, and sensation-mongers proves nothing as to race degeneracy. When the fashion changes, they will change also. Already the fad of "strenuous life" is blowing them away. *Any man of any race withers in an atmosphere of vice, absinthe, and opium.* The presence of such an atmosphere may be an effect of race decadence, but it is not a cause of the lowered tone of the nation.

Evil influences may kill the individual, but they cannot tarnish the stream of heredity. The child of each generation is free-born so far as heredity goes, and the sins of the fathers are

15. Jordan later published "War & Western Europe" (page 177) in 1915, which contains French male height statistics in the footnotes (page 185).

not visited upon him. If vice strikes deeply enough to wreck the man, it is likely to wreck or kill the child as well, not through heredity, but through lack of nutrition. The child depends on its parents for its early vitality, its constitutional strength, the momentum of its life, if we may use the term. For this a sound parentage demands a sound body. The unsound parentage yields the withered branches, the lineage which speedily comes to the end. But this class of influences, affecting not the germ-plasm, but general vitality, has no relation to hereditary qualities, so far as we know.

In heredity there can be no tendency downward or upward. Nature repeats, and that is all. From the actual parents actual qualities are received, the traits of the man or woman as they might have been, without regard, so far as we know, to the way in which these qualities have been actually developed.

The evolution of a race is selective only, never collective. Collective evolution, the movement upward or downward of a people as a whole, irrespective of education or of selection, is, as Lepouge has pointed out, a thing unknown. "It exists in rhetoric, not in truth nor in history."

No race as a whole can be made up of "degenerate sons of noble sires." Where decadence exists, the noble sires have perished, either through evil influences, as in the slums of great cities, or else through the movements of history or the growth of institutions. *If a nation sends forth the best it breeds to destruction, the second best will take their vacant places.* The weak, the vicious, the unthrifty will propagate, and in default of better will have the land to themselves.

We may now see the true significance of the "Man with a Hoe," as painted by Millet and as pictured in Edwin Markham's verse. This is the Norman peasant, low-browed, heavy-jawed, "the brother of the ox," gazing with lackluster eye on the things about him. To a certain extent, he is typical of the French peasantry. Every one who has traveled in France knows well his