

ANTHONY D. WAGNER, PH.D.
LUCIE STERN PROFESSOR & CHAIR

awagner@stanford.edu
650.723.4048

March 9, 2020

To the President's Office,

The faculty members of the Department of Psychology request that 420 Jane Stanford Way be renamed from Jordan Hall and that the statue of Louis Agassiz be removed from the building.

David Starr Jordan and Louis Agassiz, by virtue of their racist ideologies and practices, are incompatible with Stanford's values on initiative, diversity, equity, and access in learning (i.e., the [IDEAL](#) vision). The name and statue were in place long before the Psychology Department came to occupy the building, and we do not identify with either of the features. Critically, as we document below, numerous members of the Psychology Department — including many of our graduate students — have expressed that the building's name adversely affects their sense of inclusion in the University community. It should be noted that David Starr Jordan has a significant connection to the University, as Stanford's first President, whereas Louis Agassiz, to the best of our knowledge, has no significant connection to the University.

This request is unanimously supported by the faculty in the Department. It also follows the precedent set in the Palo Alto Unified School District, which recently changed the name of David Starr Jordan Middle School to Frank S. Greene Jr. Middle School. As we believe the case is clear and grounded on an extensive body of evidence, we explain the reasoning behind our request below, following the [Principles and Procedures](#) for Renaming Buildings and Other Features at Stanford University.

A. The specific behavior(s) or course(s) of conduct by the person after whom a feature is named that violate the University's mission and core principles.

David Starr Jordan. As a Stanford faculty member, Jordan chaired a Eugenics committee for the American Breeder's Association and co-founded the Human Betterment Foundation, through which he helped establish forced deportation and sterilization laws. He advocated for racial breeding and hierarchy in his writing. In his book, "The Blood of the Nation" (1910), Jordan wrote:

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 or fair nor promising to become the parents of the coming herd. Under this influence the herd will deteriorate...Such a process is called race-degeneration, and it is

the only race-degeneration known in the history of cattle or men...[I]f we sell or destroy the rough, lean, or feeble calves, we shall have a herd descended from the best.” (p. 12).

In a newspaper article, Jordan (1899) wrote to specifically denigrate persons of color as examples of the type of cattle he described above:

Wherever degenerate, dependent or alien races are within our borders today they are not part of the United States. They constitute a social problem, a menace to peace and welfare. There is no solution of race problem or class problem until race or class can solve it for itself. Unless the negro can make a man of himself through the agencies of freedom, free ballot, free schools, free religions, there can be no solution of the race problem.

Through his professional identity and widely disseminated pseudoscientific worldviews, Jordan helped to lead the U.S. Eugenics movement, a movement that led to the forced sterilization of over 64,000 humans most of whom belonged to vulnerable populations (e.g., persons of color, immigrants, low-income persons). Jordan’s actions violate Stanford’s values of Inclusivity, Diversity, Equity, and Access in Learning.

Louis Agassiz. Agassiz – mentor to David Jordan – was a well-documented supporter of polygenism, the pseudoscientific worldview that racial groups are different species and that the White race is superior to all others (Eberhardt, 2019). Agassiz disseminated his worldview through his teaching, writing, and personal communications (see Menand, 2002). In a lecture in South Carolina (1847), Agassiz stated:

The brain of the Negro is that of the imperfect brain of a seven month’s infant in the womb of a White.

In an article written for the *Christian Examiner* (1850), he wrote:

Human affairs with the reference to the colored races would be far more judiciously conducted, if, in our intercourse with them, we were guided by a full consciousness of the real differences existing between us and them, and to foster those dispositions that are eminently marked in them, rather than by treating them on terms of equality.

In a letter to a colleague, Agassiz (1863) wrote:

We ought to beware how we give to the blacks rights by virtue of which they may endanger the progress of whites...Social equality I deem at all times impracticable. It is a natural impossibility, flowing from the very character of the negro race...They are incapable of living on a footing of social equality with the whites, in one and the same community, without becoming an element of social disorder.

Through his professional identity and personal relationships, Agassiz espoused pseudoscientific claims that were divisive and fundamentally inconsistent with Stanford’s values of Inclusivity, Diversity, Equity, and Access in Learning.

B. The sources and strength of the evidence of that behavior.

David Starr Jordan. There is an extensive written record of Jordan's racist worldviews (Jordan, 1910), and public record makes clear that Jordan chaired a Eugenics committee for the American Breeder's Association and co-founded the Human Betterment Foundation through which he played a foundational role in the U.S. Eugenics movement.

Louis Agassiz. There is an extensive written record of Agassiz' pseudoscientific theories about racial hierarchies and inferiority, making clear that he espoused those theories through his teaching, writing, and personal communications (Eberhardt, 2019; Menand, 2002).

C. The nature, depth, and extent of the harm that the continued use of the name may inflict on the University's integrity, mission, and communities.

David Starr Jordan. Featuring Jordan's name on one of the main buildings of Stanford's entrance i) tarnishes our national and international reputations, ii) undermines Stanford's values of initiative, diversity, equity, and access in learning, and iii) prevents staff, students, and faculty, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., minority, immigrant, low-income), from developing a sense of inclusion and belonging at Stanford.

Louis Agassiz. Keeping the statue of Louis Agassiz on the building has the same negative effects as those outlined above regarding keeping Jordan's name on the building.

A recent survey of doctoral students in the Psychology Department confirmed these assertions. Among twenty respondents, 100% responded in favor of removing David Starr Jordan's name from the building and 95% endorsed removing the statue of Louis Agassiz (one student did not respond to that question).

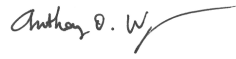
Students were also asked to describe how having Jordan as the eponym and the statue of Agassiz influences their experience at Stanford. Students reported that Jordan's name and the statue of Agassiz result in negative feelings (e.g., anger, discomfort, disrespect, distress, hurt) and that removing the two would increase positive feelings (e.g., comfort, optimism, trust, welcome, credibility). The name change and removal would show that Stanford is committed to diversity and inclusion.

In addition to the evident harms that the Jordan name and Agassiz statue are having on our community — spanning impacts on faculty, students, and staff — the faculty also are concerned about the attributions that are made to the faculty by the continued presence of these building features.

D. How renaming comports with the principles described in this document.

Both Jordan and Agassiz held views that were problematic and controversial even in their own time. The evidence that they held these views and moreover acted on them is clear. The impact of keeping Jordan as the eponym and Agassiz as a statue harm our students, staff, and faculty.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony D. W." followed by a stylized flourish.

Prof. Anthony Wagner (chair)

Prof. Steven O. Roberts, Greg Walton & Brian Wandell (Renaming Request Committee)
on behalf of the Psychology Department Faculty

References

Eberhardt, J. L. (2019). *Biased: Uncovering the hidden prejudice that shapes what we see, think, and do*. New York: Viking

Menand, L. (2002). Morton, Agassiz, and the origins of scientific racism in the United States. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 34, 110-113.

Jordan, D. S. (1910). *The blood of the nation. A study of the decay of races through the survival of the unfit*. Boston: American Unitarian Association.