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An appointment with Dr. Joseph DeJarnette: An analysis of a leading eugenics advocate and how his legacy has been rewritten, 1906-1943

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An Appointment with Dr. Joseph DeJarnette: An Analysis of a Leading Eugenics
Advocate and How His Legacy has been Rewritten, 1906-1943.

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The following is a thesis containing two separate parts: the background paper and a website. While both parts have been created with the ability to stand alone, they work best in conjunction with one another. The overall project provides a close study of Staunton, Virginia's Western State Hospital's Superintendent, Dr. Joseph DeJarnette, who practiced there from 1906-1943, and his involvement with eugenic sterilization. Dr. DeJarnette practiced during the Progressive Era, which influenced him to be a man desiring reform and progress, through science. The goal of this project is to analyze how his reputation as a doctor has been rewritten over time, changing from being a man who was once respected and idolized to one who is now associated with ghost stories and torturous behavior.

Both the background paper and the website utilize the same archive, the Library of Virginia, in order to provide a closer and more intimate look at Dr. DeJarnette's complicated history. Western State Hospital donated a substantial amount of its documents, letters, and reports, along with many other important artifacts, to the Library of Virginia over the three decades, starting in 1981, decades after Dr. DeJarnette passed away, preventing him from having any role in choosing which documents of his were preserved. The website component of this thesis consists of an online archive of letters of correspondence and reports related to Dr. DeJarnette, making it one of the first and only places where these items are digitized for public use.

This project analyzes websites as sources in order to study how Dr. DeJarnette's reputation has been transformed. There is a scarcity of secondary academic sources dealing specifically with Dr. DeJarnette, which meant it was necessary to utilize a wider

variety of sources. Regardless of the amount of literature available, the primary reason the Internet was examined for this project is because of the rapidly growing interest among historians in the subfield of digital history. This website contributes to the growing availability of historical material that is being shared via digital platform. By providing an online archive along with textual support, it is the hope that the average person as well as an academic researcher can gain a better understanding of Dr. DeJarnette, why he participated in eugenic sterilization, and how his reputation has been transformed.

Introduction

From 1906 to 1943, Western State Hospital's Superintendent Dr. Joseph DeJarnette tortured countless patients, walking the halls of the asylum whispering words of Adolf Hitler. Dr. DeJarnette not only forcefully sterilized thousands of helpless children and adults but also killed and treated the patients with such brutality that he now haunts the grounds and abandoned buildings of Western State Hospital and DeJarnette Sanitarium. He was not loved by patients, but rather was thought of as a monster.

Those commonly accepted beliefs are conveyed by various websites and publications about Dr. DeJarnette and his involvement with eugenic sterilization. These accounts, often stated with such confidence, are actually untruths and gross exaggerations. Despite that, these statements are often what is taken to be the history of this doctor and his advocacy for sterilization. In reality, Dr. DeJarnette's story is far more complex. Practicing during the Progressive Era, he was not viewed as a monster but was instead for the most part respected by doctors, family, and ex-patients during his time as Superintendent, as one who was curing mental illness through scientific means. He believed in and argued for the worldwide popular practice of sterilization because it was seen as science's answer for curing mental illness at that time. It was not hatred or cruelty that motivated his actions but rather a desire for his patients to one day be cured. Despite these statements, the history of this episode has been rewritten by focusing on the dark, ghostly aspects of his story. Rather than learning the whole story about DeJarnette and his involvement with sterilization, the average person is often led to believe these misrepresentations and exaggerations.

This thesis seeks to place Dr. DeJarnette into his appropriate time period more fully and analyze his understanding of eugenics. Eugenics, which was a popular worldwide movement during the early twentieth century, strove to eventually rid the world's population of mental illness by breeding it out, along with all other traits deemed to be detrimental. The science behind this movement, addressed later in this study, made the benefits of eugenic practices seem credible at the time. DeJarnette agreed with the science supporting eugenic sterilization, and also believed the procedure gave patients basic rights. Originally, mentally ill patients were warehoused in asylums for fear that they would reproduce and thus perpetuate their illness. Once sterilized, they were free to return to society, allowing them to leave the institution once cured. This study does not support eugenics but rather attempts to complicate the commonly accepted story of the doctor by exploring Dr. DeJarnette's motives behind his advocacy for sterilization. DeJarnette's publications, annual records, and letters actually suggest that he cared about his patients and believed that through sterilization he was saving them, not hurting them. This study presents a more nuanced picture of Dr. DeJarnette, thereby challenging the commonly accepted histories of him.

In order to fully appreciate DeJarnette's involvement with eugenics, it is crucial to know how the eugenics movement in the United States has been studied. The historiography reflects several changes in focus. Historians and eugenicists such as Frederick Osborn and Mark Haller did not begin analyzing the eugenics movement until the 1960s. Attitudes toward the eugenics movement eventually moved from skepticism and criticism to exploring its scientific underpinnings and finding any justifications for it. The historiography eventually leveled out in the twenty-first century to a more balanced

approach that considered political, scientific, cultural, and societal influences. The eugenics movement today is understood as a social movement with a scientific basis. Historian Wendy Kline offers an informative and expansive overview of the scholarship of eugenics in her essay, “Eugenics in the United States,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eugenics*. Her work largely influenced the following explanation of the historiographic timeline.¹

Studies of the eugenics movement in the 1960s often focused on Hitler and Nazis and their strong eugenic practices. The focus on racism and attention given to creating a superior race, such as what Hitler was doing through eugenics and the genocide of Jews, often influenced historians’ understanding of eugenics.² Historian Mark Haller’s *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (1963) focused on the impact eugenics had on the United States. He criticized the eugenics movement by arguing that the entire eugenics movement was based upon “often careless and inaccurate research” by scientists and was encouraged by superintendents of asylums.³ Along with openly criticizing the faulty scientific research, Haller also analyzed racism and the effects the Nazis had on the movement. Haller was one of the first historians who began to question eugenics critically. But not all literature being published in the sixties followed Haller’s example. Frederick Osborn, an extreme advocate of eugenics and one of the founding fathers of the American Eugenic Society, wrote in support of eugenics. In 1968 he published *The Future of Human Heredity: An Introduction to Eugenics in Modern Society*, encouraging historians as well as the public to focus on the scientific legitimacy

¹ Wendy Kline, “Eugenics in the United States,” in *Oxford Handbook to Eugenics*, Alison Bashford (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 511.

² Kline, *Oxford Handbook to Eugenics*, 511.

³ Mark Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 7.

of eugenics rather than its influence on ideas about race and class. He believed that the field of eugenics belonged to the province of “several scientific disciplines, especially those of genetics, demography, and psychology.”⁴ He symbolized a transition in focus within the study of eugenics; he redirected the attention of historians to the science behind the movement rather than the racism often associated with it.⁵

By the 1980s the historiography of the American eugenics movement had shifted. Instead of focusing solely on the faulty science behind the eugenics movement, historians began instead to explore why the eugenics movement was so easily accepted. In 1985, Daniel Kevles wrote *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*, which focused on specific individuals such as Francis Galton, Karl Pearson, and Charles Davenport, all key people in eugenics. He provided a detailed biography of their lives and explained each of their contributions. In addition to focusing on key doctors and geneticists, he also examined the scientific foundation and knowledge that eugenics was based upon. Kevles’ approach reflected a change in the broader ideas that fueled the eugenics movement. He wanted to understand and explain the scientific basis of eugenics and as a result, show why superintendents and scientists believed this was the answer. It was an explanation for eugenics rather than an attack.

During the 1990s historians continued to expand the study of eugenics in the United States beyond examinations of its scientific origins, and began to approach eugenics as a reflection of a larger social movement. This transformation allowed psychiatrists and social historians to join the ongoing dialogue. Approaching eugenics as

⁴ Frederick Osborn, *The Future of Human Heredity: An Introduction to Eugenics in Modern Society* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1968), 5.

⁵ Frederick Henry Osborn Papers, American Philosophical Society, <http://www.amphilsoc.org/mole/view?docId=ead/Mss.Ms.Coll.24-ead.xml> (accessed October 7, 2015)

a social movement made it possible for historians and psychiatrists to ask larger questions such as: what were the political and cultural influences on the movement, what impact did eugenics have on American society, what role did gender play in sterilization, and how did all of this affect the patients and their lives?

Historian Matthew Thomson argues that the eugenics movement was affected by politics and economics rather than by changes in psychiatry alone. In his article, “Disability, Psychiatry, and Eugenics” Thomson explains that America grew increasingly nationalistic prior to World War I. The need to be superior and have an intelligent and strong race of people fueled the development of eugenics.⁶ In *Faces of Degeneration*, Daniel Pick analyzed early twentieth-century social commentary and how that affected the “scientific truth” behind eugenics.⁷ He examined the culture, politics, and medical language that emerged during the nineteenth century in France, England, and Italy in order to show the complex shifts of the thoughts and perceptions concerning degeneration. Andrew Scull and Roy Porter are both twenty-first century historians of medicine and psychiatry, who have each studied madness and eugenics and how society has dealt with them. Their writings reflected the most recent conversation between psychiatrists and historians concerning the eugenics movement. They, along with fellow historians, consider political, cultural, societal, scientific, psychiatric, and medical influences in their attempt to understand eugenics in its entirety.

Like the historiography of this medical treatment, the eugenics movement itself experienced numerous shifts. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, eugenics gained momentum as an answer to treating and curing the mentally ill. It quickly became

⁶ Matthew Thomson, “Disability, Psychiatry, and Eugenics,” in *Oxford Handbook to Eugenics*, 111-119.

⁷ Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder: 1848-1918*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 11.

a social movement, influenced and encouraged by numerous voices, including those from the scientific community as well as the broader public. After World War II the movement transitioned from being a respected and progressive experiment to a practice associated with Nazism, resulting in a rapid decline in popularity and support. Eugenics historiography took shape following the general decline in the practice of eugenics, and originated with a strong focus on Hitler. Studies done by historians and psychiatrists originally criticized the movement but gradually began to focus more on the factors that influenced eugenics and its widespread acceptance. In an attempt to understand Dr. DeJarnette's time as Western State Hospital's superintendent from 1906 to 1943 and the way his legacy has changed over time, this study continues along the same trajectory that twenty-first century historians have taken by considering the science behind the doctor's arguments concerning eugenics as well as the social and economic factors.

Changing Attitudes Toward Caring for the Insane

Before the nineteenth century, families and communities cared for the mentally ill.⁸ The number of diagnosed mentally ill people in colonial America was low, which allowed families and communities to handle this responsibility adequately. But during the eighteenth century instances of mental illness started to rise as towns became more densely populated. As a result, families that struggled financially began to have difficulty caring for their ill relatives. Therefore, Americans started looking for an institution to take on that responsibility: the insane asylum.⁹ Within the historiography of the insane asylum's creation, historians have disagreed on exactly why the asylums developed. Historian David Rothman argues that it was society's need for control and order that influenced the creation of the institution, whereas Gerald Grob argues it was due to a growing population and that mental illness placed a heavier burden on society.¹⁰

In *The Discovery of the Asylum*, Rothman argues that following the Revolution Americans were concerned with an increase in crime and violence. Medical doctors and scientists believed that the economic, social, and political pressures society placed on people created mental illness. Instead of fixing society, they isolated the insane into asylums. By creating insane asylums, "they designed and oversaw a distinctive environment which eliminated the tensions and the chaos."¹¹ Historian Gerald Grob approached the creation of the asylum from a different angle: America's growing

⁸ As early as the sixteenth century, physicians and scientists had begun to attempt to explain and categorize insanity. Terms such as "insane," "lunatic," "feeble-minded," "backward-minded," "imbecile," and "crazy" were used to label and describe the mentally ill. Despite the progress that has been made concerning how the mentally ill are described in today's world, for the sake of historical accuracy, this paper will use those nineteenth- and twentieth-century terms in describing the mentally ill men and women.

⁹ Gerald Grob, *Mental Institutions In America: Social Policy to 1875* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 4-5.

¹⁰ Grob, *Mental Institutions in America*; David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971).

¹¹ Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 128.

population. In *Mental Institutions in America*, Grob stated that the start of insane asylums was influenced by the growing number of cases of insanity in America's population, which increased the burden on communities and families. In reality, both historians are right. Social factors such as control and overpopulation motivated society to create a solution to help *and* isolate the mentally ill: asylums.

Therefore, beginning in the nineteenth century, America saw a rise in asylums. Aggressive therapy was a common way of treating the "lunatics" in this time period. This form of treatment included the use of restraints and surgery in order to rid the patients of insanity.¹² A well-known superintendent who believed in strong aggressive therapy was Dr. Benjamin Rush, the attending physician at Pennsylvania Hospital from 1753 to 1813. He encouraged bloodletting, the practice of draining a patient's blood until they nearly fainted in order to cleanse them of their madness. He also used a tranquilizing chair, which attempted to force the patients to remain calm. Another piece of equipment he used with patients was the gyrator, a board onto which the patient was strapped and then spun around, to keep the blood circulating.¹³ Other common practices in asylums were the use of hot and cold baths, strict diets, isolation, restraint, straitjackets, Utica boxes, and chains. However, with the arrival of the Second Great Awakening during the early nineteenth century, psychiatrists, doctors, and reformers began to become concerned with the type of treatment given to the insane patients. A leading goal of the Second Great Awakening was a desire to rid the world of evil before Jesus Christ returned to Earth. As

¹² John M. Hunter, Gary W. Shannon and Stephanie L. Sambrook, "Rings of Madness: Service Areas of 19th Century Asylums in North America," *Social Science and Medicine* 23 (1986): 1034 <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0277953686902625> (accessed January 21, 2012); Lynn Gamwell and Nancy Tomes, *Madness in America: Cultural and Medicine Perceptions of Mental Illness before 1914*, (Binghamton: Cornwell University Press, 1995), 32.

¹³ Gamwell and Tomes, *Madness in America*, 32-33.

a result, reformers began to question the harsh treatments of the mentally ill and instead started to look for more humane ways to cure patients, which resulted in the rise of moral treatment.

Moral treatment moved to the forefront of medical treatment of the insane in the mid-nineteenth century during the Second Great Awakening, prompted in part by the foreign influence of Frenchman Philippe Pinel and the English Tuke family.¹⁴ Philippe Pinel, the creator of moral treatment, focused on the belief that “human beings could be perfected by manipulating their social and physical environment.”¹⁵ The Tukes brought Pinel’s concept of moral treatment to the United States and implemented it in asylums across the country during the Second Great Awakening.¹⁶ Concern for the welfare of the mentally ill grew in tandem with other nineteenth-century reform movements. While the belief that these unfortunate men and women should be isolated from the general public still prevailed, so did an interest in finding better treatments for them. Because of this increasing call for reform, moral treatment, which focused on individualized care, was quickly accepted among superintendents and the public.¹⁷

The basic concept behind moral treatment was to make the patients feel safe during their stay at the asylums by providing them with humane treatment and care.

Western Lunatic Asylum was well known for its practice of this treatment.¹⁸ Dr. Francis

¹⁴ Daniel Walker Howe, “Reason and Revelation,” in *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America 1815-1848* (Cary, North Carolina: Oxford University Press, 2007); Joseph P. Morrissey, and Howard H. Goldman, “Care and Treatment of the Mentally Ill in the United States: Historical Developments and Reforms,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 484 (March, 1986): 12-27.

¹⁵ Morrissey and Goldman, “Care and Treatment of the Mentally Ill,” 14.

¹⁶ William Tuke was a doctor who founded the York Retreat in England in 1792, and his grandson Samuel Tuke helped him found the Friends Asylum in Pennsylvania in 1817. They both believed in and practiced moral treatment.

¹⁷ Morrissey and Goldman, “Care and Treatment of the Mentally Ill,” 15.

¹⁸ This was the previous name of Western State Hospital.

T. Stribling, superintendent of Western Lunatic from 1840 until 1874, strongly advocated for this humane therapy. Stribling, along with other superintendents, believed the design of the asylum as well as the smaller details concerning the patients' experience at the asylum had a direct effect on the success of the treatment. Therefore, they paid particular attention to patients' first arrival at the asylum. Since the landscape and yard was the first thing patients saw when they entered the asylum, superintendents believed it necessary for the surroundings to be well manicured and pleasing to the eye. If the patient was "surrounded by the beautiful forms of nature...his spirit [could] possibly rejoice and sympathize."¹⁹ Dr. Stribling described Western Lunatic Asylum as intentionally situated far enough away from the city, but yet still remaining within its view.²⁰ He believed that the peaceful placement of the asylum would "promote both the comfort and health of its occupants."²¹ The reformatory power of the surrounding environment was believed to help cure the patients by distracting them from the chaos of society outside the asylum.

While the design and appearance of the asylum were significant, the relationship between the mentally ill patients and the doctors was of the utmost importance to many superintendents. Asylums were intentionally designed to only allow a small number of patients to be admitted with the hope that superintendents could develop a close relationship with their patients. When Dr. Stribling became Superintendent at Western Lunatic in 1836, he immediately began developing close relationships with his staff and

¹⁹ "Ohio Lunatic Asylum--Gardening and Insanity," *Ohio Cultivator*, February 15, 1851, 59. American Periodicals.

²⁰ While Dr. Stribling was superintendent at Western Lunatic Asylum, his asylum was recognized as the "best-managed institution of the North." This qualifies him as an excellent source in understanding this type of therapy. "Western Lunatic Asylum," *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* (August 2, 1843), 523, American Periodicals.

²¹ Francis T. Stribling, *The Annual Reports of the Court of Directors of the Western Lunatic Asylum, to the Legislature of Virginia with the Report of the Physician, for 1839* (Staunton: Kenton Harper, 1840), 16-17.

patients. He clearly stated his expectations for the staff's behavior and responsibilities in his By-Laws:

“The attendants are to treat the inmates with respect, and shew such attentions as will evince an interest in their welfare. Under all circumstances, the patients must be treated kindly and affectionately, must be spoken to in a mild and gentle tone of voice, soothed and calmed when irritated, encouraged and cheered when melancholy or depressed.”²²

Stribling did not tolerate the mistreatment of the patients: if any attendant or employee injured or punished the patient in a way that Stribling did not think necessary, it resulted in “instant banishment from the Institution.”²³ This strict policy was carried out in various other asylums to help create a system that made the patients feel safe and respected, allowing them to focus on healing their minds and curing their illnesses.

Another element within moral therapy that was intended to make the patient feel safe was to limit the use of restraints. This differed from previous beliefs that restraints were the only way to control the insane. Before moral treatment was brought to America, devices such as chains and restraining chairs were used to control the patients and keep them from becoming too excited. Under moral treatment, superintendents believed that restraints prevented the patients from relaxing and the staff should avoid using them as much as possible.²⁴

Superintendents hoped that by keeping the patients occupied through daily activities, their minds would not be focused on their own mental problems, and as a result they would be less violent and disruptive. Doctors argued that mental illness correlated

²² Francis Stribling, By-Laws of the Western Lunatic Asylum, 1845, Western Hospital State Archives, State Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

²³ Stribling, *Annual Report for 1839*; Alice David Wood, *Dr. Francis T. Stribling and Moral Medicine: Curing the Insane at Virginia's Western State Hospital: 1836-1874*. Gallileo Gianniny Publishing, 2004, 57.

²⁴ Francis Stribling, *Annual Report of the Court of Directors of the Western Lunatic Asylum to the Legislature of Virginia with the Report of the Physician for 1841*, (Richmond: Shepherd and Colin, 1842), 65.

directly to the mind: “Physicians assumed that insanity was the result of imagination gone astray.”²⁵ In order to keep the mind focused, occupational therapy, or work therapy, was implemented in various ways. Examples of work that male patients commonly employed included cultivating the farm and garden, excavating, cutting wood, making fences, and feeding and attending the animals.²⁶ While men’s labor tended to include manual labor outside around the grounds, women’s work usually focused on spinning, knitting, and sewing clothes and materials for the asylums.²⁷ Superintendents believed that manual labor aided the healing process by exercising the body and mind. Dr. Stribling observed that with work therapy, patients soon developed a moral disgust toward their specific illness or disruptive behavior, which consequently motivated them to work through their problems to get better. Through work therapy, patients’ minds were kept busy, and therefore did not constantly dwell on their personal troubles.²⁸

Overall, moral treatment focused on the patients and their state of mind. Superintendents believed that the sooner the patients entered the asylums and began working on improving their mental health, the greater their chances were to be cured.²⁹ Superintendents bragged about this specific type of treatment in their annual records. They praised Pinel and his philosophy. It was the belief that through the actions and components of moral treatment discussed so far, patients would be cured quickly and would be able to return back to society.

²⁵ Norman, Dain, *Concepts of Insanity: In the United States, 1789-1865* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1964), 8.

²⁶ Stribling, Annual Report 1841, 57.

²⁷ Stribling, *Annual Report for 1839*, 19; Stribling, *Annual Report for 1841*, 57, 58.

²⁸ Wood, Dr. Francis T. Stribling, 46-48; Gamwell, *Madness in America*, 39; Louise S. Laird, "Nursing of the Insane," *The American Journal of Nursing* 2 (December 1901): 174, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3402516>.

²⁹ Gerald Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 103.

Despite these beliefs, changes occurred around the 1850s that challenged the structure and function of the asylum, resulting in a change of treatment. During the second half of the nineteenth century, superintendents faced overcrowding, which threatened the entire concept of moral treatment. As stated earlier, the vision the superintendents shared centered on asylums being small so that patients could be closely monitored and cared for without the use of restraining devices. It soon became apparent, however, that this vision was far from reality. Chronically ill patients along with a growing number of readmitted patients played a significant part in the overcrowding of asylums. In response to this overcrowding, superintendents simply fought for bigger asylums that could hold more patients instead of questioning moral treatment and whether it worked or if the vision for a cure was realistic.³⁰ This fight for expansion occurred because of the public's growing desire to keep mentally ill people from returning to their communities. As a result, superintendents were increasingly forced to keep patients in asylums. This shift of attention that occurred in many asylums countrywide led to a transition from moral treatment to custodial care of the patients.³¹ Custodial care simply means making sure the patients are taken care of and have a bed to sleep in, rather than focusing on therapeutic care. It differs from moral treatment because there is no emphasis on work therapy, or maintaining the comfort of the patients.

Growing asylum populations led to increased discipline and punishment for misbehavior. Doctors began to change their focus from therapy to simply preventing misbehavior and disobedience. The architecture of the asylums themselves also presented a problem. Asylums were built intentionally to be small, only able to house around two

³⁰ Grob, *Mental Institutions in America*, 174-221.

hundred patients, to permit the staff to care for their patients effectively.³² During the late nineteenth century, though, asylums could no longer comfortably accommodate the 400-plus patients they now admitted. The superintendents' response to this problem was to build bigger asylums. During the 1860s and 1870s many new asylums were built while existing asylum buildings often received additions. The struggle to accommodate the growing number of patients became just one of the many new responsibilities superintendents faced, redirecting their focus. Superintendents also grew increasingly overwhelmed with management responsibilities. By having to focus on issues such as overcrowding, the doctors became more concerned with the administrative side of their work, and paid less attention to the patient-staff relationship that was once so important.

Every change that occurred within the existing model of the insane asylum challenged and reshaped all aspects of it. Bigger asylums that held more patients made it difficult for the staff to develop relationships with the patients, which made moral treatment less feasible. The trust and attentive care that was once so crucial in moral treatment became almost impossible to achieve in the mid-nineteenth century. Due to the increasing number of patients, custodial care became the most practical way of dealing with them. This complex transition from moral treatment to custodial care was not simply based on shifting opinions of superintendents towards the mentally ill; this change was shaped by individual decisions made within the mental health field.³³

Eugenics and sexual sterilization emerged in the early twentieth century in response to the social problems of overcrowding in asylums and the persistence of crime

³² Grob, *Mental Institutions in America*, 181.

³³ For more explanation of custodial care, consult Gerald Grob, *Mental Institutions In America: Social Policy to 1875* (New York: The Free Press, 1973); Gerald Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (New York: The Free Press, 1994); David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971).

and mental illness in society. The idea behind eugenics was to improve future generations by improving the genetic pool. Science had moved beyond the notion that mental illness was the result of a confused mind and instead began to blame heredity. The belief that heredity was the leading factor in mental illness supported sterilization. Superintendents could comfortably release patients back to society after their sterilization surgery, with no fear that the feeble-minded would reproduce. Releasing mentally ill patients would then help fix the overcrowding problem that was occurring in asylums throughout the country. Sterilization of the unfit would also help to address rising instances of mental illness, chaos, and crime.³⁴ If mental illness was hereditary and was being transmitted from one generation to another, then prohibiting reproduction of the unfit would help to rid the world of criminals and incompetent people who constantly created chaos.³⁵

Studies done by Francis Galton in the late nineteenth century brought eugenics to the forefront of scientists and superintendents' attention. Galton, who first coined the term "eugenics" in 1883, was an English statistician, biologist, psychologist, and polymath.³⁶ Eugenics is the idea that through science, future breeding can be altered in order to produce purer and more intelligent offspring. Galton believed that science held power over "inanimate nature" and therefore argued that man could alter a future

³⁴ Thomson, "Disability, Psychiatry, and Eugenics," in *Oxford Handbook of Eugenics*, 128.

³⁵ While the eugenics movement rapidly gained momentum and popularity in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the focus on a superior human race and bettering the population had been of interest to people since Ancient Greece, with the dissemination of Plato's "Republic," which is often read as a eugenic tract. Haller, *Eugenics*, 3.

³⁶ Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (Macmillan, 1883) 4; Daniel J. Kevles, *In The Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 1; Richard Lynn, *Eugenics: A Reassessment* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001), 4.

generation's hereditary outcomes through eugenics.³⁷ The thinking was that through the practice of eugenic sterilization, only those people qualified as fit and healthy should be able to reproduce. The feebleminded and unfit would be sterilized and would not be able to reproduce, eventually resulting in the end of mental illness. Galton's ability to travel to places such as Egypt and other African countries allowed him to broaden his understanding of different societies and cultures. It was during these adventures and the observations that occurred during them, that he grew interested in the concept of heredity and the effects it had on people's intelligence and mental state. Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* also influenced him and prompted him to think about evolution and the human race. Galton then set out to determine whether man could take control of his own evolution and breeding, the same way farmers did with their animals and plants. Through Galton's studies and experiments, his definition and concept of eugenics and sterilization came into creation.

In 1865, Galton first published his ideas on heredity in a two-part article in *Macmillan's Magazine*, which was turned in to a book called *Hereditary Genius* in 1869.³⁸ It is important to note that Gregor Mendel's experiments with plants and breeding in 1865, later recognized as the "foundation" of eugenics, were at this point in time largely ignored and "unappreciated" by the scientific community.³⁹ Despite this, years later, scientists and superintendents, such as Dr. DeJarnette at Western State Hospital, would go on to frequently refer to Mendel as a source in order to explain the legitimacy of eugenic sterilization. Galton believed that heredity governed "not only physical

³⁷ Kelves, *In the Name of Eugenics*, 1.

³⁸ Kelves, *In the Name of Eugenics*, 3.

³⁹ Kelves, *In the Name of Eugenics*, 3.

features but also talent and character.”⁴⁰ In the 1870s, he strove to scientifically and mathematically prove that feeble-mindedness was hereditary, and not due to societal influences, the commonly accepted belief. He conducted complex experiments with sweet peas and their genetic tendencies, as well as human subjects and their family trees and blood-lines, which all proved to support his heredity argument.⁴¹ Throughout his studies, Galton noticed something in British and western society which concerned him greatly: dysgenics, or the deterioration of society genetically also called degeneration.⁴² He believed that the populations in Britain and other western societies were deteriorating in intelligence and worth. He also noticed that the more able people were reproducing less and often at a lower rate than the less able people, which alarmed him even more. Galton blamed this discovery on the fact that the more able men and women tended to marry late or not at all because they focused on their careers and considered children as a potential distraction.⁴³

Francis Galton wanted to fix this alarming pattern he had detected in society. He argued that Herbert Spencer’s survival of the fittest theory was failing, and instead humans needed to intervene and control who was reproducing and which genes were passed on to society. Through selective breeding, the mental quality of future generations would be improved.⁴⁴ He believed there were three groups of people: The Desirables, the Passables, and the Undesirables. What determined if someone was a desirable was

⁴⁰ Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry Into Its Laws and Consequences* (Macmillan, 1869), 1-2.

⁴¹ For a more detailed explanation of these experiments, consult *In The Name of Eugenics* by Daniel Kevles.

⁴² Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*.

⁴³ Lynn, *Eugenics: A Reassessment*, 7.

⁴⁴ Francis Galton, “Hereditary Talent and Character,” in *Eugenics: Then and Now*, ed. Carl Jay Bajema, (Pennsylvania: Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, Inc., 1976), 14. He believed that mental qualities are just as controllable as the physical structures of future generations were.

whether he displayed health (energy and vigor), intelligence, and moral character (moral sense, integrity, and trustworthiness). Intelligence, according to Galton, was the defining characteristic of society. It was what distinguished civilized people from barbarians.⁴⁵ The Passables consisted of people who had an average number of these qualities, while Undesirables were often the criminals, feeble-minded, and mentally ill. It was within the Undesirable segment of the population that the birthrate was increasing so much. Eugenic sterilization emerged as an attempt to fix this by controlling their ability to reproduce. Galton wrote “eugenics is the science that deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of race...the race as a whole would be less foolish, less frivolous, less excitable and politically more provident than now.”⁴⁶ Eugenics sought to breed a population with health, intelligence, and moral character, a population of people that would not end up in asylums as a result of feeble-mindedness.

Galton recognized that public opinion and approval would be paramount in the success of eugenics. In order to guarantee the success of this new scientific idea about breeding, Galton came up with three steps that needed to occur. The first step was to get eugenics to be “understood and accepted as fact,” and as an academic discipline which would help ensure further research.⁴⁷ Once that was accomplished, scientists then needed to approach the public with the idea of eugenics and make sure it was understood that eugenics deserved serious consideration so that human quality and intelligence could improve. Then lastly, it must be introduced into the national consciousness, like a new

⁴⁵ Lynn, *Eugenics: A Reassessment*, 4.

⁴⁶ Francis Galton, “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope and Aim,” in *Eugenics: Then and Now*, 45-47.

⁴⁷ Galton, “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aim,” in *Eugenics: Then and Now*, 50; Lynn, *Eugenics: A Reassessment*, 10.

religion. He wanted the public to know that since Nature was failing to breed the fittest and best of men and women, it was now Man's duty to do so.⁴⁸

Galton's wishes were soon granted. In the early twentieth century, eugenics became a large component of the Progressive Era. This was a time of progress and reform within science, politics, economics, and society. Progressives "sought to mediate the problems of modern society" through science and law.⁴⁹ Since the goal of eugenics was to control and manipulate breeding in order to guarantee a superior race, it was classified as progress within the scientific realm, and therefore supported by many progressives.

During this era, both doctors and scientists believed that through science, society could be improved. There was a hope that "the hereditarians and the environmentalists" could work together and use "biological science to improve human society."⁵⁰ Reflective of the time period DeJarnette lived in, he along with many others, supported the scientific evidence and quickly agreed with Mendel's Law and Galton's evidence, all arguing that mental illness was a genetic problem, specifically one that could be fixed. Dr. John Bell, superintendent of the State Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded in Lynchburg, Virginia, believed that Man was "breeding a race of incompetent and socially inadequate people."⁵¹ He continued to state that "through segregation, extra-institutional control, the enactment of eugenical marriage laws, and sterilization, society [was] endeavoring to solve the problem, and all of these beneficent works unite to form the wheel of social

⁴⁸ Galton, "Eugenics; Its Definition, Scope, and Aim," in *Eugenics: Then and Now*, 50.

⁴⁹ Jason S. Lantzer, "The Indiana Way of Eugenics: Sterilization Laws, 1907-1974," 27, in Paul A. Lombardo, *A Century of Eugenics in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Daniel K. Prickens, *Eugenics and the Progressives* (Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 40.

⁵⁰ Prickens, *Eugenics and Progressives*, 40.

⁵¹ Dr. J.H. Bell, "Eugenical Sterilization," April 1929, WSH Archives, Box 88, Folder 23.

progress.”⁵² Doctors and scientists were not alone in their support for eugenics, as the movement gained a wide range of followers.

Supporters of eugenics included President Theodore Roosevelt, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Carnegie Institution.⁵³ In 1908 American geneticist Raymond Pearl noted that eugenics was “catching on” among both radicals and conservatives.⁵⁴ The predominantly white Anglo-Saxon Protestant middle- to upper-class also became interested and involved in the eugenics movement. These people were the ones who often had the money and time to attend lectures and meetings about eugenics. Women also became involved. This social movement “brought women, as social activists if not as researchers, into direct involvement with the world of science.”⁵⁵ This was a unique opportunity for women to not only join this worldwide conversation but also participate in advocating for it.

Regardless of the wide support eugenics had within the country, it did receive some resistance from certain doctors. For example, the original Galtonian eugenic scientists in Britain did not approve of the “sham science” they observed taking place in America.⁵⁶ British scientist David Heron claimed that American eugenics had “careless presentations of data, inaccurate methods of analysis, irresponsible expression of conclusions, and rapid change of opinion.”⁵⁷ That being said, eugenics did not receive significant backlash or resistance in America until after World War II.

⁵² Bell, “Eugenic Sterilization,” April 1929, 2, WSH Archives, Box 88, Folder 23.

⁵³ Lynn, *Eugenics: A Reassessment*, 27.

⁵⁴ Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*, 63.

⁵⁵ Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics* 64.

⁵⁶ Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America’s Campaign to Create a Master Race* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), 99.

⁵⁷ Black, *War Against the Weak*, 99-100.

The Progressive Era was a time of reform and scientific faith as well as a time of racial concerns. Certain supporters of eugenics not only wanted to rid future populations of mental illness and criminal activity, but they also wanted to control racial relationships and only allow people to reproduce with those of the same race. Virginian Walter Plecker, a white supremacist and supporter of eugenics, was a prominent person who advocated that view.⁵⁸ Director of the Bureau of Vital Statistics, Plecker “waged a campaign of threats and intimidations” toward Americans, in order to classify whether they were white or black.⁵⁹ He was able to do this through the passing of the Racial Integrity Act of 1924, which he helped draft and pass. This Act demanded that every citizen of Virginia have his or her racial status, whether black or white, be recorded at birth. The One-Drop Rule was also enacted, stating that if a person had one ancestor in his or her family line, that person was deemed black. The passing of these legislative acts also discouraged bi-racial marriages. These efforts were enforced in the name of eugenics. By keeping races separate from one another, it was believed that better breeding would occur. Another example of the racial concern within the Progressive Era and eugenics movement is Michigan’s Dr. John Harvey Kellogg. In 1906 he founded the Race Betterment Foundation, with the hopes of “Stop[ping] propagation of defectives.”⁶⁰ He supported segregation and agreed with fellow eugenicists, such as Irving Fisher, that the mixing of races would further damage future breeding.

⁵⁸ Douglas Smith, “The Campaign for Racial Purity and the Erosion of Paternalism in Virginia, 1922-1930: “Nominally White, Biologically Mixed, and Legally Negro,” in *The Journal of Southern History* 68, No.1 (Feb. 2002), 65-106, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3069691> (accessed March 24, 2016); Warren Fiske, “The Black-and-White World of Walter Ashby Plecker,” *The Virginian-Pilot*, August 18, 2004, <http://www.nps.gov/jame/learn/historyculture/upload/The-Black-and-White-World-of-Walter-Plecker.pdf> (accessed March 23, 2016).

⁵⁹ Smith, “The Campaign for Racial Purity and the Erosion of Paternalism in Virginia.”

⁶⁰ Black, *War against the Weak*, 88.

Although scientists often encouraged and defended eugenics, there was also a religious undertone to this movement. In the magazine, *Christian Register*, Charles W. Phillips was quoted as saying, “Love gives imperative to protect [the] unborn from defective heredity and upbringing.”⁶¹ Many believed it to be their moral and Christian duty to help protect the unborn, and in their minds it was through sterilization that this protection could occur.

Along with the influences of the Progressive Era, other factors led doctors and superintendents to support eugenic sterilization in the United States.⁶² Some historians, such as Ellen Brantlinger, argue that they supported it for paternalistic reasons, believing that some people needed to be controlled for their own well-being. She argues that the paternalistic attitude of the superintendents influenced their desire to control the sexual reproduction and genetic pool of the mentally ill and feebleminded. Eugenic sterilization was also economically very beneficial. The State was financially responsible for the mentally ill, but often remained responsible for a patient’s entire life, since the majority of patients never left the asylums after they were admitted. Sterilization allowed those mentally ill patients who qualified as “stable” to leave the asylums and not be warehoused as patients, since they no longer presented any threat of reproducing. In addition to allowing patients to return to society, the ultimate goal of eugenics was to

⁶¹ Charles Phillips, “A Moral Basis for Eugenic Sterilization,” *The Christian Register*, Records of Western State Hospital, 1825-2000. Box 88, Folder 25, State government records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

⁶² Prior to the early twentieth-century eugenics movement some physicians had already begun to practice sterilization. German physician Johann Peter Frank had experimented with castration in 1779, and in 1889 American Dr. Henry Sharpe had begun sterilizing males by vasectomy. It is Dr. Sharpe whom historians credit as the first physician to technically begin the practice of sterilization. Following the example of Dr. Sharpe, many fellow doctors began to practice sterilization and to fight for legal power to do it. Dr. Joseph DeJarnette was an extremely powerful voice in Virginia for eugenic sterilization. It was through him and Dr. Albert Priddy that the Virginia Sterilization Law passed favorably with the United States Supreme Court, led by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1924. Ellen Brantlinger, *Sterilization of People with Mental Disabilities: Issues, Perspectives, and Cases* (Westport, Connecticut: Auburn House, 1995).

eventually breed mental illness out of existence, therefore eliminating this significant financial burden and social responsibility.

Despite the eugenics movement's large following, popular support began to decline in the 1960s due to a shift in social attitudes. Sterilization, once seen as a way of giving rights to mentally ill people now began to be seen as a denial of basic rights.⁶³ A famous Supreme Court trial in 1927 involved this very issue with a mentally ill patient named Carrie Buck.⁶⁴ While the Supreme Court eventually ruled in favor of sterilization, it still voiced concern for Buck's rights, which people argued were violated when she was sterilized against her will. People also started claiming that the scientific evidence supporting eugenics was faulty and wrong. It was argued that every gene mattered and scientists should not alter a person's natural original genetic makeup. It was also during this time that popular eugenic magazines and journals started to change their names. President Frederick Osborn of the Society for the Study of Social Biology (which was previously named the American Eugenics Society, but changed its name in 1972), stated,

The society was groping for a wholly new definition of purpose. It was no longer thinking in terms of 'superior' individuals, 'superior' family stocks, or even of social conditions that would bring about a 'better' distribution of births. It was thinking in terms of diversity, in terms of genetic attributes appropriate to different kinds of physical and social environments."⁶⁵

Just as society began to think differently about a 'better' distribution of births and mental states, certain minority groups also started to gain power and rights. Women won the right to abort unborn children and HIV victims were no longer isolated from their communities. Many people began to be more accepting of diversity. This emphasis on

⁶³ Lynn, *Eugenics: A Reassessment*, 37.

⁶⁴ For further reading on Buck vs. Bell, reference Steven Knoll, *Feeble-Minded in Our Midst* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

⁶⁵ F. H. Osborn, "History of the American Eugenics Society," in *Social Biology*, 21, 115-26.

diversity coupled with the association of eugenics with the Nazis caused the eugenic movement to suffer a huge loss of support during the 1960s and 1970s.

Understanding Eugenics through Dr. Joseph DeJarnette's Eyes

Joseph Spencer DeJarnette was born on September 29, 1866 in Pine Forest, Spotsylvania County, Virginia. Following graduation from the Medical College of Virginia with an M.D. in 1888, DeJarnette quickly entered the medical field. DeJarnette interned for a year at Soldier's Home in Richmond, Virginia, before landing an internship at Western State Hospital in Staunton Virginia for a year and a half. In 1904 DeJarnette became the first president of the Augusta County (Virginia) Medical Society. Two years after becoming involved with this society, he was anointed superintendent of Western State Hospital.⁶⁶ Soon after his rise to a position of authority within the hospital, DeJarnette began advocating for eugenic sterilization. In addition to authoring numerous publications explaining the benefits and procedures of eugenics, DeJarnette also taught classes for medical students concerning the concepts of eugenics and mental disease.⁶⁷ During his superintendence, between 1905 and 1943, sterilization became legal in the state of Virginia.⁶⁸ The doctor claimed that he personally sterilized six hundred males at the hospital once the procedure was legalized.⁶⁹ DeJarnette's strong support for and belief in eugenics made him the voice of the movement in Virginia.

Dr. Joseph DeJarnette serves as a strong example of a doctor practicing within the Progressive Era. As a strong advocate for and believer in science and its ability to correct Nature, and a supporter of progress, who also showed racial concerns about future

⁶⁶ Michael Gregory Dorr and the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, "Joseph Spencer DeJarnette (1866–1957)," *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, 19 Jun. 2014. Web. (accessed October 7, 2015).

⁶⁷ John Horsley of St. Elizabeth's Hospital, letter to Joseph DeJarnette, October 28, 1929, WSH Archives, Box 72 Folder 18; Harry Byrd, Governor, letter to DeJarnette, July 25, 1927, WSH Archives Box 72 Folder 15; P.V.D. Conway, letter to DeJarnette, August 21, 1914, WSH Archives Box 72 Folder 12.

⁶⁸ He was the longest serving superintendent at Western State. After retiring in 1943, he remained in charge at the DeJarnette Sanitarium until 1947.

⁶⁹ Biographical Data, WSH Archives Box 72, Folder 1.

generations, DeJarnette strongly agreed with fellow scientists and superintendents in the belief that mental illness and feeble-mindedness were hereditary. DeJarnette argued “heredity ha[d] been designated as the etiological factor in from 60 to 80 per cent of the cases of insanity, feeble-mindedness and epilepsy.”⁷⁰ Because of this, doctors discouraged the mentally ill from having children. Dr. DeJarnette believed that “parenthood should only be encouraged among those with best hereditary traits, and discouraged among defectives by segregation and sterilization.”⁷¹ Doctors hoped that through sterilization they could eventually rid society of mental illness. Their goal was to breed it out of the American population.

Dr. DeJarnette frequently referenced Gregory Mendel and his Law throughout his research. Mendel’s Law attempted to prove that if one parent was a carrier of mental illness, it was likely that the children would be carriers as well.⁷² Scientists claimed that the typical feeble-minded woman would have four children to the college-educated woman’s one.⁷³ The fact that the mentally ill and “deficient” women reproduced at a much higher rate than the more intelligent stable women in society concerned DeJarnette. In his article, “Eugenic Sterilization in Virginia,” he wrote “man seems to have neglected his own breeding and left it to the whims and fancies of the individual.”⁷⁴ DeJarnette pointed out that humans bred animals and vegetables with the intention of producing the best and most perfect kind, but yet humans ignored their own race. He continued to say “the good and the bad, the weak and the strong have bred our race with little or no

⁷⁰ Dr. Joseph DeJarnette, “Sterilization Law of Virginia,” 1, WSH Archives, Box 88, Folder 24,

⁷¹ DeJarnette, “Sterilization Law of Virginia.”

⁷² For more of a detailed explanation of Mendel’s Law, [reference](#) Carl Jay, Bajema, *Eugenics: Then and Now*, (Pennsylvania: Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, Inc., 1976).

⁷³ Dr. Joseph DeJarnette, “Eugenic Sterilization in Virginia,” *Virginia Medical Monthly*, January 1931,2, WSH Archives, Box 88, Folder 24.

⁷⁴ DeJarnette, “Eugenic sterilization in Virginia,” 1, WSH Archives, Box 88, Folder 24.

concerted objective.”⁷⁵ Because of this, DeJarnette argued that the human race needed to begin intentionally breeding only well-educated and successful people in order to improve the intelligence of society. One way to promote this was by sterilizing the mentally ill so that they could not pass their inferior genetic traits on to another generation. Through selective sterilization of the mentally ill, the feeble-minded, and criminals, it was believed that society would benefit and slowly become more intelligent.

DeJarnette’s first mention of his support for eugenics was in the 1909 *Annual Report of Western State Hospital*. Prevention through sterilization was the only way to scientifically control the insane, according to the doctor. DeJarnette admitted that the “method may sound harsh,” but claimed that to not sterilize the feeble-minded was actually a “crime against their offspring and a burden to their State.”⁷⁶ Throughout his time as superintendent, DeJarnette often wrote poems to discuss occurrences at the hospital. In 1920 he wrote a poem entitled “Mendel’s Law,” which very explicitly stated his belief in sterilization and the reason why he believed it necessary:

Mendel’s Law

Oh, why are you men so foolish—
 You breeders who breed our men
 Let the fools, the weaklings and crazy
 Keep breeding and breeding again?
 The criminal, deformed, and the misfit
 Dependent, diseased, and the rest—
 As we breed the human family
 The worst is as good as the best.

Go to the home of some farmer,
 Look through his barns and sheds,
 Look at his horses and cattle,
 Even his hogs are thoroughbreds;
 Then look at his stamp on his children,

⁷⁵ DeJarnette, “Eugenic sterilization in Virginia,” 1, WSH Archives, Box 88, Folder 24.

⁷⁶ Eighty-Second Annual Report and of the Superintendent of the Western State Hospital for 1909, 17, WSH Archives, Box 245 Folder 7.

Lowbrowed with the monkey jaw,
Ape-handed, and silly, and foolish—
Bred true to Mendel's Law.

Go to some homes in the village,
Look at the garden beds,
The cabbages, the lettuce and turnips
Even the beets are thoroughbreds;
Then look at the many children
With hands like the monkey's paw,
Bowlegged, flatheaded, and foolish—
Bred true to Mendel's Law.

This is the law of Mendel,
And often he makes it plain,
Defectives will breed defectives
And the insane breed insane.
Oh, why do we allow these people
To breed back to the monkey's nest,
To increase our country's burdens
When we should breed from the good and the best.

O, you wise men, take up the burden
And make this your loudest creed,
Sterilize the misfits promptly—
All not fit to breed.
Then our race will be strengthened and bettered,
And our men and our women be blest,
Not apish, repulsive, and foolish,
For we should breed from the good and the best.⁷⁷

Along with his numerous publications concerning eugenics, Dr. DeJarnette also was involved with the legal aspect of the movement. In 1924 he testified in support of sterilization during the mentioned Supreme Court case involving Carrie Buck. Miss Buck was a seventeen-year-old patient at the State Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded in Albemarle County, Virginia. Her mother, Emma Buck, had been diagnosed as having the mental age of a seven-year-old and was also a patient at the Colony. The case centered on the fact that Carrie already had an illegitimate child who was deemed mentally defective,

⁷⁷ Western State Hospital, 1920 Report, 13, WSH Archives, Box 246 Folder 3.

and the Court questioned whether or not Carrie should be sterilized. The Colony's doctor, Dr. A.S. Priddy, after observing her, came to the conclusion that it was both necessary and justified to sterilize her in order to prevent future mentally ill children. Dr. DeJarnette supported Dr. Priddy and testified, saying, "If both parents are feeble-minded, it is practically certain that the children will all be feeble-minded."⁷⁸ DeJarnette believed that if a person was unable to financially support himself because of his inherited mental condition, he should not have had the right to be born.⁷⁹ As a result, DeJarnette did not think Carrie Buck should be able to bear any more children, but rather needed to be sterilized.

In addition to improving society and its collective intelligence, DeJarnette believed sterilization had significant economic benefits as well.⁸⁰ Once patients were discharged from the mental hospitals, they often bore children, creating a continuous flow of mentally ill patients constantly being admitted back into the hospitals. This led to a financial burden on the State because the hospitals held the sole responsibility to care for and house these feebleminded children. In an article DeJarnette wrote for the *Virginia Health Bulletin*, he shared a picture of six women who were patients in his hospital.⁸¹ The three women in the first row were full sisters, as were the three women in the second row. Two of the women already had children and were married. He used this picture to argue that just these six patients alone would cost the State annually \$690 and most likely even more when they had more children who would most likely also be mentally ill.

⁷⁸ Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia: Carrie Buck, September Term, 1925, 5, WSH Archives, Box 88, Folder 27.

⁷⁹ DeJarnette, "Sterilization law of Virginia," 1, WSH Archives, Box 88, Folder 24.

⁸⁰ In a letter to Trinkle, DeJarnette said that in 1939, over 3,200 patients had been sterilized which would save Virginia over 380 million dollars over the next thirty years; Joseph DeJarnette, letter to Hon. E. Lee Trinkle, July 14, 1939, WSH Archives, Box 74 Folder 6.

⁸¹ Dr. Joseph DeJarnette, "The Prevention of Insanity: Heredity," in *Virginia Health Bulletin*, March 5, 1915, WSH Archives, Box 88, Folder 24.



Fig. 1 *Virginia Health Bulletin*, 2

DeJarnette argued that eugenic sterilization could fix this burdensome financial problem as it was “cheap and effective.”⁸² By not allowing the mentally ill to reproduce, the number of these people in society would decrease, which would lower the admittance of patients per year in institutions, thereby saving the State money.

The American eugenics movement flourished during the push for social activism and political reform that characterized the Progressive Era. DeJarnette’s efforts exemplified many Progressive impulses. He showed a strong faith in science and a belief that through the efforts of sterilization, people could breed more superior generations, and as a result, fix society. In his arguments for eugenic sterilization, he attempted to assure society that patients would receive basic rights as a result of sterilization, rights that he argued they deserved. Mental hospitals often served as long-term homes for the mentally ill. The patients often stayed in the hospitals for years because they could not be cured. Though the patients did not threaten society’s safety, the fear that they would reproduce if they were released kept the asylums from discharging them. DeJarnette wrote in an article, “In my mind, sterilization is by far the kindest and best method to render the unfit to live on the outside, to make a living and to have a social life not very different from his

⁸² 88th Annual Report, Western State Hospital, 1915, 10, WSH Archives, Box 245 Folder 11.

more fortunate brother.”⁸³ Through sterilization, these patients would have the opportunity to leave the hospitals, be married, and enjoy the life of happiness and opportunity that DeJarnette believed they deserved, without the fear of their sexual drive resulting in further generations of mentally deficient people. DeJarnette believed that man’s strongest instinct was his sexual drive, and to deny the insane a sex life was “a cruelty.”⁸⁴ Doctors claimed that the operation did not hurt the patients’ sexual drive and that the healing time was minimal. According to the arguments made by DeJarnette, it appeared that sterilization was beneficial for both the hospital and the patient: the surgical operation saved the hospitals money and alleviated the State’s financial burden, and patients obtained freedom and a life outside the asylum.

⁸³ DeJarnette, “Eugenic Sterilization,” WSH Archives, Box 88 Folder 24; Eighty-Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Directors and the Superintendent of the Western Sate Hospital, 1911, 11, WSH Box 245 Folder 8.

⁸⁴ DeJarnette, “Eugenic Sterilization,” 7, WSH Archives, Box 88 Folder 24.

Opinions of DeJarnette

In 1939, a toast given by W. Clyde Maddox, in honor of Dr. DeJarnette, asked, “Who has served here fifty years, who has calmed so many fears, and helped to dry so many tears? That is Dr. DeJarnette.”⁸⁵ During his time at Western State Hospital, DeJarnette was loved and respected by many: patients, relatives of patients, fellow doctors, and the community of Staunton. He kept a warm and welcoming hospital, which other doctors and the public frequently visited. One of his highest priorities was maintaining an open dialogue with the relatives of patients, writing many letters in order to inform families of their loved one’s condition. The party thrown for the 50th anniversary of DeJarnette’s tenure as superintendent at Western State brought in a large volume of letters from doctors countrywide as well as governors of Virginia, all of whom praised his work and dedication towards the mentally ill. The evidence shown in this section concerning the public’s overwhelming approval and appreciation of Dr. DeJarnette presents more than just a dramatic change in his reputation; it sheds light on to the society in which this doctor practiced. The numerous letters, reports, and toasts surrounding DeJarnette, praising his capability as a doctor as well as his intelligence and ability to understand progressive science, supports the argument that eugenic sterilization was a wide social movement. For the most part, Dr. Joseph DeJarnette did not receive negative criticisms during his time of participation of sterilization, which is reflective of that specific time period and the support that many classes and types of people had of eugenics.

⁸⁵ W. Clyde Maddox, Toast to DeJarnette, July 21, 1939, WSH Archives, Box 74 Folder 13.

Western State Hospital was a home for the feeble-minded and mentally ill, as well as a popular place for doctors and relatives of patients to visit.⁸⁶ Dr. George Wright of Southwestern State Hospital and his wife visited Western State in 1937, and wrote that the “whole atmosphere [was] so bright” and the “food provided was wonderful.”⁸⁷ James M. Graham, an employee of the First National Farmers Bank, wrote DeJarnette on May 19, 1937 following a recent visit he himself had made to the DeJarnette Sanatorium. He recalled receiving “courteous treatment and hospitality,” and stated that DeJarnette deserved a “great deal of credit for bringing this institution to such a high standard.”⁸⁸ Along with the positive atmosphere and excellent visits, Dr. DeJarnette encouraged relatives and friends to write letters to the patients to keep them from feeling “neglected.”⁸⁹ Relatives not only wrote to the patients, but also to DeJarnette.

From records it appears that the doctor kept in touch with a large percentage of relatives and regularly informed them about the progress of their loved ones at the hospital. It was through these letters that the relatives often expressed feelings of gratitude, love, and trust in Dr. DeJarnette. Alexander Hamilton of Petersburg, Virginia, wrote to DeJarnette on July 24, 1939, recalling his visit. He praised the doctor, writing that he “couldn’t keep the tears out of [his] eyes when [he] thought of all [his] kindness to the many unfortunate ones, [his] own precious boy included.”⁹⁰ Despite Hamilton not being able to see his boy Herbert during his visit, he and his wife were not upset but

⁸⁶ Visiting hours were offered every day from 8:00-12:00 pm and 2:00-5:30 pm; Letter head of Western State Hospital, WSH Archives, Box 72, Folder 12.

⁸⁷ Dr. and Mrs. Wright of Southwestern State Hospital, letter to DeJarnette, WSH Archives, Box 72, Folder 22.

⁸⁸ James M. Graham, of The First National Farmers Bank, letter to DeJarnette, May 19, 1937, WSH Archives, Box 72, Folder 22.

⁸⁹ Letter Head of Western State, WSH Archives, Box 72, Folder 12.

⁹⁰ Alexander Hamilton, Letter to DeJarnette, July 24, 1939, WSH Archives, Box 74, Folder 13.

rather realized “how impossible” it was on such an occasion, since it occurred on the same day that a guest speaker was giving a presentation at the hospital. This type of trust the relatives had in DeJarnette is evident in another letter from Robert Reese, who wrote to DeJarnette in 1918. Reese wrote the doctor to thank him for a letter he had received earlier that month and to “assure [DeJarnette] [his] kindness and consideration for [his] poor old demented Father ha[d] added another obligation.”⁹¹ He continued in his letter to say that the hospital was at the highest level of effectiveness in the country and that he was proud of his state for “selecting and keeping” DeJarnette as the head of the hospital.⁹²

DeJarnette sought to make his patients as comfortable as he was able to during their stay. Laura Carter of Alabama wrote in 1931 thanking Dr. DeJarnette for allowing her relative Edward to have his own room during his stay at Western State. She was “very thankful to hear that Edward is looking well and doing well,” to which she credited DeJarnette’s thoughtfulness.⁹³

Relatives of patients were not the only people who wrote and kept up a good relationship with Dr. DeJarnette; discharged patients did as well. Patients tended to write DeJarnette to let him know they had been able to remain cured from whatever disease they previously had. In 1927, ex-patient J.R. Whited wrote to DeJarnette to update him on his life since he had been discharged, explaining how he had suddenly lost both his brother and his son. Despite those hard times, he remembered DeJarnette’s advice from years previous, that things would be “better by and by,” which helped him to avoid a

⁹¹ Robert G. Reese, letter to DeJarnette, October 9, 1918, WSH Archives, Box 72 Folder 13.

⁹² Reese, letter to DeJarnette, WSH Archives, Box 72, Folder 13.

⁹³ Laura Armistad Carter, letter to DeJarnette, December 3, 1931, WSH Archives, Box 72, Folder 20.

relapse.⁹⁴ He also told DeJarnette that he had “cured him” and because of that and how much he had done for the unfortunate men and women, God would have a “special crown” for the doctor in heaven.⁹⁵ It is unclear whether these above-mentioned patients were subjected to sterilization. Despite this, it is evident that many patients and relatives both thought highly of DeJarnette and believed in his ability to treat the mentally ill, during the time he actively practiced eugenic sterilization.

Dr. Joseph DeJarnette was described once in a toast given by Laura Carter at a party as having a “friendly nature and magnetic personality,” as well as an “ambition to love and serve humanity.”⁹⁶ Positive characteristics and descriptions, such as the compliments in the previous toast, often were used to describe DeJarnette’s personality. In numerous letters, men and women showered him with compliments about his integrity and dedication to Western State Hospital. Charles J. Smith, President of Roanoke College, wrote DeJarnette that he respected and applauded him because of his “integrity of character, [his] warmth of sympathy, and [his] devotion to the helpless.”⁹⁷ DeJarnette’s apparent sympathy towards the feeble-minded and mentally ill patients was apparent to the people within the community. T.H. Daniel, a colleague of his, wrote “those who came to you (DeJarnette) in trouble and distress, learned to know you and to love you for your kindness to and sympathy with them.”⁹⁸ The doctor’s ability to “feel for and consider the weaknesses of human nature” and to dedicate his life’s work to solving the problem of mental illness allowed him to be “outstanding in [the] community” of Staunton.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ J.R. Whited, letter to DeJarnette, December 29, 1927, WSH Archives, Box 72, Folder 15

⁹⁵ Whited, letter to DeJarnette, WSH Archives, Box 72 Folder 15.

⁹⁶ Mrs. Croghan, Toast for DeJarnette, May 28, 1934, WSH Archives, Box 72, Folder 21.

⁹⁷ Chas. Smith, President of Roanoke College, letter to DeJarnette, WSH Archives, Box 74, Folder 6.

⁹⁸ T.H. Daniel, letter to DeJarnette, July 14, 1939, WSH Archives, Box 74, Folder 6.

⁹⁹ Croghan, Toast for DeJarnette, WSH Archives Box 72, Folder 21.

DeJarnette cared for the patients, wanted them to be comfortable, managed a beautiful and effective institution, and made correspondence with relatives of patients a priority. These actions of his are also reflective of the ideas of the Progressive Era which included the notion that social problems could be corrected with science. DeJarnette was not only a respected man of character, but he also was highly regarded and respected in terms of his work as a superintendent and doctor.

“Why can not public servants much as you live more than one generation?”¹⁰⁰

Attorney-At-Law H. Redd of Richmond, Virginia, asked this question of DeJarnette. Redd wrote to DeJarnette in 1936 after reading the annual report for Western State Hospital. He was so pleased with DeJarnette’s accomplishments at the hospital that he wished DeJarnette could live longer than normal in order to continue his work. Redd “most heartily endorse[d] and approve[d]” his work of sterilization and believed that it would do much to help the future.¹⁰¹ John Walkare agreed and went so far as to say that DeJarnette’s “long and tremendously useful life and [his] service to [his] fellow men and women entitle[d] [him] to rank with the immortals.”¹⁰² Doctors, lawyers, governors, and many more saw DeJarnette’s annual reports and his practice of sterilization at Western State Hospital as something to be proud of and that his work “had given all superintendents in the state of Virginia a splendid mark at which to shoot.”¹⁰³ In the early twentieth century eugenics was the answer, so DeJarnette’s advocacy for it made him a medical role model. The major shift in DeJarnette’s reputation reflects the complicated legacy that he left behind.

¹⁰⁰ H. Carter Redd, letter to DeJarnette, February 6, 1936, WSH Archives, Box 72 folder 22.

¹⁰¹ Redd, letter to DeJarnette, WSH Archives, Box 72, Folder 22.

¹⁰² John Walkare, letter to DeJarnette, January 2, 1935, WSH Archives, Box 72 folder 21.

¹⁰³ Paul S. Blandford, of Virginia Industrial School for Boys, letter to DeJarnette, WSH Archives, Box 74, Folder 6.

H. M. Davis, member of the Special Board of Directors at Lynchburg's Colony in Virginia, stated how wonderful it was to be "associated in an official capacity" with DeJarnette and his work.¹⁰⁴ E.W. Magruder, Chief Chemist of the Department of Agriculture and Immigration of the State of Virginia, commented that DeJarnette's work was done with "so much interest, thoroughness, honest and ability."¹⁰⁵ The President of the *Waynesboro News-Virginian*, Louis Spilman, declared that he knew of "no one who ha[d] contributed more to society" than DeJarnette.¹⁰⁶ Senator Byrd's description of the doctor's great humanitarian work was corroborated by many.¹⁰⁷ How did this one man, who was seen as a "protector" of patients who had done his job "admirably" become remembered as a man of evil intentions?¹⁰⁸ Why did his reputation become that of a monster?

¹⁰⁴ H.M. Davis, letter to DeJarnette, January 1, 1931, WSH Archives, Box 72, Folder 20.

¹⁰⁵ B.W. Magruder, letter to DeJarnette, July 19, 1939, WSH Archives, Box 74 Folder 13

¹⁰⁶ Louis Spilman, of *Waynesboro News-Virginian*, July 18, 1939, WSH Archives, Box 74 Folder 6.

¹⁰⁷ Harry Byrd, response to invitation for 50th Anniversary Party, July 21, 1939, WSH Archives, Box 74, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Redd, letter to DeJarnette, WSH Archives, Box 72, Folder 22; T.H. Daniel, letter to DeJarnette, WSH Archives, Box 74, Box 6

Rewriting History

German historian Leopold von Ranke once argued that fellow historians needed to write history that showed “what actually happened.”¹⁰⁹ Ranke believed that a historian’s job was to simply research deep inside the archives in an attempt to find the real story of an event. Once the truth was discovered and thoroughly researched, the historian could then record the story as it was. He argued that it was the historian’s responsibility to record history without bias, and never to interpret a story in order to fit one’s needs. Historians should tell “what actually happened,” in order to guarantee truth and reliability. Even though von Ranke valued historical accuracy and integrity above all else, one truth he failed to acknowledge was that history is always biased.

Yet historical accuracy, along with Ranke’s philosophy, is currently being jeopardized by the “rewriting” of history via the Internet. The scholarship on mental health and eugenics, including that by historians such as Gerald Grob, David Rothman, Richard Lynn, Roy Porter, Daniel Pick, Charles Davenport, and Daniel Kevles to just name a few, is not the source of the problem. Instead, the rising popularity of the Internet has allowed certain aspects of history to be rewritten easily. The Internet attracts a large audience that can publish its opinions with a click of a button, without needing specific credentials to do such. This freedom has caused some historical narratives, such as Dr. DeJarnette’s legacy, to be quietly transformed into entirely new entities.

“On the Internet,” one historian wrote, “nobody knows you’re a dog—and they can’t be sure, either, that you’re a credentialed historian.”¹¹⁰ This statement presents some of the concerns that historians harbor about the Internet. In recent scholarship,

¹⁰⁹ Leopold Von Ranke, *The Secret of World History: Selected Writings on The Art and Science of History* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1981), 58.

¹¹⁰ “I am nevertheless a historian” 5

historians have discussed the opportunities given to them by the popular World Wide Web, but also the numerous challenges that go along with those opportunities. While the Internet does offer a speedier publishing process than that of a typical academic monograph, historians are still hesitant to commit fully to digital history, given the numerous obstacles and challenges that also come along with it.¹¹¹ But, if the historians are not writing history online, who is? Historian Marshall Poe claims that the “uncritical, poorly informed, and with axes to grind—are now writing ‘our’ history.”¹¹² Historian Robert Wolff also believes that “people with little or no formal training in the [history] discipline have embraced the writing of history on the web...”¹¹³ Nevertheless, some historians are attempting to embrace the digital world.

Timothy Messer-Kruse, historian and author of *The Trial of the Haymarket Anarchists*, attempted to break barriers between professional historian and the general public by contributing to a site dedicated to the Haymarket Affair. Upon visiting the page dedicated to this event in *Wikipedia*, “the free online encyclopedia that anyone can edit,” he noticed that it included the common misconception that there was no evidence at the trials. Messer-Kruse strongly disagreed with this interpretation, and tried to edit the page. He backed up his revisions through the use of documents, “verbatim testimony from the trial,” and a peer-reviewed article he had written, in order to show the reality that a wide variety of evidence presented. Despite this scholarly evidence, *Wikipedia* rejected his

¹¹¹ The option of publishing thoughts and research through blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter, Flickr, and personal websites, along with other media on the Internet, allows for almost immediate access to the public. Despite this advantage, debate on where historians belong and how they can contribute via the Internet is still taking place.

¹¹² Leslie, Madsen-Brookes, “‘I am Nevertheless a Historian’: Digital Historical Practice and Malpractice, around Black Confederate Soldiers,” 5, in Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki, eds. *Writing History in the Digital Age*, (CT: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

¹¹³ Robert, S. Wolff, “The Historian’s Craft, Popular Memory and Wikipedia,” 2, in Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki, eds. *Writing History in the Digital Age*, (CT: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

edits, saying that his beliefs were the ‘minority view’ and that “you should not delete information supported by the majority of sources to replace it with a minority view.”¹¹⁴

Wikipedia did not take into consideration that Messer-Kruse was a trained and professional historian, but rather excluded his arguments simply because they were not in line with the commonly accepted story.

Another example of this in *Wikipedia* deals with eugenics and its relationship with women. Historian Martha Saxton, a teacher of a women’s history class, assigned her students to research and create new *Wikipedia* pages, or to simply edit existing pages. One of her students, Leah Cerf, revised the page, “Eugenics in the United States.” *Wikipedia* approved the edits made about women being victims of eugenics, but did not approve of her revisions including information about women advocating the procedure. The editor apparently told Leah that it was “anti-women” and “biased” to write about women’s role in supporting the “dark pseudoscience.”¹¹⁵ *Wikipedia* did not want to show the complicated story of women and eugenics, but rather preferred to just continue perpetuating the notion that women were only victims. These examples highlight the hardships and challenges that face historians via the Internet, while at the same time, showing how easily the general public can contribute to writing history, resulting often in the rewriting of an event to support public misconceptions.

Along with the rising popularity and accessibility of the Internet, the growing interest in dark tourism also presents both challenges and opportunities to historians.

Dark tourism, otherwise known as thanatourism, was derived from the Greek word for

¹¹⁴ Timothy, Messer-Kruse, “The ‘Undue Weight’ of Truth on Wikipedia,” *The Chronicle Review*, February 12, 2012.

¹¹⁵ Martha, Saxton, “Wikipedia and Women’s History: A Classroom Experience,” 2, in Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki, eds. *Writing History in the Digital Age*, (CT: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

“death.” Dark tourism focuses on remembering the darker times and events throughout history in order to capture public interest, because, as one historian has noted, “people have long been drawn to the sites and scenes of disaster, murder, execution and war.”¹¹⁶ One example of this is the opening of Auschwitz, a concentration camp Hitler used to exterminate Jews during World War II, as a tourist destination. Fascination with the pain and horrors that took place there has fueled public interest in touring the facilities that held the prisoners. Now that visitors can actually visit a concentration camp in person, learning about the Holocaust has become an engaging story about the people who experienced it and the hardships they endured. Abandoned buildings, such as old asylums, are also a popular attraction to the common explorer and lover of dark history. Many believe that by walking the halls of the old insane asylums or other abandoned buildings, they are able to connect and learn their history better and more personally.

It is common for the average person to associate certain emotions and beliefs with specific topics or events. For example, when people hear “Holocaust,” they often think of Hitler or concentration camps. The same association occurs with certain terms related to mental health. Often, terms such as “insane asylum,” “insanity,” “crazy people,” “eugenics,” and “sterilization” can elicit preconceived ideas. Many of these ideas about historical mental health practices are often connected to a story of darkness, torture, misunderstood helpless individuals, and evil doctors. Because the history surrounding the rise and development of insane asylums is complicated and does have its ugly parts, many people prefer to cling solely to the darker aspects of the story and forget about the rest.

¹¹⁶ Suzannah Lipscomb, “Shedding Light on Dark History,” *History Today* 65 no.4 (April 2015): 46.

The combination of Western State Hospital's abandoned, decaying, massive brick buildings, and its past history as an asylum where eugenic sterilization was practiced make it a prime target for those interested in dark history. As a result, the history behind Dr. DeJarnette and his involvement with the eugenics movement is being gradually and quietly rewritten. Yet DeJarnette's past and story are complex. He did strongly advocate for eugenic sterilization, leading Virginia to become heavily involved in the practice, but he also wrote reports and letters detailing his supposed concern and admiration for his patients and fought for their basic rights, such as freedom to leave the asylum. He was also respected and admired by both the community and the medical field.

In addition to the popular interest in sites of dark history, another recent development has also contributed to the rewriting of DeJarnette's story. The city of Staunton, Virginia, has recently decided to tear down the old buildings of Western State Hospital along with the DeJarnette State Sanitarium. The city has already begun the destruction of some buildings in order to build a high-end shopping mall. This news has dismayed many preservationists and historians. Most Staunton citizens have a very basic understanding of Western State Hospital's history. The buildings and remains serve as physical reminders of the hospital's past, generating questions and sparking people's interest in their past history and purpose. Once these buildings are gone, another piece of the institution's history will be lost and soon forgotten. Yet one way that historians can preserve some of that history is by collecting materials relevant to DeJarnette and Western State Hospital and making them publicly available via the Internet.

Websites as Communicators of History

Websites devoted to Western State Hospital's abandoned buildings and the dark past surrounding Dr. Joseph DeJarnette have proliferated in recent years. Because the majority of Western State's historical documents are located at the Library of Virginia's Archives, many people instead simply search the Internet for answers to the questions they may have concerning this doctor. The story that is predominantly portrayed on most websites states that Dr. Joseph DeJarnette tortured and abused the helpless and innocent mentally ill. He forcefully sterilized his patients and looked to Hitler as his hero. He was not a highly reputable man within society and definitely not a leader within the medical field. The remainder of this section will explore the misconceptions that riddle these websites.

A simple Google search on the terms 'DeJarnette' and 'Western State Hospital' produces multiple results. But exploring those results often reveals little that is factual and much more that is sensationalistic, impressionistic, and downright incorrect. For example, one recurring theme is that, under the command of DeJarnette, "patients were tortured" and often sterilized against their will in the basement of the asylum.¹¹⁷ Users who comment on such sites are also a powerful voice in solidifying and perpetuating such stories surrounding the doctor. A website user named Iglegli who visited the *I'm Spatial* site, which deals with the question of what to do with the DeJarnette buildings, stated passionately that, "[she] really [doesn't] see how anyone could consciously put their head down at night in that place [Western State] knowing that kids were brutalized, beaten,

¹¹⁷ SE Lindberg, "DeJarnette Sanitarium; a vacation to Silent Hill?," August 1, 2011, <http://www.selindberg.com/2011/08/dejarnette-sanitarium-vacation-to.html>; and "Western State Hospital," Haunted Places, <http://www.hauntedplaces.org/item/western-state-hospital-dejarnette-building/>.

experimented on, sterilized against their will...”¹¹⁸ A personal blog posted by S.E. Lindberg, in which he discusses a recent road trip taken with his family, also makes mention of torturous deeds attributed to DeJarnette. During the road trip that Lindberg discusses, he and his family stopped for the night in Staunton, Virginia, home of Western State Hospital. He explained to his readers that their hotel room overlooked the abandoned buildings that once stood as DeJarnette Sanitarium. After a long and detailed description of the horror movie, *Silent Hill*, Lindberg then compares DeJarnette to this movie by saying that the doctor’s “butchery and sexual motivation reek of Pyramid Head,” a demon character in *Silent Hill* who rapes his victims.¹¹⁹ This traveler, who admitted to having no previous knowledge of DeJarnette until stopping at that hotel, felt justified in making that assumption of the doctor’s intentions and actions.

As these few examples demonstrate, Dr. DeJarnette is currently being portrayed as someone who brutally tortured and abused his patients. What these websites fail to mention is how DeJarnette argued that sterilization actually helped his patients. DeJarnette wanted the mentally ill to be able to leave the asylum and enter the real world again, but this was something they could only do once they were sterilized. The doctor also wrote articles sharing details on the surgical procedures for sterilization on both women and men, and explained how their recovery was often extremely rapid. But the story that these websites share only highlights the supposed torture that DeJarnette practiced.

Another common point made on a variety of websites is the relationship between Dr. DeJarnette and Hitler. It is commonly believed that DeJarnette thought of Hitler as a

¹¹⁸ I’m Spatial, “What to do with the DeJarnette Center,” May 28, 2007, in Staunton, Urban Design, <https://imspatial.wordpress.com/2007/05/28/what-to-do-with-the-dejarnette-center/>.

¹¹⁹ SE Lindberg, “DeJarnette Sanitarium”

hero of eugenics and that DeJarnette sought to be more like Hitler. For example, the website *Roadtrippers*, a rapidly growing website that helps map out exciting and “off the beaten path” places across the country, writes that DeJarnette was “known for roaming the halls while quoting Adolf Hitler.”¹²⁰ This is a piece of DeJarnette’s past that many websites emphasize. The *Roadtrippers* website is not entirely wrong; DeJarnette did occasionally use Hitler as a source of information concerning eugenics, but what many people do not know or consider is that he did so before the extent of Hitler’s behavior became widely known. Dr. DeJarnette was not supporting or advocating murder of the Jews but rather Hitler’s beliefs concerning eugenics and race.¹²¹ This sheds light on a more nuanced portrayal of Dr. DeJarnette. He was neither monster nor savior. Instead he was a doctor practicing amidst the Progressive Era, divided between the racial and eugenicist views of his time, and the desire to cure his patients.

The current-day view of Dr. DeJarnette as a monster recalls the famous journalist Hannah Arendt’s notion of the “banality of evil” which refers to the normalization of evil to the point where it is accepted as common. Arendt based this concept on her analysis of German Adolf Eichmann’s court trial concerning his involvement with the Nazi concentration camps. Arendt claimed that Eichmann was not a purely evil monster, but rather a man who had been surrounded by evil to the point where it became normal and acceptable.¹²² One could argue that Dr. DeJarnette and his involvement in eugenics can

¹²⁰ “DeJarnette Children’s Asylum,” Roadtrippers, <https://Roadtrippers.com/us/staunton-va/points-of-interest/dejarnette-childrens-asylum?lat=40.80972&lng=-96.67528&z=5>

¹²¹ Hitler did not want to wipe out the Jewish population because they were incompetent or mentally weak, but rather because they were competition to him. His motives were very different from those of DeJarnette. See Richard Lynn, *Eugenics: A Reassessment* and Daniel Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*.

¹²² Chloe Cooper Jones, “This New Hannah Arendt Documentary Is a Warning About the Fascist Within Us All,” in *Vice* (April 11, 2016). <http://www.vice.com/read/this-new-hannah-arendt-documentary-is-a-warning-about-the-nazi-within-us-all> (accessed April 12, 2016); Hannah Arendt, “Eichmann in

be viewed similarly, that he was not a purely evil monster but rather a product of the time period that influenced him.

The widely popular *Wikipedia* site describes Dr. DeJarnette as “a vocal proponent of eugenics, specifically the compulsory sterilization of the mentally ill.”¹²³ The scholarly *Virginia Dictionary of American Biography* also describes Dr. DeJarnette very similarly.¹²⁴ This loaded description of the doctor leaves much unsaid, as well as making it appear as if his involvement with eugenics is the only real element worth remembering from his time as Superintendent.¹²⁵ Unfortunately many websites simply include that broad statement or one very similar, and then move on to other stories concerning the man. For example, blogger Matthew Warner writes “DeJarnette and Western State are only spoken in hushed tones in Staunton mainly because...DeJarnette was a public advocate of eugenics.”¹²⁶ Warner fails to provide any further historical background concerning the worldwide eugenics movement, and instead proceeds to discuss DeJarnette’s involvement with sterilization at Western State. The *Undersiders* website, which is composed of “amateur historians, photographers, and explorers” who document lost and forgotten places, describes DeJarnette as “a few straws short to say the least.”¹²⁷ This website does not portray the doctor as a medical leader or a role model, but instead

Jerusalem—1,” *New Yorker* (February 16, 1963), <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1963/02/16/eichmann-in-jerusalem-i> (accessed April 12, 2016).

¹²³ “Joseph DeJarnette, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_DeJarnette

¹²⁴ “Joseph S. DeJarnette,” Encyclopedia Virginia, http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/DeJarnette_Joseph_Spencer_1866-1957#start_entry; This site eventually gives more historical information concerning the doctor, but the immediate information provided only states that he was a very active eugenicist.

¹²⁵ DeJarnette also worked on expanding the hospital, using fewer restraints, and treating alcoholics.

¹²⁶ Matthew Warner, “Former Insane Asylums in Staunton, Virginia,” blog, <http://matthewwarner.com/former-insane-asylums-in-staunton-virginia/>.

¹²⁷ “DeJarnette’s Children Asylum,” Undersiders, January 20, 2013, <http://undersiders.com/dejarnette-childrens-asylum/>

describes him as a cruel man, where “twisted stuff” occurred “under his guidance.”¹²⁸ The lack of historical or scientific background information prevents viewers from fully comprehending DeJarnette as a part of his time period. In order to understand his beliefs and arguments, it is important to understand the broader context of the worldwide eugenic movement and the scientific conversation that was taking place around him.

Captions used to describe images along with the text within websites are very powerful and can also carry a clear message. Historian Errol Morris discussed the power of photographs and captions with Dartmouth professor and expert of digital photography Hany Farid in a recent *New York Times* article. During their conversation, Morris explained, “It is the labels, the captions, and the surrounding text that turn images from one thing into another.”¹²⁹ The caption associated with an individual image often controls how the image itself is seen and understood. For example, the captions provided on website *Undersiders* uses phrases such as “creepy chair” or “another unsettling find.” The first caption alone turns a simple chair into a dark and sinister object. The language used on many of these websites, either through the text provided or through comments left by users, is also a powerful indicator of their focus and intended message. Again, the website *Undersiders* is a prime example. It begins by claiming, “the place had [him] on [his] toes because of its history and the unknown.”¹³⁰ By immediately focusing on the element of fear, this website sets the stage for a purposefully dark interpretation of the hospital’s grounds and history.

Paranormal activity is also a major component in the rewriting of DeJarnette’s history. Fascination with abandoned buildings, tortured patients, and sterilization all help

¹²⁸ “DeJarnette’s Children Asylum,” *Undersiders*.

¹²⁹ Errol, Morris, “Photography as a Weapon,” in *New York Times*, August 11, 2008.

¹³⁰ “DeJarnette’s Children Asylum,” *Undersiders*.

to perpetuate a belief that the buildings connected to DeJarnette are haunted. The interest in ghosts and the possibility of encountering tortured souls left to haunt the abandoned hallways attract public interest. A group known as Black Raven Paranormal consists of a team of explorers who visit a variety of places attempting to find traces of paranormal activity. For the past few years they have presented a weekly show during the month of October in Staunton, Virginia. Participants sit on the steps of the abandoned Sanitarium while Black Raven members discuss DeJarnette and the “ghost stories” that have been “reported there at the Sanitarium for many, many years.”¹³¹ Marty Seibel, founder of Black Raven Paranormal, believes that “hauntings and history go hand in hand... you can’t have one without the other.”¹³² Through these ghost stories, citizens of Staunton are hearing a story of Dr. DeJarnette that is predominantly focused on how these buildings are haunted as a result of his time as superintendent.

Ghost tours have become a popular pastime. Tours of other ‘creepy’ buildings such as Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, or places such as cemeteries and battlefields, constitute a very popular phenomenon. Both cities and small towns all across the country advertise their haunted histories in attempts to capture the public’s attention and tourist revenue. A simple Internet search for “ghost tours” produces numerous hits for nearby cities as well as countrywide opportunities for ghost tours and events centered on ghosts.¹³³ As with the abandoned buildings of Western State Hospital, the dark atmosphere and complicated history of such places often stimulate ghost stories and the public’s interest. For example, the Website *Roadtrippers* states,

¹³¹ “Ghosts of Staunton,” Paranormal Black Raven, <http://www.ghostsofstaunton.com/dejarnette.html>

¹³² “A True Ghost Story,” *Richmond Times*, October 22, 2012.

¹³³ If a person is located in Harrisonburg and enters “ghost tours” into Google, events show up for Harrisonburg, Staunton, and Lexington, Virginia, accessed February 28, 2016.

“because of these [DeJarnette’s] experiments, and the strange sightings that have occurred on the premises since, many paranormal investigations believe it [Western State Hospital] is haunted.”¹³⁴ The website includes a comment section for guests to share their experiences and opinions. Typical of several of the comments is one from “RebbekkahHolt,” who commented on January 2, 2015 that she personally knows “a lot of strange things that happened there.”¹³⁵ RebbekkahHolt fails to provide details or examples but simply explains that she was a patient at Western State Hospital from the age of eleven-and-a-half to thirteen. Blogger Matthew Warner also shares an interest in the paranormal and says he wants to turn the buildings into a haunted house resort.¹³⁶

Although the sensationalism associated with DeJarnette has created a high level of interest in the hospital, it has also redirected people’s attention away from learning about the doctor himself to simply wanting to gain access to the buildings to explore them. *Roadripper’s* user CaryUnderwood asked “What all happened there? This place fascinates me. I really want to get into it.”¹³⁷ On its comment section, the website *Undersiders* also reflected the same desires to explore the buildings. Despite these individuals’ interest in exploring the buildings, many viewers also commented on the need to tear them down. On the website *I’m Spatial*, a user named Alison commented that “preserving it [the buildings] is a slap in the face to the Virginian citizens who were victims of eugenics who are still living... would you want to preserve any other historic building where such evil occurred?”¹³⁸ Another user named Iglegli shared similar passionate feelings toward the hospital and DeJarnette, writing “TEAR IT DOWN NOW!

¹³⁴ “DeJarnette’s Children Asylum,” Roadtrippers.

¹³⁵ “DeJarentte’s Children Asylum, Roadtrippers.

¹³⁶ Matthew Warner, “Former Insane Asylums in Staunton, Virginia.”

¹³⁷ “DeJarnette’s Children Asylum” Roadtrippers.

¹³⁸ I’m spatial, “What to do with the DeJarnette Center?”

Why on earth would we knowingly continue to allow the memorialization of such criminal acts and to keep the memory of that man around for all to view!”¹³⁹ A thread in many of these comments is the common belief that the buildings need to be torn down in order to heal and move forward from our complicated relationship with eugenics.¹⁴⁰

Recently, in part due to the growing interest in dark history and the sensationalism surrounding old insane asylums, the story of Dr. Joseph DeJarnette, superintendent of Western State Hospital, has gained popularity and intrigued the public. Numerous websites have been developed, spurring recent conversations concerning Dr. DeJarnette and the legacy he left behind. The story of DeJarnette’s complicated involvement with eugenic sterilization has subtly been rewritten through these websites and their active viewers. The medical articles DeJarnette wrote and the personal letters he exchanged with other doctors and ex-patients, all of which shed light on his intentions and beliefs concerning sterilization, have been mostly ignored. Instead, DeJarnette’s legacy is now associated with torture, forced sterilization, and haunted souls. The once highly respected and intelligent doctor is now remembered as evil man who loved Hitler. This dramatic transformation of one person’s story shows just how easily history can be rewritten via the Internet. Along with ignoring the evidence of Dr. DeJarnette that has been left behind, numerous websites and other writings of Dr. DeJarnette take him out of his time period and hold him to the standards of today’s ethics. It is dangerous to try to understand this doctor without fully immersing oneself into the Progressive Era and learning of the wide support of eugenics that surrounded Dr. DeJarnette. Since the early twentieth

¹³⁹ I’m spatial, “What to do with the DeJarnette Center.”

¹⁴⁰ An interesting fact to consider is the reality that the DeJarnette Sanitarium was not created for the purpose of sterilization. It was founded for patients who could afford their own care and offered them a golf course and horses for recreational fun. This sanitarium provided a resort-like atmosphere for the patients.

century, the United States has advanced in science, the field of mental health, and personal rights. While today it is commonly accepted that eugenic sterilization was wrong, the early 1900s did not have that knowledge nor did they feel similarly. Therefore it is crucial to view and analyze Dr. DeJarnette in his time period and not 2016.

Digitizing Dr. DeJarnette

The second component to this thesis is a website, which can be found at:

<http://brimelchione.wix.com/start-from-scratch-n>. Very few resources for online research concerning Western State Hospital exist, and even fewer specifically treat Dr. DeJarnette. This website is one of the only online archives in existence entirely dedicated to Western State Hospital's Dr. DeJarnette and his involvement in eugenic sterilization. It offers access to documents that previously were only accessible at the Library of Virginia's archives. This archive provides photographs, hospital documents, letters of correspondence, poems, and medical articles all written by the doctor.

The website was designed through the platform WIX and offers numerous advantages. It seeks to take advantage of the evolving use of digital history through media and technology by providing both an online opportunity for further research as well as offering greater exposure to a wider audience. Dr. DeJarnette's name is commonly searched on the Internet as evidenced by the numerous websites dedicated to Western State Hospital and the DeJarnette buildings. Urban explorers and people who seek out abandoned buildings to explore are often fascinated with these buildings. They are actively exploring these websites and frequently express a desire to learn more about DeJarnette and his life. This website will serve as a platform that allows both the public and the academic researcher to access historical documents and images that relate to DeJarnette's complicated past.

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