

WHITEWASHED

LOGLINE

A poisoning, a cover-up, and a university built on reputation—*Whitewashed* uncovers the story history tried to bury.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Whitewashed investigates the 1905 death of Jane Stanford, who insisted she had been poisoned—an account initially confirmed by a Hawaiian coroner before being recast as natural causes. At the center of this reversal was university president David Starr Jordan, whose influence helped reshape the official narrative. The film traces how power, science, and institutional loyalty converged to transform a suspicious death into accepted history.

FULL SYNOPSIS

Whitewashed investigates the mysterious 1905 death of Jane Stanford, co-founder of Stanford University, who insisted she had been poisoned. A Hawaiian coroner confirmed strychnine poisoning, yet the official narrative rapidly shifted to natural causes. At the center of this reversal was university president David Starr Jordan—a powerful scientific figure and leading voice in the American eugenics movement—whose influence helped reshape the public record.

Moving between documented evidence and reconstructed moments, the film traces how a single death became a controlled narrative, and how institutions protect themselves by editing history. Through a distinctive visual language that blends archival material with AI-assisted image generation and cinematic reconstruction, *Whitewashed* does not simply retell the past—it interrogates how the past is made visible.

In exposing both a possible cover-up and the mechanisms of historical storytelling itself, *Whitewashed* asks a larger question: when power shapes the record, what becomes of truth?

PRODUCTION NOTE

Whitewashed incorporates AI-assisted image generation and visual reconstruction as part of its filmmaking process. These tools are used under the direction of the filmmaker to interpret gaps in the historical record, evoke lost environments, and reimagine moments that were never photographed.

The film’s research, argument, editing, and authorship remain grounded in archival investigation and editorial judgment. AI functions as a visual tool—not a substitute for historical inquiry—supporting the film’s central exploration of how the past is constructed, remembered, and sometimes deliberately obscured.

DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT

I set out to investigate a death that did not make sense—and discovered a story about how institutions protect themselves.

Whitewashed is not only about what happened to Jane Stanford, but about how narratives are constructed, erased, and rewritten. The deeper I went into the archive, the more I encountered not just conflicting accounts, but the quiet power of reputation shaping what becomes “truth.”

By combining archival materials with AI-assisted visual reconstruction, I wanted to reflect that tension visually—between what is documented and what is lost, between evidence and interpretation. The film asks not only what happened, but who gets to decide what history remembers.

DIRECTOR BIO

Berry Minott is an independent documentary filmmaker, producer, and director with nearly forty years of experience in film and video production. Her work is grounded in investigative storytelling, archival research, and ethical inquiry, with a long-standing focus on political culture, science, labor history, and institutional power.

She began her career in 1984 as producer and co-director of *From the Floor of the Convention*, a behind-the-scenes examination of the 1984 Democratic National Convention. The film received an ACE Award in 1985 and established Minott’s early engagement with political process and media access. She went on to produce and co-direct several award-winning documentaries, including *The Changing Face of the Waterfront*, *Kansai*, *Halfway to Hell*, and *Cut Loose*. She later directed and co-produced *Harry Bridges: A Man and His Union*, which received the DuPont–Columbia Award and premiered at the Sundance Film Festival.

Completed in 2013, Minott's feature documentary *The Illness and the Odyssey* traces the decades-long scientific and human search to understand Lytico-Bodig disease in Guam, a neurological condition with implications for Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and ALS. The film screened at the Mill Valley International Film Festival, was presented in science-focused programs and theaters including Science on Screen and the Roxie Theatre in San Francisco, and received multiple awards.

In 2025, Minott completed *Whitewashed*, an investigation into the contested death of Jane Stanford and the institutional forces that shaped its historical record. Across four decades, her films have emphasized clarity, accountability, and the ethical responsibility of documentary storytelling.

FILM INFORMATION

- **Runtime:** 10 minutes
- **Format:** 4:3
- **Color:** Black & White
- **Country:** USA
- **Language:** English

KEY CREDITS

Producer/Director: Berry Minott

Editor/Co-Producer: Kyung Young

Contemporary Footage: Leonard Levy

Contemporary Sound: John Paul Poritz



Jane Stanford - *She said she had been poisoned.*

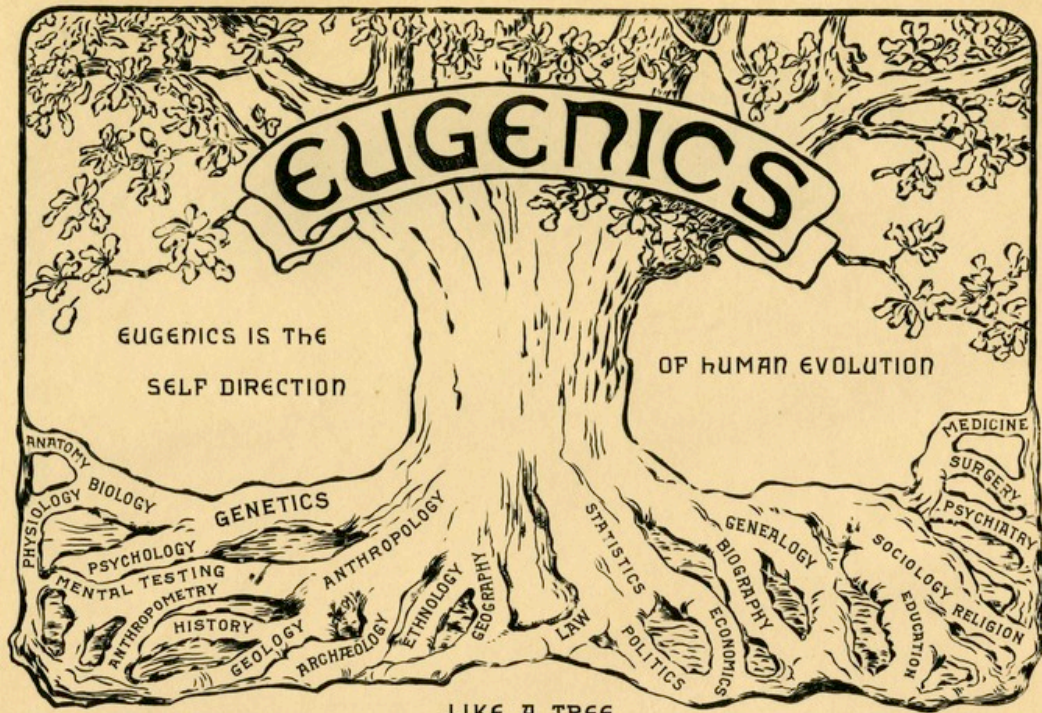


President David Starr Jordan - Science,
authority, and control of the narrative.



One glass. One turning point.

One glass. One turning point.



The ideas that shaped the institution.

CONTACT

Berry Minott

b.minott@me.com

415 730-5559