

Developing the Rage to Win

HUGH PEARSON

In 1966 the civil rights movement segued into the anger-filled Black Power movement and those of us known as Negroes insisted on being known as blacks. We had in mind the complete transformation of what the word means to the nation as a whole. Black Power; Black Is Beautiful; Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud. These were the campaign slogans designed to assure that the transformation took place. While that may have happened in the hearts and minds of many of us who embrace the word to describe who we are, it never really gained root in the rest of America.

To observe this a person need only look up the word black in *Webster's New World Dictionary*, or any other standard reference dictionary. Besides stating that black classifies a racial group, there is the following: 3) totally without light; in complete darkness; 5) soiled; dirty; 7) evil; wicked; harmful; 8) disgraceful; 9) full of sorrow and suffering; sad; dismal; gloomy; 10) disastrous; 11) sullen or angry [black looks]; 12) without hope [a black culture]; 14) humorous or satirical in a morbid or cynical way [black comedy]. The negative list goes on.

Given that the dictionary is called *New World*, it tells us that nearly thirty years after the black revolution was to have taken place, our "new world" is left with predominantly repulsive definitions of the word. For the most part, the Black Power movement failed. Hindsight has taught us that there were two lasting accomplishments of the 1960s struggle to improve the plight of blacks: the 1964 Civil Rights Act outlawing segregation in public facilities, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act assuring all adult Americans the right to vote. In essence these victories proved we could induce the nation

to live up to its constitution, guaranteeing that its legal system would not stand on the side of racism, but no more than that.

That blacks would wish for more out of the movement was understandable. After all, we were far behind everyone else. Though at the beginning of our nation there was some indentured servitude, most immigrants arrived escaping some form of torment or a static society preventing the prosperity they desired. Our African ancestors, on the other hand, arrived for the express purpose of serving as virtual human beasts of burden. After their freedom, blacks became typecast as former slaves, a subgroup which new European arrivals quickly felt better than. Initially such immigrants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were ranked by the Europeans who preceded them. The Irish, the Poles, Eastern European Jews, and other ethnicities now considered white, were treated as doormats, in some cases experiencing even greater prejudice than former black slaves. Human history has proven that in virtually all large-scale societies, subgroups compete in a struggle, the outcome of which determines which one is to be considered naturally at the top, and which naturally at the bottom.

Eventually blacks became the basement-dwelling caste and the formerly despised European immigrants gained acceptance as whites. The ugly truth that blacks still occupy our nation's bottom social rung is difficult to swallow in our post-civil rights era, since during the turbulent, idealistic 1960s, plenty of Americans were convinced that by the 1990s that would no longer be the case. That we persist in being this in the minds of so many Americans is perhaps best summed up by the racist joke: What do you call a black man with a Ph.D.? Answer: Nigger. This chronic state, along with a rapidly changing economy which has left many unprepared blacks out in the cold, has resulted in a black collective spinning of wheels and a plague of black nihilism in which angry young black males kill one another, produce rap records romanticizing their violent, tough predator images, and reinforce society's fear of black men; poor psychologically defeated blacks care little about their neighborhoods, so graffiti is common, as well as rats and roaches, reinforcing the notion that blacks aren't clean, meaning that even though more than half of black Americans are now middle class, blacks still must

fight prejudice when searching for somewhere to live; affirmative action, originally promoted by blacks and whites who considered themselves progressive as a redress for past discrimination, in too many instances lowers standards for blacks in order to fulfill a black quota, thus reinforcing the stereotype that blacks aren't very intelligent.

Then there's the most nihilistic effects of all. A chronic feeling of disconnectedness from the rest of America is so thorough among blacks that large numbers of black youths see no reason to perform well in school. Legions of blacks are so completely consumed by their sense of alienation that they believe Western culture as a whole is white, blinding them to any understanding that they are part of Western culture, which not only originated plenty of breakthroughs but borrowed (and continues to borrow) from a wide variety of other cultures to be what it is.

So when Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's book *The Bell Curve* was published in the fall of 1994 and the media immediately zeroed in on its conclusions regarding black intelligence, that amounted to kicking a man while he's down. Though the book is a massive warning about how our nation is rapidly developing a cognitive elite which is increasingly leaving behind a disadvantaged mass of Americans of all colors, blacks feel singled out due to the book's research conclusion that on average blacks of all socioeconomic backgrounds naturally score lower than everyone else on intelligence tests. And a race-weary nation still coming to grips with the failures of the post-civil rights era, finds the bridging of its racial gap rendered even more difficult.

There are any number of ways to debunk *The Bell Curve's* conclusions. Natural scientists have found absolutely no correlation between race and intelligence. Charles Murray is not a natural scientist, and neither was the recently deceased Herrnstein. The notion that all 30 million blacks constitute a singular race of people, separate and distinct from white Americans is itself a senseless relic of the nation's early history. The vast majority of blacks harbor some degree of European as well as black African ancestry, and 40 percent harbor Native American ancestry too (and some white Americans, southerners in particular, harbor black African ancestry),

further complicating any attempt to draw a definitive correlation between race and intelligence.

And why should intelligence be conclusively measured according to such criteria as how quickly a person repeats a sequence of numbers backward, or her or his facility for answering a sequence of multiple choice questions on an exam under time constraints (IQ, scores and SAT scores, among other exams were used by the authors of *The Bell Curve* to draw their conclusions). If such tests are designed purely for the measurement of intelligence, why is a time constraint consisting of a set number of hours even applied to any of the exams, rather than allowing test takers all the time they desire within reasonable limits to complete them? And why are there no essay sections, or fiction and poetry writing elements to assess creativity? It is understandable if a minimum cut off is agreed upon to establish what constitutes normal functioning. But beyond such an assessment why should anyone conclude, with regard to the SAT for example, that a student scoring 500 will undoubtedly contribute less to society than a student scoring 700?

These are all appropriate caveats to *The Bell Curve's* conclusions. But the danger that they will be used as crutches allowing blacks to continue viewing ourselves as victims, is every bit as great as the danger that publication of *The Bell Curve* provides more comfort to racists. Our tendency to cling to old standards in the way we see ourselves and old solutions to the problems we continue to experience is very great. Thus not only is there a virtual litmus test for deciding who is and who isn't truly black among those most alienated from predominantly white America, there is a virtual litmus test for such a decision among many people who consider themselves liberals and leftists. According to the test, all true blacks must unconditionally support affirmative action in all of its varieties; all true blacks must be Democrats rather than Republicans out of gratitude that the landmark civil rights gains were achieved on the watch of the Democrats; all true blacks must agree that the alarming rate of murder among young black males is due solely to profound changes in our economy, and that any criticism of young black men who murder amounts to blaming the victim and tarnishing the image of all blacks.

Such condescension regarding blacks is so great that it indirectly supports *The Bell Curve's* implication that blacks are intellectually inferior to everyone else. It implies that responsible behavior, variety of thought and political affiliation, is solely for other people. In other words, our race-obsessed environment has rendered it virtually impossible for anyone black to be an individual in the same manner whites take for granted as their right. Inadvertently our nation has created an environment for being black that imprisons all blacks.

This mental imprisonment all but assures that the definitions for black will remain what they are. In the process blacks are discouraged from learning the lessons other victimized people learned to improve their lot. Such conditioning is furthered by the authors of *The Bell Curve*, not only through the way they use black scores on intelligence tests to imply that blacks are a permanent mental underclass, but in the way they ignored the evidence they uncovered that environment could play the decisive role in blacks catching up to whites on intelligence test performance in the future.

Among their findings was something they called the Flynn Effect, in which over time IQ scores tend to drift upward among groups of people due to environmental improvements overriding any possible genetic basis for IQ performance. Due to the Flynn Effect, average IQ scores among a nation's population have been shown to increase by as much as one point per year, posting gains comparable to the fifteen points separating black and white IQ averages today. Murray and Herrnstein concluded that though the Flynn Effect will certainly increase black IQ averages it won't make any difference in the black/white IQ gap since environmental improvements will also occur among whites.

Such a conclusion is true only if blacks remain imprisoned in the mental environment we find ourselves in. However if we free ourselves from it, there's no question that our individual development on average will post gains at a greater rate than the individual development of our white counterparts so that eventually the black/white IQ gap will be closed.

Freeing ourselves from this imprisonment will entail quite a few mental adjustments. We must overcome our sensitivity to the

stereotype that our black African ancestors were savages and that we too, at heart, are savages (which is the foundation both of our insecurity and the persistence of racism). This can only happen if we understand that there are plenty of geographical reasons those black African ancestors never participated in the type of cultural advancement engaged in by their European and Asian counterparts (though there is still much to be proud of with regard to many black African cultures, and there were a few ancient black African civilizations, though eventually they disintegrated).

For instance, as pointed out recently by economist Thomas Sowell in his book *Race and Culture*, unlike Europe, black Africa has no navigable rivers. Also unlike Europe, its coast has no protective ports. In earlier history navigable rivers and protective ports were key to the development of commerce which facilitated the exchange of ideas, the merging of peoples into genuine nations (as opposed to myriad tribes with a multitude of languages which to this day still characterizes black African nations, most of which are simply former European colonies), and the conquering of nations after the development of large naval armadas (by the Spanish, Dutch, English, etc.). Also, our black African ancestors were isolated from other peoples by the massive Sahara desert, which is larger than the entire continental United States.

Furthermore, most of those we now consider white were at one time divisible into northern European barbarians versus people of advanced southern European civilizations (Greece, then Rome). The southern Europeans, in turn, borrowed from the once more-advanced Egyptians and Asians. Northern Europeans only became advanced after being conquered by the Romans. Eventually they learned the lessons the Romans could teach and overtook them, until one day northern Europeans were considered more advanced than their southern counterparts (an image which persists today).

All of this is to say that no group of people has a patent on knowledge. Thus blacks who feel compelled to romanticize black African traditions, many of which amount to barbarism—such as the practice of submitting women to clitorectomies, and the past tradition among a few tribes of killing the wives of the tribal chief upon his death—need not feel compelled to do so just because

racists attempt to disengage blacks from any feeling of connectedness with the rest of mankind.

But the most important mental adjustment of all is for each black individual to decide he or she has no catching up to do in order to become a complete human being. Not for the purpose of developing a defensive black racism, but in order to muster the self-confidence necessary to meet any challenge, and the desire to allow no known variety of human knowledge to go unmastered. This is a type of individual confidence possible only through forgetting *Webster's New World Dictionary's* definitions of blackness (even if everyone else does not), and through ignoring *The Bell Curve's* conclusions about black IQs. We must exchange information with each other, invite participation from those viewed as nonblack who genuinely respect us, and meet all challenges with an attitude exactly like that of a group of junior high school kids in Harlem.

With the coaching of Maurice Ashley, the highest ranking black chess player in the nation, they were introduced to the intellectual game of chess.

In earlier times chess was limited to royalty and nobility. Educators have proven that mastery of the game improves abstract thinking skills and thus academic performance. Like high SAT scores and high IQs, chess mastery generally isn't associated with black people. But that didn't stop Ashley from accepting the challenge of teaching the game to the kids. At a recent seminar on chess in education, he recalled, "I went in against the pressure, even of some educators who felt, why are you teaching these kids chess? And I really had to be hard on [the kids]... Their attitude was, 'Hey, you're going to teach us chess? Well we play basketball. Do you play basketball?'"

Eventually Ashley succeeded in teaching enough of them the game that they began entering national junior high school chess tournaments. They called their chess team the Raging Rooks of Harlem. "We went to our first tournament in 1989. One of our kids, Michael, lost his first game, and all the other kids won. He was off by himself, he didn't want to talk about it. . . . I decided you couldn't pamper him. When he saw that no one was going to pamper him, he said, 'This is crazy, I have to take this into my own

hands. After that he went five and one. He developed this tremendous will to win. In every succeeding tournament he'd say, 'Come on, we're going to go in there and kick butt!' He came up with all the mottoes for the team. Just before we'd go to play we'd put our hands together and say 'Raging Rooks, yeah!' And Michael would say, 'Well, gotta go to work, gotta go to work,' like it was a business he had to take care of."

The Raging Rooks took care of business so well that two years later they won the National Junior High School Chess Team Championship. Like the Raging Rooks, from here on, not only do African Americans have to hear success is all in the mind, we all have to believe it.

Brave New Right

MICHAEL LIND

The controversy about *The Bell Curve* is not about *The Bell Curve* only. It is about the sudden and astonishing legitimization, by the leading intellectuals and journalists of the mainstream American right, of a body of racist pseudoscience created over the past several decades by a small group of researchers, most of them subsidized by the hereditarian Pioneer Fund.¹ *The Bell Curve* is a layman's introduction to this material, which had been repudiated by the responsible right for a generation.

Whatever the leaders of mainstream conservatism may claim now, in the seventies and eighties they themselves, and not merely the "politically correct" left, repudiated the kind of arguments that Herrnstein and Murray make. After the civil rights revolution, the mainstream conservative movement, though continuing to engage in covert appeals to racial resentments on the part of white Americans, was more or less successfully purged of the vestiges of pseudoscientific racism (which, it should be recalled, had been just as important as states'-rights arguments in the resistance to desegregation). By the Reagan years, the right, under the influence of neo-conservatives in particular, seemed to have permanently rejected its white-supremacist past. With the zeal of recent converts, mainstream conservatives claimed to be defending the ideals of color-blind sixties liberalism, of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Hubert Humphrey, against those who would betray those ideals by promulgating racial quotas and multicultural ideology. Talk of black and Hispanic racial inferiority was relegated to the far-right fringe.

During the entire period that the right was free (temporarily, it now appears) from pseudoscientific racism, there were always a few scholars like Arthur J. Jensen and William Shockley to be found

arguing that blacks as a group are intellectually inferior to whites as a group by nature. As far back as 1971, Herrnstein set off a firestorm with his article "IQ" in *The Atlantic Monthly* in December 1971. Much of the dubious research on which *The Bell Curve* rests was accumulated in the seventies and eighties. Why, then, did Herrnstein and Murray—with Philippe Rushton and other neo-hereditarians in their train—take conservatism by storm in 1994, rather than 1984, or 1974? Why are mainstream conservatives suddenly welcoming the revival of eugenic theory, after several decades in which they rejected anything redolent of pseudoscientific racism?

The answer, I would suggest, has less to do with new scholarly support for hereditarianism (there is none) or changes in American society as a whole (it has not changed *that* much) than with the ongoing transformation of the American conservative movement. In a remarkably short period of time, the broadly based, optimistic conservatism of the Reagan years, with its focus on the economy and foreign policy, has given way to a new "culture war" conservatism, obsessed with immigration, race, and sex. This emergent post-cold war right has less to do with the Goldwater-Reagan right than with the older American right of radio priest Father Charles E. Coughlin and the fundamentalist minister Gerald L. K. Smith's Christian Nationalist Crusade. In its apocalyptic style as well as its apocalyptic obsessions, this new conservatism owes more to Pat Robertson and Patrick Buchanan than to William F. Buckley, Jr., and Irving Kristol.² The growing importance, within the Republican Party, of the Deep South no doubt also plays a role; Goldwater's and Reagan's Sun Belt conservatism is being rewritten in Southern Gothic style. Race, sex, breeding, class—these are the classic themes of Tidewater reaction.

It is not surprising, then, that long-suppressed ideas about hereditary racial inequality are now reemerging. Their entry, or rather their return, is made easier by the crumbling of taboos that has accompanied the popular backlash against the excesses of political correctness. The nastiest elements on the right now answer any criticism with the charge that they are victims of "PC" (to which the obvious rejoinder is that some targets of the politically correct really *are* racists).

In addition to these general trends, the most important particular factor behind the rehabilitation of pseudoscientific racism on the right may be the recent evolution of the debate among conservatives about race and poverty. For several years a right-wing backlash has been growing against the integrationism and environmentalism not only of liberals but also of certain prominent conservatives. A few years ago, in a perceptive article for *The American Spectator*, the Canadian journalist David Frum identified two schools of thought among conservatives about poverty in general, and black urban poverty in particular. One school, whose major spokesman was Jack Kemp, believed that poor black Americans would respond to the proper economic incentives with entrepreneurial ardor. These conservatives stressed free-market reforms such as "enterprise zones" and the subsidized sale of public housing to its tenants, reforms that, it was claimed, might break underclass dependency on a paternalistic state. The "culturalist" school, identified with thinkers like William Bennett, was more impressed by signs of familial breakdown in the inner city and the perpetuation of a "culture of poverty." The ghetto poor could not be expected to take advantage of new economic opportunities unless their values changed first. When Frum wrote, a third school of pessimistic neo-hereditarians was not engaged in the debate; Kemp and Bennett were both environmentalists, finding the sources of black poverty elsewhere than in the inherited biological traits of poor blacks.

For all their differences, the free-marketeers and culturalists agreed that the problems of the black urban underclass could not be addressed without government activism. In effect, Kemp and Bennett had reasoned their way back to the conclusions of Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1965 about the need to address the breakdown of the underclass black family by means of substantial social programs. The conservatives who had thought the most about race and poverty were arguing, in effect, for a conservative version of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. Whether it took the form of massive subsidies to public housing tenants or a national network of high-quality orphanages for the children of broken ghetto families (a possibility mooted by political scientist James Q. Wilson), there would have to be government-backed social engineering on a grand scale.

It soon became clear that a conservative war on poverty would be enormously expensive. In the Bush administration, Richard Darman—vilified by the right as a big-spending country-club Republican—actually led the struggle to defeat then Housing Secretary Jack Kemp's proposals for higher spending on the urban poor. As for a national system of quality orphanages and boarding schools, that would cost billions. A call for activist government paid for by higher taxes to help the ghetto poor was not what most conservatives wanted to hear from their experts on urban poverty. The reaction against Kemp's "bleeding-heart, big-government" conservatism on the right was setting in even while he was still George Bush's secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Conservatives who revered the hero of the Kemp-Roth tax cuts began to mutter about the new Kemp, the Kemp who was too eager to embrace big government—and too soft on blacks. The gradual isolation of Kemp within the conservative movement has probably doomed his presidential hopes. The marginalization of Kemp has been most clearly visible in *National Review*, which has criticized Kemp's views on immigration as too soft, and cast him as the defender of the black poor in a strange debate over whether there is a crime problem in America or just a "black crime" problem.

The orphanage proposal has found a proponent in Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (who in late 1994 hosted a television presentation of *Boys' Town*). The idea probably appeals more to Gingrich, who is fascinated with technological solutions to social problems, than to the resentful voters who put his party into power in Congress. Even Gingrich has not advocated increased *public* funding for orphanages and boarding schools. If he did, Gingrich would probably find himself marginalized within his own party like Kemp.

For all practical purposes, the debate among conservatives about poverty was over before the Herrnstein-Murray controversy even began. Before *The Bell Curve* appeared, and in part thanks to the influence of Murray's earlier book *Losing Ground*, it had become politically impossible for any conservative politician to argue for maintaining current levels of spending on the poor, much less increasing spending. The claim of some conservatives that they

merely want to redistribute responsibility between the federal government and the states and private charities is an evasion. Conservatives do not really want states to spend more, in order to compensate for reduced federal spending; they want to slash public spending on poor Americans at all levels. They do not, for example, favor public job creation programs—even at the county level—for poor people thrown off welfare. Furthermore, the claim that private charities will make up for spending cuts ignores the fact that many private charities today receive many of their resources from government. At any rate, if government spending on poor people is demoralizing and encourages addiction and illegitimacy, surely private spending would have the same terrible effects—unless, that is, the parish soup line, that last resort of the destitute, were to be off limits to the children of unwed mothers. In reality most conservatives favor absolute reductions in spending on the poor by public and private agencies at all levels; they are simply not honest enough to say so.³

The conservatives, then, agreed on the prescription—reduce or abolish spending on the poor—before they agreed on the diagnosis. The fortuitous appearance of *The Bell Curve* provided conservatives with a useful rationale for a policy of abolishing welfare that they already favored. Had there been no Herrnstein-Murray controversy, the right would still have favored abolishing welfare, but on the familiar grounds that it does not work or backfires by creating perverse incentives. Herrnstein and Murray have provided the right with a new-old argument against welfare which, if it is true, is even more compelling: the underclass (white as well as black) is intellectually deficient by nature, so that ambitious programs to integrate its members into the middle class are almost certainly a waste of money.

This is not the first time that elite Americans have sought to explain the problems of lower-income groups in terms of the allegedly innate biological characteristics of their members. As Dale T. Knobel writes in his study *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America* (Wesleyan, 1986):

During the years immediately before [the Civil War], public officials intent upon uncovering the sources of urban poverty, crime,

and disease, began to recant openly the environmental explanations of social evils accepted for decades and to adopt an “ethnologic” approach. The Massachusetts State Board of Charities insisted that the chief cause of pauperism and public dependency was nothing less than “inherited organic imperfection, vitiated constitution, or *poor stock*,” and the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor concluded that “the excess of poverty and crime, also, among the Irish, as compared with the natives of other countries, is a curious fact, worthy of the study of the political economist and the ethnologist. . . .” In 1820 the Irish had only been one of several European immigrant groups regarded suspiciously because of their tutelage under authoritarian political and religious regimes. By 1860, Anglo-Americans had not only separated the Irish out from other immigrants and given them special status as an alien “race” but had also come to treat Irish character as the cause rather than the consequence of their Old World condition.

Now as then, the logic of the hereditarian argument—poverty is caused by genetic inferiority—points toward eugenics programs to discourage the allegedly inferior from reproducing and to encourage fecundity on the part of the allegedly superior. Though Herrnstein and Murray refuse to endorse eugenic measures other than restriction of immigration by persons “with low cognitive ability” and easy access for the poor to contraceptives, others undoubtedly will use their arguments to justify more intrusive eugenic engineering. Already some conservatives have suggested that welfare mothers be temporarily sterilized by Norplant as a condition of receiving relief; the logical next step would be involuntary sterilization of “feeble-minded” blacks, Hispanics, and poor whites, of the kind that was common in the United States throughout most of this century.

It remains to be seen how far the eugenic enthusiasms of the neo-hereditarian right can be taken before they collide with conservative religious convictions. In the early twentieth century, advocates of eugenic sterilization (not only political conservatives, but liberals and socialists) found their most committed adversary in the Catholic church. The employment of a distorted version of Darwin-

ism in the defense of the economic and racial status quo is also problematic in light of the resolute anti-Darwinism of Protestant evangelicals. In the nineteenth century the most radical American racists tended to be secular intellectuals; the biblical account of the common origin and shared opportunity for salvation of mankind prevented devout Protestant conservatives, no matter how bigoted, from treating the different races as separate species or subspecies. In what is surely one of the great ironies of our time, at the end of the twentieth century, as at the end of the nineteenth, the excesses encouraged by eugenic theory in the United States may only be checked within the American conservative movement by the dogmas of resurgent fundamentalism.

NOTES

1. See Lane and Rosen's chapter in this volume.
2. See Michael Lind, "Rev. Robertson's Grand International Conspiracy Theory," *New York Review of Books*, February 2, 1995; Michael Lind, "The Death of Intellectual Conservatism," *Dissent*, Winter 1995.
3. Conservatives in Washington and New York are particularly disingenuous when they claim that the state governments will come up with cures for poverty that have, somehow, escaped the attention of national policy specialists. Who exactly are these untapped policy intellectuals in Sacramento and Austin and Albany who are so much more brilliant than the scholars of the American Enterprise Institute or the Manhattan Institute?

Back to the Future with The Bell Curve: Jim Crow, Slavery, and G

JACQUELINE JONES

According to Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, we live in an age and a country untainted by history, an age that springs full blown from *g*, or the "general intelligence" of the citizens who live here, now. In presenting their rigidly deterministic view that IQ is the major force shaping social structure in the United States today, the authors of *The Bell Curve* exude a smug complacency about late twentieth-century American society: they argue that, judging from current housing and job patterns, people are pretty much where they should be—members of the so-called "cognitive elite" are ensconced in the wealthiest communities, while the poor (dubbed the "dull" or "very dull") languish, and deservedly so, in run-down, crime-ridden neighborhoods because they are unable to do any better for themselves. Yet even as the authors revel in the purity of a *g*-driven society, they hearken back to the supposedly glorious days of yesteryear, when poor people not only remained in their place, but also knew and understood that to be their place. As we read *The Bell Curve*, then, the past unfolds behind us, and beckons, full of promise for the future.

Among the more ludicrous claims of *The Bell Curve* is the authors' assertion that they are fearless scholars, venturing "into forbidden territory" (p. 10), into an intellectual no-man's land "between public discussion and private opinion" (p. 297). In fact, of course, the book is simply the most recent in a long line of efforts

to prove the congenital inferiority of poor people in general, and (in this country) black people in particular. In the seventeenth century, settlers in the British colonies justified the enslavement of Africans because (most) blacks were non-Christian, non-English, and non-white. In the eighteenth century, white elites proposed that this particular group of poor people be permanently stigmatized, and forced to toil at the dirtiest jobs, so that white men could enjoy their republican liberties. In the late nineteenth century, southern politicians and landowners charged that the former slaves were lazy, immoral, and irresponsible; the federal government gave its blessing to efforts to keep black men and women disenfranchised, hard at work, and segregated from whites in schools and other public places. In the early twentieth century, racists turned to scientific theories to bolster their contention that whites were superior to non-whites in culture and intelligence.

As a text revealing of our times, then, *The Bell Curve* pursues traditional ends via new means; it seeks to denigrate blacks and justify their exclusion from the best jobs that the country has to offer. Well-paying, secure positions that include benefits like health care will remain the province of whites (and a few Asians), while the most menial jobs will remain reserved for blacks and the "New Immigrants" from Latin American countries. According to *The Bell Curve*, persistent racial and class segregation of neighborhoods and workplaces will insure that the poor, with their bad morals and shiftless ways, will not contaminate the well-to-do. As a political program, these ideas have the added advantage of appealing to poor whites, who might otherwise have to compete with the darker-skinned "lower orders" for scarce resources. From the perspective of an American historian, it is an old story, now told with a new set of "evidence" in the form of lots of picture-perfect regression analyses.

Beginning with a core assumption—that intelligence can be quantified, and that a single number encapsulates the potential of any individual—the authors make a number of claims about the social structure of the United States in the late twentieth century. For example, they suggest that, generally speaking, an individual's job status reflects his or her IQ (p. 52); that the nation's public school system works well, and funnels bright children into the

appropriate channels of higher education (p. 104), as revealed by the fact that all of the people who deserve to go to college (and a number of black people who don't) are going (pp. 91–92). The collective stupidity (that is, low IQ) of a group is the cause of many social problems suffered by its members—poverty (p. 140–41) and ill health among them (it is possible that “less intelligent people are more accident prone” [p. 155]; hence presumably the folly of preventive medical care). Among the implicit policy recommendations contained in *The Bell Curve* (the authors' disingenuous disclaimers to the contrary notwithstanding) are the sterilization of all poor women (because they are the agents of dysgenesis—defined as “demographic trends . . . exerting downward pressures on the distribution of cognitive ability in the United States . . . pressures [that] are strong enough to have social consequences” [p. 342]—and only eugenesis will reverse this process); and disenfranchisement of certain groups in the population on the basis of IQ (because dumb people make bad citizens).

In terms of the ways we as a nation sort out the rights and responsibilities of individuals and groups, the American historical trajectory follows a regressive path, according to Herrnstein and Murray. Although the authors do not dwell explicitly on the alleged glories of days gone by, they do seem to envision a society that bears a striking resemblance to earlier periods in the nation's history, periods characterized by the legal and economic subordination of black people as a group. Indeed, the history-minded reader can discern that *The Bell Curve* begins by evoking the days of Jim Crow, and then moves back to the time of slavery, building toward a dramatic climax in the last chapter, when the authors wax eloquent about the virtues of the political ideology and social structure characteristic of the late eighteenth century.

As a blueprint for the good society, the period 1890 to 1915 has much to recommend it when viewed from the perspective of *The Bell Curve*. (Not coincidentally, it was during these years that intelligence testing came into vogue, no doubt in response to large-scale immigration from Eastern Europe; economic transformations often provoke new theories and systems of social control and racial inferiority.) During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the

executive branch, Congress, and the Supreme Court sanctioned a system of racial segregation in public places and institutions. While the country was undergoing a process of urbanization and industrialization, the vast majority of black people were domestic servants and agricultural workers (that is, they worked at jobs befitting their low mental abilities, in the parlance of *The Bell Curve*). Judging from Herrnstein and Murray's overall conclusions, we can speculate that this must have been a Golden Age in American history, since even mentally deficient people found a productive place in a dynamic, growing society; “in a simpler America, being comparatively low in the qualities measured by IQ did not necessarily affect the ability to find a valued niche in society. Many such people worked on farms” (p. 536).

Though obviously ignorant of the far reaching value of IQ testing, the cognitive elite in the Jim Crow South (perhaps intuitively) recognized the folly of funding schools for black children; therefore, tax money for education was routinely diverted away from blacks schools and given to white ones. Around the turn of the century, the southern public-education system (such as it was) reflected a racial division of labor that limited African Americans to work in the fields. For example, in 1900, fully 80 percent of Mississippi's black population were confined to agricultural labor, and another 15 percent to domestic service. In 1899, the state's governor, James K. Vardaman, observed, “people talk about elevating the race by education! It is not only folly, but it comes pretty nearly being [sic] criminal folly. . . . It is money thrown away.” Foreshadowing *The Bell Curve*'s lament that too many black folks today are getting educational credentials they don't deserve, creating all sorts of unrealistic expectations, Vardaman was of the opinion that “literary education—the knowledge of books—does not seem to produce any substantial results with the negro, but serves rather to sharpen his cunning, breeds hopes that cannot be gratified, creates an inclination to avoid honest labor.”

In the late nineteenth century, the rural South abided by a racial etiquette characterized by a superficial familiarity between members of the two races. And in order to do well—to buy land or obtain credit—individual blacks often had to look to a white patron, usu-

ally a man who could vouch for their honesty and testify to their hat-in-hand industry. Similarly, the authors of *The Bell Curve* suggest that a strict racial division of labor need not lead to hard feelings between individuals: "*We cannot think of a legitimate argument why any encounter between individual whites and blacks need be affected by the knowledge that an aggregate ethnic difference in measured intelligence is genetic instead of environmental*" (p. 313). In other words, there is no reason why a white lawyer need not engage in friendly banter with the custodian who cleans his office late at night; in the South, such easy familiarity was attributed to "good breeding" among whites. *The Bell Curve* similarly attests to the beneficial social effects of "good breeding."

The rural South, in a "simpler" America, was a time and place where "the community provided clear and understandable incentives for doing what needed to be done" (p. 537), characteristics attributed by Herrnstein and Murray to a society superior to our own. Jim Crow courts often deferred to Judge Lynch in dealing with black men and women who resisted doing "what needed to be done." The authors in fact suggest explicitly that they yearn for "a society where the rules about crimes are simple and the consequences are equally simple. Someone who commits a crime is probably caught—and almost certainly punished. The punishment almost certainly hurts (it is meaningful). Punishment follows arrest quickly, within a matter of days or weeks" (p. 543). Those were the days, when lynch mobs stood ready to act as the efficient agents of the cognitive elite. Thus Jim Crow America meets *The Bell Curve's* criteria for a place where "the stuff of community life had to be carried out by the neighborhood or it wouldn't get done," a time when "society was full of accessible valued places for people of a broad range of abilities" (p. 538). For all intents and purposes, federal authority did not exist; "local control" reigned supreme, and a small number of white men were in control of everything.

In fact, of course, the days of Jim Crow were a bit more complicated than Herrnstein and Murray's simple-minded scenario would suggest. Stepping back from their historical idyll, we might note that the authors see the past, like the present, as static, as they blissfully ignore the complex interplay of political and economic factors

that have always shaped social structure. In the postbellum South, and in the early twentieth-century North, white tradesmen and skilled workers gradually displaced the few black artisans who plied their trades. This process of course had nothing to do with intelligence and everything to do with the politics of discrimination; white trades unions served as gatekeepers to their crafts, and white craftsmen appealed to "race loyalty" in order to lure customers away from their black competitors. For their part, employers had good reason to discriminate in hiring regardless of the qualifications of workers. For example, black people were excluded from the position of department store clerk because store owners feared that white customers would not patronize their establishments if served by a black man or woman.

In keeping with their wide-eyed, romantic view of the past, Herrnstein and Murray often get their facts wrong when they make tentative forays into the thicket of historical specificity. They refer to "the urbanizing process following slavery" (328), ignoring the half century when the vast majority of former slaves and their children lived in the rural South, and toiled as sharecroppers, before the Great Migration beginning in 1916. The authors also assert that "the wealthy people have always been the most mobile" (p. 104), when in fact sharecroppers had extraordinarily high rates of residential mobility; every year or two, desperately poor families sought out a better deal, a better contract, down the road—or they were evicted by landlords who hoped to find more compliant tenants. The statement that "poverty among children has always been much higher in families headed by a single woman, whether she is divorced or never married" (p. 137) has little relevance to the history of sharecroppers; though they were among the poorest people in the nation, they by and large lived in two-parent households, and those rates of familial stability were the same for black as well as white families. And finally, the authors of *The Bell Curve* write that "as late as the 1940s, so many people were poor in economic terms that to be poor did not necessarily mean to be distinguishable from the rest of the population in any other way" (p. 129). The fact that the poor had less money than the rich "was almost the only reliable difference between the two groups" (p. 129). No doubt sharecroppers

pers of both races would have taken comfort from the idea that their lives in the cotton fields, and outside the burgeoning consumer economy, were really not all that different from those of middle-class urban dwellers at the same time.

The Bell Curve proceeds, or rather, recedes, from Jim Crow back to the slave South. In order to refute the idea that a legacy of slavery has affected the IQ of African Americans in a negative way, the authors suggest that Africans as a group are "very dull"; they cite a researcher who reports "median black African IQ to be 75, approximately 1.7 standard deviations below the U.S. overall population average, about ten points lower than the current figure for American blacks" (p. 289). These data suggest to Herrnstein and Murray that (as they delicately put it) "the special circumstances of American blacks" (p. 289) have not depressed the group's IQ scores at all. Indeed, we might assume that the authors mean to suggest just the opposite—that slavery was a school of sorts, an institution that helped mentally deficient Africans adapt to a superior way of living.

Many large slave-owning planters, as well as their early twentieth-century scholarly apologists, would have agreed with this assessment. In 1856 the planter-politician William J. Grayson of South Carolina waxed poetic about the benefits of slavery as an educational institution, and about the pedagogical skills of slave owners: "Taught by the master's efforts, by his care/ Fed, clothed, protected many a patient year, . . . / The negroes schooled by slavery embrace/ The highest portion of the Negro race." Samuel Cartwright, a New Orleans physician, agreed that the slave plantation was "gradually and silently converting the African barbarian into a moral, rational, and civilized being."

On the plantation, blacks and whites coexisted in a relatively peaceful way (though the peace was enforced with violence or the threat of it). Since black people often made (and make) bad parents—as *The Bell Curve* puts it—a planter no doubt felt justified in exercising paternalistic control over his workers, sending mothers and fathers to the field each day while an elderly slave woman minded their children; or perhaps he felt that it was in his best interest, and the interest of "society in general" if the children were sep-

arated from their parents and sold to another owner. Because the slave family had no legal standing, by definition all slave children were illegitimate; hence their parents hardly deserved to have much control over them in any case. Herrnstein and Murray argue that people with low IQs lack the personal qualities necessary for citizenship because they are not "civilized." They also suggest that today, dumb people commit more crimes than their smart counterparts; we might conclude, then, that the system of slavery was meant to control "uncivilized" people, since "civilized" people do not need to be tightly constrained by laws or closely monitored by organs of the state" (p. 254). As a social institution mediating between the rigors of a complex society and the low-IQ people who lived in it (nineteenth-century America inhabited by the descendants of low-IQ Africans), slavery was superior to any school. In any case, the slave plantation operated on the principle that all low-IQ persons (i.e., blacks) could work productively and should be taken care of accordingly—a virtue in any society (p. 547). If we extrapolate from Herrnstein and Murray's analysis—and understand the planter as a paternalistic smart white man overseeing lots of hardworking black males and fecund "wenches," and controlling the "Nats" predisposed to violent crime or rebellion—then the slave plantation takes on a more benevolent, or at least socially useful, cast.

Antebellum slavery rested on several ideological foundations—the notions that blacks were inherently (intellectually and otherwise) inferior to whites, that some groups must do the dirty work while others govern, and that inequality of ability—and legal rights—was fundamental to an orderly, stable society. James Henry Hammond, a South Carolina slave owner, articulated the antebellum version of *The Bell Curve*. Hammond argued that all societies "have a natural variety of classes. The most marked of these must, in a country like ours, be the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant." Hammond, like Herrnstein and Murray, conflated poor people with those of limited intellectual abilities. And like his late-twentieth century ideological successors, Hammond was convinced that the cognitive underclass had no part to play in government at any level; the beauty of slavery was that it rendered the issues of rights and representation among the poor and ignorant a moot question, since this

benighted class was rightly "excluded from all participation in the management of public affairs."

Again, what is striking about *The Bell Curve* is the way it offers some very old ideas in the guise of fresh statistics-based revelations. In their claims of scholarly disinterestedness the authors seem to have taken a page out of one of the weighty tomes written by Josiah Nott, an Alabama physician who was also a slavery apologist. In his book *Types of Mankind*, published in 1854, and other works, Nott argued that blacks were inherently inferior to whites and that statesmen, rather than wasting their time on issues related to "the perfectibility of races," might better "deal, in political argument, with the simple facts as they stand." Those "facts" included the idea that no "full-blooded Negro . . . has ever written a page worthy of being remembered." Nott claimed that he was first and foremost a scientist, and that it was up to others to translate his conclusions into social practice: of the inequality of the races, he noted, "It may be proper to state . . . that the subject shall be treated purely as one of science, and that [researchers like himself] will follow facts wherever they may lead, without regard to imaginary consequences."

Not content to tarry in antebellum Dixie, the authors of *The Bell Curve* continue their march back into time with a final chapter, entitled "A Place for Everyone." Here the wisdom of the Founding Fathers is revealed; these slaveholding men inspire hope for the future not because they invented a rhetoric that has informed some of world's great struggles for human rights, but rather, for the opposite reason: because they "wrote frankly about the inequality of men" (p. 530). Jefferson, for example, according to the authors of *The Bell Curve*, "was thankful for a 'natural aristocracy' that could counterbalance the deficiencies of others, an 'aristocracy of virtue and talent, which Nature has wisely provided for the direction of the interests of society'" (p. 530). The new nation was founded by the cognitive elite, and it is to the social ideal that they represented that the nation must return; "in reminding you of these views of the men who founded America, we are not appealing to their historical eminence, but to their wisdom. We think they were right" (p. 532). The great lesson to be learned from the era of the Revolution was

that "the ideology of equality has done some good. . . . But most of its effects are bad" (p. 533).

Herrnstein and Murray neglect to mention that Jefferson himself was one of the first white Americans to test the waters of scientific racism; in this respect his ideas served as a bridge of sorts between the seventeenth-century emphasis on blacks as dangerous people, to the antebellum view that blacks were dumb and immoral. During much of the colonial period, blacks were described as wily, cunning, thievish, and recalcitrant—that is, they were described by privileged whites in the same terms used to describe a variety of other groups of subordinate workers, including Irish servants, imported English convicts, and Indian day workers. As a group, then, Africans and their descendants in this country were not so different from other groups of bound laborers; all of these groups resisted the demands imposed upon them by their masters, and all of them, either singly or collectively, posed threats to civil order. Thomas Jefferson, as one of the leading political theorists of his day, was able to mediate between old doctrines that justified the social control of potentially rowdy workers, and new theories of equality; he did this by arguing that black people were fundamentally different from white people.

Like Herrnstein and Murray, Jefferson was intrigued by "the real differences that nature has made" among different groups of people. Writing in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, first published in 1787, Jefferson suggested that blacks' "existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection." He felt justified in offering this generalization, even allowing for this group's "difference of condition, of education, of conversation, of the sphere in which they move" (that is, the "special circumstances" of American blacks, noted by Herrnstein and Murray above). Unlike those Southerners who, half a century later, would expand upon his views and offer a full-blown defense of slavery, Jefferson simply recorded his observations: "Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites, in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracking and comprehending the investigations of Euclid, and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous." Assuming that comprehension of "the investigations of

Euclid" amounted to the eighteenth-century equivalent of an IQ test, it is clear that Jefferson shared with Herrnstein and Murray a contempt for the intellectual abilities of black people, and for their potential as members of the body politic.

The Bell Curve authors thus seem relatively restrained in the praise they heap upon their soulmate, the sage of Monticello. Jefferson's rhetoric about equality would later become appropriated by a number of different groups—by slaves and their abolitionist allies, and by women's rights advocates. Yet within the late-eighteenth century social and political context, Jefferson was very much a man of his time, and his place, the slaveholding state of Virginia. If *The Bell Curve* is right, he was also, apparently, a man for our own time—postindustrial America.

Herrnstein and Murray suggest that "concepts such as virtue, excellence, beauty and truth should be reintroduced into moral discourse" (p. 534). Along with a literal of rendition the Founding Father's political theory, they might as well endorse the social structure that went with it. This, in essence, they do. Just as Madison, Jefferson, and Washington saw slavery as the best way to contain a potentially violent group of poor people—contain them and at the same time confine them to the lowliest kinds of work—so do *The Bell Curve* authors seek to contain the modern "underclass." Americans are "already afraid of the underclass," and, in the coming years they are "going to have a lot more to be afraid of" (p. 518).

The Bell Curve calls for a devolution of America into a more simple time and place, one where the federal government has receded so that a "wide range of social functions... [can] be restored to the neighborhood when possible and otherwise to the municipality" (p. 540). The anti-Federalists would feel vindicated; but time was not on their side. Late eighteenth-century Republicanism was predicated on a nation of sturdy, independent yeomen farmers, men differential to their social betters. By the mid-nineteenth century the ideal of widespread landownership had already slipped out of the reach of many Americans; society was highly stratified, with large numbers of wage hands replacing small family farmers. Likewise, it is difficult to see how today's high-tech economy and global assem-

bly line might be compressed to fit into the villages and plantations of late-eighteenth century rural America.

It is worth noting that, throughout the authors' stroll down the backroads and byways of America's past, women remain conspicuous for their absence, except as they make brief, unwanted appearances as the media of murder and mayhem—that is, as reproducers of the Cognitive Mudsill. Here Herrnstein and Murray boldly depart from the Founding Fathers' appreciation of the fact that slave women of child-bearing age were just as valuable as the strongest male field hands. Postindustrial America has no need for more dumb babies, and the authors make it clear that the federal government should stop subsidizing this kind of sociopathological activity. Gone are the days when a bumper tobacco or cotton crop could siphon off the potentially destructive energies of low-IQ people of all ages.

Still, in a book devoted to heritable differences between groups, it is strange to find so little discussion of gender. For example, we might expect the authors to take note of the fact that men seem to do better on math tests than women, and run with it—straight to some straight-faced pronouncements about the inability of women to live in an increasingly complex world. However, the sexual division of labor presents *The Bell Curve* authors with some problems that they prefer not to deal with. During the three historical periods discussed above, women remained disenfranchised and relegated to the margins of the body politic by discriminatory property laws and other forms of state-sanctioned bias. They performed gender-specific work inside and outside the home, much of it unwaged in any case. If, as the authors suggest, "the job market has been rewarding not just formal education but also intelligence" (p. 96), how do we account for the fact that the vast majority of women today inhabit the "pink collar ghetto" of the labor force? If men and women are equal in IQ (see the nine lines devoted to this topic on page 275), and if women are reaching parity with men in terms of college education, it is clear that mediating factors must be keeping women from achieving their due in terms of jobs. My hunch is that, for Herrnstein and Murray to acknowledge that a whole host of political and economic imperatives, as well as individual choices, keep

women out of the jobs for which their IQs might qualify them, the two authors might have to depart from their monocausal theory of social structure.

The Bell Curve furthers the currently fashionable agenda of demonizing poor women of both races. Indeed, the authors provide much fodder for the notion that unwed mothers are the root cause of everything that plagues this nation. These women, charge the authors, indulge themselves by living off the goodwill of long-suffering taxpayers. They produce low-birth weight babies with low IQs, babies who will themselves grow up to become chronic welfare recipients and abusive parents—and if they are boys, violent criminals, and if they are girls, irresponsible citizens and the mothers of even more living social time bombs.

The Bell Curve focuses its ire on poor women; the authors suggest for example that “going on welfare really is a dumb idea, and that is why women who are low in cognitive ability end up there” (p. 201). Yet for all of their discussions of jobs and opportunity and civic responsibility, the authors shy away from confronting the political implications of the nation’s largest group of dependent (shall we call them selfish and parasitical?) people—the middle-class wives and mothers who stay home full time with their children. Why are poor women who want to attend to their children a threat to the Republic, while middle-class women who do the same thing are heralded as guardians of the nation’s “family values”? Why is it so important that welfare mothers betake themselves to the nearest employment office, while middle-class women who choose to work are decried as the embodiment of all neuroses? For all of their self-proclaimed intellectual derring-do, Herrnstein and Murray avoid these issues; instead, they favor glib generalizations that will no doubt prove fodder for any number of right-wing demagogues.

Herrnstein and Murray must deny history, and replace it with mythology, in order to justify a social structure that will keep black people disproportionately relegated to the jobs of nursing aides, orderlies and attendants, cleaners and servants, maids and horse-men. In *The Bell Curve* they suggest that the great threat to American society today is not radical socioeconomic inequality *per se*, but rather all of the loud and rude complaints that emanate from those

who are resentful of this inequality. Though they coyly refrain from endorsing a “custodial state” (“we have in mind a high-tech and more lavish version of the Indian reservation for a substantial minority of the nation’s population” [p. 526]), the authors put their implicit stamp of approval on policies that at least point in that direction. For example, they propose that the city of Washington, D.C., reject affirmative action and return “to a policy of hiring the best-qualified candidates” for its police department, a policy that will inevitably mean that “a smaller proportion of those new police would be black.” Then, they add, “the quality of the Washington police force is likely to improve, which will be of tangible benefit to the hundreds of thousands of blacks who live in that city” (p. 507). Here is the distilled essence of *The Bell Curve*: a call for a city composed largely of black workers to be controlled by white police officers. The notion that white cops will perform their jobs well by virtue of their relatively high IQs is absurd on the face of it; but more significantly, this vision of the well-ordered city exists outside the realm of history, and thus outside the realm of reason. As an artifact of the late twentieth century, then, *The Bell Curve* amounts to hate literature with footnotes.

The Sources of The Bell Curve

JEFFREY ROSEN AND CHARLES LANE

By scrutinizing the footnotes and bibliography in *The Bell Curve*, readers can more easily recognize the project for what it is: a chilly synthesis of the work of disreputable race theorists and eccentric eugenicists. "Here was a case of stumbling onto a subject that had all the allure of the forbidden," Charles Murray told the *New York Times*. "Some of the things we read to do this work, we literally hide when we're on planes and trains. We're furtively peering at this stuff."

It would be unfair, of course, to ascribe to Murray and Herrnstein all the noxious views of their sources. Mere association with dubious thinkers does not discredit the book by itself; and *The Bell Curve*, ultimately, must stand or fall on the rigor of its own arguments. But even a superficial examination of the primary sources suggests that some of Murray and Herrnstein's substantive arguments rely on questionable data and hotly contested scholarship, produced by academics whose ideological biases are pronounced. To this extent, important portions of the book must be treated with skepticism.

Much of *The Bell Curve*'s data purporting to establish an inherited difference in intelligence among blacks, whites, and Asians is drawn from the work of Richard Lynn of the University of Ulster. In the acknowledgments to *The Bell Curve*, Murray and Herrnstein say they "benefited especially from the advice" of Lynn, whom they refer to elliptically as "a scholar of racial and ethnic differences." Lynn is an associate editor of, and, since 1971, a frequent contribu-

tor to, *Mankind Quarterly*, a journal of racist anthropology, founded by the Scottish white supremacist Robert Gayre. *Mankind Quarterly* has a long history of publishing pseudoscientific accounts of black inferiority. Lynn and others have used its pages to ventilate their view that society should foster the reproduction of the genetically superior, and discourage that of the genetically inferior.

Murray and Herrnstein rely most heavily on an article that Lynn published in *Mankind Quarterly* in 1991, "Race Differences in Intelligence: A Global Perspective." In the article, Lynn reviews what he calls the "world literature on racial differences in intelligence." He notes that "the first good study of the intelligence of pure African Negroids was carried out in South Africa" in 1929, without mentioning that this study was based on an administration of the now-discredited U.S. Army Beta Test. He also claims that the median IQ of black Africans is 70—based solely on a single test of blacks in South Africa in 1989. Murray and Herrnstein invoke this dubious figure, but they manage to confuse it: they say that the median black African IQ is 75.

Lynn concludes that "Mongoloids have the fastest reaction times," and the highest IQs, "followed by Caucasoids and then by Negroids." Indeed, Lynn, who specializes in "Oriental Intelligence," has also advanced the extraordinary claim that the average Japanese IQ score is ten points higher than that of the average European. This assertion, made in the pages of *Nature* in 1982, was refuted in a follow-up study conducted by Harold W. Stevenson of the University of Michigan. After examining what he calls "1,500 of the most important technological and scientific discoveries which have ever been made," Lynn reaches the following conclusion: "Who can doubt that the Caucasoid and the Mongoloid are the only two races that have made any significant contribution to civilization?"

Lynn has an exotic explanation for the racial differences he has purported to discover. As Murray and Herrnstein observe in a footnote, "Lynn explains the evolution of racial differences in intelligence in terms of the ancestral migrations of groups of early hominids from the relatively benign environments of Africa to the harsher and more demanding Eurasian latitudes, where they

branched into the Caucasoids and Mongoloids." Similar theories, Murray and Herrnstein note without irony, "were not uncommon among anthropologists and biologists of a generation or two ago."

Murray and Herrnstein also introduce readers to the work of J. Phillippe Rushton, a Canadian psychologist. Rushton has argued that Asians are more intelligent than Caucasians, have larger brains for their body size, smaller penises, lower sex drive, are less fertile, work harder, and are more readily socialized; and Caucasians have the same relationship to blacks. In his most recent book, *Race, Evolution and Behavior*, Rushton acknowledges the assistance of Herrnstein; and Murray and Herrnstein return the compliment, devoting two pages of their own book to a defense of Rushton. Among the views that Herrnstein and Murray suggest Rushton has supported with "increasingly detailed and convincing empirical reports" is the theory that, in their words, "the average Mongoloid is toward one end of the continuum of reproductive strategies—the few offspring, high survival, and high parental investment end—the average Negroid is shifted toward the other end, and the average Caucasoid is in the middle."

In a gratuitous two-page appendix, Murray and Herrnstein go out of their way to say that "Rushton's work is not that of a crackpot or a bigot." But in an interview with *Rolling Stone*, Rushton colloquially summarized his research agenda: "Even if you take things like athletic ability or sexuality—not to reinforce stereotypes—but it's a trade-off: more brain or more penis. You can't have everything." And in a 1986 article in *Politics and Life Sciences*, Rushton suggested that Nazi Germany's military prowess was connected to the purity of its gene pool, and warned that egalitarian ideas endangered "North European civilization."

This, then, is the evolution of Murray and Herrnstein's data. The tradition which they benignly label "classicist" stretches back to the Victorian era, when Sir William Galton, the cousin of Darwin, argued that Africans were less intelligent and had slower "reaction times" than Englishmen; it extends through Charles Spearman, who argued that socially desirable traits, such as honesty and intelligence, could be measured together; and it was updated in 1969 by Arthur Jensen who relied on Galton's hundred-year-old estimates

for his conclusion that blacks were less intelligent than whites.

In addition to appropriating the data of Spearman, Jensen, Lynn and Rushton, Murray and Herrnstein faithfully duplicate the analytical structure of their arguments. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Rushton's book includes the same strains of conservative multiculturalism that Murray embraced in his essay in *The New Republic*. Anticipating Murray's celebration of "clannish self-esteem," Rushton devotes an entire chapter of his book to a genetic explanation for ethnocentrism: "According to genetic similarity theory, people can be expected to favor their own group over others." And he speculates that "favoritism for one's own ethnic group may have arisen as an extension of enhancing family and social cohesiveness."

The Bell Curve, in short, is not an original or courageous book. It is the work of a controversialist and popularizer of ideas from the fringes of the academy that have been repeatedly aired and repeatedly ignored. And despite the publicity that accompanied the publication of *The Bell Curve*, Murray's celebration of "clannish self-esteem" could hardly be more ineptly timed. The notion of American blacks and whites as increasingly culturally and genetically distinct "clans" seems especially implausible in an age when the healthy growth of ethnic intermarriage promises to undermine the concept of coherent racial classification entirely. It is not surprising to discover, after scratching the surface of Charles Murray's footnotes, the shabbiness of the scholarly tradition on which he has staked his reputation.

Curveball

STEPHEN JAY GOULD

The Bell Curve, by Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray (Free Press; \$30), subtitled *Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, provides a superb and unusual opportunity to gain insight into the meaning of experiment as a method in science. The primary desideratum in all experiments is reduction of confusing variables: we bring all the buzzing and blooming confusion of the external world into our laboratories and, holding all else constant in our artificial simplicity, try to vary just one potential factor at a time. But many subjects defy the use of such an experimental method—particularly most social phenomena—because importation into the laboratory destroys the subject of the investigation, and then we must yearn for simplifying guides in nature. If the external world occasionally obliges by holding some crucial factors constant for us, we can only offer thanks for this natural boost to understanding.

So, when a book garners as much attention as *The Bell Curve*, we wish to know the causes. One might suspect the content itself—a startlingly new idea, or an old suspicion newly verified by persuasive data—but the reason might also be social acceptability, or even just plain hype. *The Bell Curve*, with its claims and supposed documentation that race and class differences are largely caused by genetic factors and are therefore essentially immutable, contains no new arguments and presents no compelling data to support its anachronistic social Darwinism, so I can only conclude that its success in winning attention must reflect the depressing temper of our time—a historical moment of unprecedented ungenerosity, when a mood for slashing social programs can be powerfully abetted by an argument that beneficiaries cannot be helped, owing to inborn cognitive limits expressed as low IQ scores.

The Bell Curve rests on two distinctly different but sequential arguments, which together encompass the classic corpus of biological determinism as a social philosophy. The first argument rehashes the tenets of social Darwinism as it was originally constituted. "Social Darwinism" has often been used as a general term for any evolutionary argument about the biological basis of human differences, but the initial nineteenth-century meaning referred to a specific theory of class stratification within industrial societies, and particularly to the idea that there was a permanently poor underclass consisting of genetically inferior people who had precipitated down into their inevitable fate. The theory arose from a paradox of egalitarianism: as long as people remain on top of the social heap by accident of a noble name or parental wealth, and as long as members of despised castes cannot rise no matter what their talents, social stratification will not reflect intellectual merit, and brilliance will be distributed across all classes; but when true equality of opportunity is attained smart people rise and the lower classes become rigid, retaining only the intellectually incompetent.

This argument has attracted a variety of twentieth-century champions, including the Stanford psychologist Lewis M. Terman, who imported Alfred Binet's original test from France, developed the Stanford-Binet IQ test, and gave a hereditarian interpretation to the results (one that Binet had vigorously rejected in developing this style of test); Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, who tried to institute a eugenics program of rewarding well-educated women for higher birth rates; and Richard Herrnstein, a co-author of *The Bell Curve* and also the author of a 1971 *Atlantic Monthly* article that presented the same argument without the documentation. The general claim is neither uninteresting nor illogical, but it does require the validity of four shaky premises, all asserted (but hardly discussed or defended) by Herrnstein and Murray. Intelligence, in their formulation, must be depictable as a single number, capable of ranking people in linear order, genetically based, and effectively immutable. If any of these premises are false, their entire argument collapses. For example, if all are true except immutability, then programs for early intervention in education

might work to boost IQ permanently, just as a pair of eyeglasses may correct a genetic defect in vision. The central argument of *The Bell Curve* fails because most of the premises are false.

Herrnstein and Murray's second claim, the lightning rod for most commentary, extends the argument for innate cognitive stratification to a claim that racial differences in IQ are mostly determined by genetic causes—small difference for Asian superiority over Caucasian, but large for Caucasians over people of African descent. This argument is as old as the study of race, and is most surely fallacious. The last generation's discussion centered on Arthur Jensen's 1980 book *Bias in Mental Testing* (far more elaborate and varied than anything presented in *The Bell Curve*, and therefore still a better source for grasping the argument and its problems), and on the cranky advocacy of William Shockley, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist. The central fallacy in using the substantial heritability of within-group IQ (among whites, for example) as an explanation of average differences between groups (whites versus blacks, for example) is now well known and acknowledged by all, including Herrnstein and Murray, but deserves a restatement by example. Take a trait that is far more heritable than anyone has ever claimed IQ to be but is politically uncontroversial—body height. Suppose that I measured the heights of adult males in a poor Indian village beset with nutritional deprivation, and suppose the average height of adult males is five feet six inches. Heritability within the village is high, which is to say that tall fathers (they may average five feet eight inches) tend to have tall sons, while short fathers (five feet four inches on average) tend to have short sons. But this high heritability within the village does not mean that better nutrition might not raise average height to five feet ten inches in a few generations. Similarly, the well-documented fifteen-point average difference in IQ between blacks and whites in America, with substantial heritability of IQ in family lines within each group, permits no automatic conclusion that truly equal opportunity might not raise the black average enough to equal or surpass the white mean.

Disturbing as I find the anachronism of *The Bell Curve*, I am even more distressed by its pervasive disingenuousness. The

authors omit facts, misuse statistical methods, and seem unwilling to admit the consequences of their own words.

The ocean of publicity that has engulfed *The Bell Curve* has a basis in what Murray and Herrnstein, in an article in *The New Republic* last month [Oct. 31, 1994], call "the flashpoint of intelligence as a public topic: the question of genetic differences between the races." And yet, since the day of the book's publication, Murray (Herrnstein died a month before the book appeared) has been temporizing, and denying that race is an important subject in the book at all; he blames the press for unfairly fanning these particular flames. In *The New Republic* he and Herrnstein wrote, "Here is what we hope will be our contribution to the discussion. We put it in italics; if we could, we would put it in neon lights: *The answer doesn't much matter.*"

Fair enough, in the narrow sense that any individual may be a rarely brilliant member of an averagely dumb group (and therefore not subject to judgment by the group mean), but Murray cannot deny that *The Bell Curve* treats race as one of two major topics, with each given about equal space; nor can he pretend that strongly stated claims about group differences have no political impact in a society obsessed with the meanings and consequences of ethnicity. The very first sentence of *The Bell Curve*'s preface acknowledges that the book treats the two subjects equally: "This book is about differences in intellectual capacity among people and groups and what those differences mean for America's future." And Murray and Herrnstein's *New Republic* article begins by identifying racial differences as the key subject of interest: "The private dialogue about race in America is far different from the public one."

Furthermore, Herrnstein and Murray know and acknowledge the critique of extending the substantial heritability of within-group IQ to explain differences between groups, so they must construct an admittedly circumstantial case for attributing most of the black-white mean difference to irrevocable genetics—while properly stressing that the average difference doesn't help in judging any particular person, because so many individual blacks score above the white mean in IQ. Quite apart from the rhetoric dubiety of this

old ploy in a shopworn genre—"Some of my best friends are Group X"—Herrnstein and Murray violate fairness by converting a complex case that can yield only agnosticism into a biased brief for permanent and heritable difference. They impose this spin by turning every straw on their side into an oak, while mentioning but downplaying the strong circumstantial case for substantial malleability and little average genetic difference. This case includes such evidence as impressive IQ scores for poor black children adopted into affluent and intellectual homes; average IQ increases in some nations since the Second World War equal to the entire fifteen-point difference now separating blacks and whites in America; and failure to find any cognitive differences between two cohorts of children born out of wedlock to German women, reared in Germany as Germans, but fathered by black and white American soldiers.

The Bell Curve is even more disingenuous in its argument than in its obfuscation about race. The book is a rhetorical masterpiece of scientism, and it benefits from the particular kind of fear that numbers impose on nonprofessional commentators. It runs to 845 pages, including more than a hundred pages of appendixes filled with figures. So their text looks complicated, and reviewers shy away with a knee-jerk claim that, while they suspect fallacies of argument, they really cannot judge. In the same issue of *The New Republic* as Murray and Herrnstein's article, Mickey Kaus writes, "As a lay reader of 'The Bell Curve,' I am unable to judge fairly," and Leon Wieseltier adds, "Murray, too, is hiding the hardness of his politics behind the hardness of his science. And his science, for all I know, is soft. . . . Or so I imagine. I am not a scientist. I know nothing about psychometrics." And Peter Passell, in the *Times*: "But this reviewer is not a biologist, and will leave the argument to experts."

The book is in fact extraordinarily one-dimensional. It makes no attempt to survey the range of available data, and pays astonishingly little attention to the rich and informative history of its contentious subject. (One can only recall Santayana's dictum, now a cliché of intellectual life: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.") Virtually all the analysis rests on a single technique applied to a single set of data—probably done in one

computer run. (I do agree that the authors have used more appropriate technique and the best source of information. Still, claims as broad as those advanced in *The Bell Curve* simply cannot be properly defended—that is, either supported or denied—by such a restricted approach.) The blatant errors and inadequacies of *The Bell Curve* could be picked up by lay reviewers if only they would not let themselves be frightened by numbers—for Herrnstein and Murray do write clearly, and their mistakes are both patent and accessible.

While disclaiming his own ability to judge, Mickey Kaus, in *The New Republic*, does correctly identify the authors' first two claims that are absolutely essential "to make the pessimistic 'ethnic difference' argument work": "1) that there is a single, general measure of mental ability; 2) that the IQ tests that purport to measure this ability... aren't culturally biased."

Nothing in *The Bell Curve* angered me more than the authors' failure to supply any justification for their central claim, the sine qua non of their entire argument: that the number known as g , the celebrated "general factor" of intelligence, first identified by the British psychologist Charles Spearman, in 1904, captures a real property in the head. Murray and Herrnstein simply declare that the issue has been decided, as in this passage from their *New Republic* article: "Among the experts, it is by now beyond much technical dispute that there is such a thing as a general factor of cognitive ability on which human beings differ and that this general factor is measured reasonably well by a variety of standardized tests, best of all by IQ tests designed for that purpose." Such a statement represents extraordinary obfuscation, achievable only if one takes "expert" to mean "that group of psychometricians working in the tradition of g and its avatar IQ." The authors even admit that there are three major schools of psychometric interpretation and that only one supports their view of g and IQ.

But this issue cannot be decided, or even understood, without discussing the key and only rationale that has maintained g since Spearman invented it: factor analysis. The fact that Herrnstein and Murray barely mention the factor-analytic argument forms a central indictment of *The Bell Curve* and is an illustration of its vacuous-

ness. How can the authors base an 800-page book on a claim for the reality of IQ as measuring a genuine, and largely genetic, general cognitive ability—and then hardly discuss, either pro or con, the theoretical basis for their certainty?

Admittedly, factor analysis is a difficult mathematical subject, but it can be explained to lay readers with a geometrical formulation developed by L. L. Thurstone, an American psychologist, in the 1930s and used by me in a full chapter on factor analysis in my 1981 book *The Mismeasure of Man*. A few paragraphs cannot suffice for adequate explanation, so, although I offer some sketchy hints below, readers should not question their own IQs if the topic still seems arcane.

In brief, a person's performance on various mental tests tends to be positively correlated—that is, if you do well on one kind of test, you tend to do well on the other kinds. This is scarcely surprising, and is subject to interpretation that is either purely genetic (that an innate thing in the head boosts all performances) or purely environmental (that good books and good childhood nutrition boost all performances); the positive correlations in themselves say nothing about causes. The results of these tests can be plotted on a multidimensional graph with an axis for each test. Spearman used factor analysis to find a single dimension—which he called g —that best identifies the common factor behind positive correlations among the tests. But Thurstone later showed that g could be made to disappear by simply rotating the dimensions to different positions. In one rotation Thurstone placed the dimensions near the most widely separated attributes among the tests, thus giving rise to the theory of multiple intelligences (verbal, mathematical, spatial, etc., with no overarching g). This theory (which I support) has been advocated by many prominent psychometricians, including J. P. Guilford, in the 1950s, and Howard Gardner today. In this perspective g cannot have inherent reality, for it emerges in one form of mathematical representation for correlations among tests and disappears (or greatly attenuates) in other forms, which are entirely equivalent in amount of information explained. In any case, you can't grasp the issue at all without a clear exposition of factor analysis—and *The Bell Curve* cops out on this central concept.

As for Kaus's second issue, cultural bias, the presentation of it in *The Bell Curve* matches Arthur Jensen's and that of other hereditarians, in confusing a technical (and proper) meaning of "bias" (I call it "S-bias," for "statistical") with the entirely different vernacular concept (I call it "V-bias") that provokes popular debate. All these authors swear up and down (and I agree with them completely) that the tests are not biased—in the statistician's definition. Lack of S-bias means that the same score, when it is achieved by members of different groups, predicts the same thing; that is, a black person and a white person with identical scores will have the same probabilities for doing anything that IQ is supposed to predict.

But V-bias, the source of public concern, embodies an entirely different issue, which, unfortunately, uses the same word. The public wants to know whether blacks average 85 and whites 100 because society treats blacks unfairly—that is, whether lower black scores record biases in this social sense. And this crucial question (to which we do not know the answer) cannot be addressed by a demonstration that S-bias doesn't exist, which is the only issue analyzed, however correctly, in *The Bell Curve*.

The book is also suspect in its use of statistics. As I mentioned, virtually all its data derive from one analysis—a plotting, by a technique called multiple regression, of social behaviors that agitate us, such as crime, unemployment, and births out of wedlock (known as dependent variables), against both IQ and parental sociometric status (known as independent variables). The authors first hold IQ constant and consider the relationship of social behaviors to parental socioeconomic status. They then hold socioeconomic status constant and consider the relationship of the same social behaviors to IQ. In general, they find a higher correlation with IQ than with socioeconomic status; for example, people with low IQ are more likely to drop out of high school than people whose parents have low socioeconomic status.

But such analyses must engage two issues—the form and the strength of the relationship—and Herrnstein and Murray discuss only the issue that seems to support their viewpoint, while virtually ignoring (and in one key passage almost willfully hiding) the other.

Their numerous graphs present only the form of the relationships; that is, they draw the regression curves of their variables against IQ and parental socioeconomic status. But, in violation of all statistical norms that I've ever learned, they plot only the regression curve and do not show the scatter of variation around the curve, so their graphs do not show anything about the strength of the relationships—that is, the amount of variation in social factors explained by IQ and socioeconomic status. Indeed, almost all their relationships are weak: very little of the variation in social factors is explained by either independent variable (though the form of this small amount of explanation does lie in their favored direction). In short, their own data indicate that IQ is not a major factor in determining variation in nearly all the social behaviors they study—and so their conclusions collapse, or at least become so greatly attenuated that their pessimism and conservative social agenda gain no significant support.

Herrnstein and Murray actually admit as much in one crucial passage, but then they hide the pattern. They write, "It [cognitive ability] almost always explains less than 20 percent of the variance, to use the statistician's term, usually less than 10 percent and often less than 5 percent. What this means in English is that you cannot predict what a given person will do from his IQ score. . . . On the other hand, despite the low association at the individual level, large differences in social behavior separate groups of people when the groups differ intellectually on the average." Despite this disclaimer, their remarkable next sentence makes a strong causal claim. "We will argue that intelligence itself, not just its correlation with socioeconomic status, is responsible for these group differences." But a few percent of statistical determination is not causal explanation. And the case is even worse for their key genetic argument, since they claim a heritability of about 60 percent for IQ, so to isolate the strength of genetic determination by Herrnstein and Murray's own criteria you must nearly halve even the few percent they claim to explain.

My charge of disingenuousness receives its strongest affirmation in a sentence tucked away on the first page of Appendix 4, page 593: the authors state, "In the text, we do not refer to the usual

measure of goodness of fit for multiple regressions, R^2 , but they are presented here for the cross-sectional analyses." Now, why would they exclude from the text, and relegate to an appendix that very few people will read, or even consult, a number that, by their own admission, is "the usual measure of goodness of fit"? I can only conclude that they did not choose to admit in the main text the extreme weakness of their vaunted relationships.

Herrnstein and Murray's correlation coefficients are generally low enough by themselves to inspire lack of confidence. (Correlation coefficients measure the strength of linear relationships between variables; the positive values run from 0.0 for no relationship to 1.0 for perfect linear relationship.) Although low figures are not atypical for large social-science surveys involving many variables, most of Herrnstein and Murray's correlations are very weak—often in the 0.2 to 0.4 range. Now, 0.4 may sound respectably strong, but—and this is the key point— R^2 is the square of the correlation coefficient, and the square of a number between zero and one is less than the number itself, so a 0.4 correlation yields an R-squared of only .16. In Appendix 4, then, one discovers that the vast majority of the conventional measures of R^2 , excluded from the main body of the text, are less than 0.1.

These very low values of R^2 expose the true weakness, in any meaningful vernacular sense, of nearly all the relationships that form the meat of *The Bell Curve*.

Like so many conservative ideologues who rail against the largely bogus ogre of suffocating political correctness, Herrnstein and Murray claim that they only want a hearing for unpopular views so that truth will out. And here, for once, I agree entirely. As a card-carrying First Amendment (near) absolutist, I applaud the publication of unpopular views that some people consider dangerous. I am delighted that *The Bell Curve* was written—so that its errors could be exposed, for Herrnstein and Murray are right to point out the difference between public and private agendas on race, and we must struggle to make an impact on the private agendas as well. But *The Bell Curve* is scarcely an academic treatise in social theory and population genetics. It is a manifesto of conservative ideology; the

book's inadequate and biased treatment of data displays its primary purpose—advocacy. The text evokes the dreary and scary drumbeat of claims associated with conservative think tanks: reduction or elimination of welfare, ending or sharply curtailing affirmative action in schools and workplaces, cutting back Head Start and other forms of preschool education, trimming programs for the slowest learners and applying those funds to the gifted. (I would love to see more attention paid to talented students, but not at this cruel price.)

The penultimate chapter presents an apocalyptic vision of a society with a growing underclass permanently mired in the inevitable sloth of their low IQs. They will take over our city centers, keep having illegitimate babies (for many are too stupid to practice birth control), and ultimately require a kind of custodial state, more to keep them in check—and out of high IQ neighborhoods—than to realize any hope of amelioration, which low IQ makes impossible in any case. Herrnstein and Murray actually write, "In short, by custodial state, we have in mind a high-tech and more lavish version of the Indian reservation for some substantial minority of the nation's population, while the rest of America tries to go about its business."

The final chapter tries to suggest an alternative, but I have never read anything more grotesquely inadequate. Herrnstein and Murray yearn romantically for the good old days of towns and neighborhoods where all people could be given tasks of value, and self-esteem could be found for people on all steps of the IQ hierarchy (so Forrest Gump might collect clothing for the church raffle, while Mr. Murray and the other bright ones do the planning and keep the accounts—they have forgotten about the town Jew and the dwellers on the other side of the tracks in many of these idyllic villages). I do believe in this concept of neighborhood, and I will fight for its return. I grew up in such a place in Queens. But can anyone seriously find solutions for (rather than important palliatives of) our social ills therein?

However, if Herrnstein and Murray are wrong, and IQ represents not an immutable thing in the head, grading human beings on a single scale of general capacity with large numbers of custodial incompetents at the bottom, then the model that generates their gloomy vision collapses, and the wonderful variousness of human

abilities, properly nurtured, reemerges. We must fight the doctrine of *The Bell Curve* both because it is wrong and because it will, if activated, cut off all possibility of proper nurturance for everyone's intelligence. Of course, we cannot all be rocket scientists or brain surgeons, but those who can't might be rock musicians or professional athletes (and gain far more social prestige and salary thereby), while others will indeed serve by standing and waiting.

I closed my chapter in *The Mismeasure of Man* on the unreality of *g* and the fallacy of regarding intelligence as a single-scaled, innate thing in the head with a marvelous quotation from John Stuart Mill, well worth repeating:

The tendency has always been strong to believe that whatever received a name must be an entity or being, having an independent existence of its own, and if no real entity answering to the name could be found, men did not for that reason suppose that none existed, but imagined that it was something particularly abstruse and mysterious.

How strange that we would let a single and false number divide us, when evolution has united all people in the recency of our common ancestry—thus undergirding with a shared humanity that infinite variety which custom can never stale. *E pluribus unum*.

Cracking Open the IQ Box

HOWARD GARDNER

Despite its largely technical nature, *The Bell Curve* has already secured a prominent place in American Consciousness as a "big," "important," and "controversial" book. In a manner more befitting a chronicle of sex or spying, the publisher withheld it from potential critics until the date of publication. Since then it has grabbed front-page attention in influential publications, ridden the talk-show waves, and catalyzed academic conferences and dinner table controversies. With the untimely death of the senior author, psychologist Richard Herrnstein, attention has focused on his collaborator Charles Murray (described by the *New York Times Magazine* as the "most dangerous conservative in America"). But this volume clearly bears the mark of both men.

The Bell Curve is a strange work. Some of the analysis and a good deal of the tone are reasonable. Yet, the science in the book was questionable when it was proposed a century ago, and it has now been completely supplanted by the development of the cognitive sciences and neurosciences. The policy recommendations of the book are also exotic, neither following from the analyses nor justified on their own terms. The book relies heavily on innuendo, some of it quite frightening in its implications. The authors wrap themselves in a mantle of courage, while coyly disavowing the extreme conclusions that their own arguments invite. The tremendous attention lavished on the book probably comes less from the science or the policy proposals than from the subliminal messages and attitudes it conveys.

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Taken at face value, *The Bell Curve* proceeds in straightforward

fashion. Herrnstein and Murray summarize decades of work in psychometrics and policy studies and report the results of their own extensive analyses of the National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Experience of Youth, a survey that began in 1979 and has followed more than 12,000 Americans aged 14–22. They argue that studies of trends in American society have steadfastly ignored a smoking gun: the increasing influence of measured intelligence (IQ). As they see it, individuals have always differed in intelligence, at least partly because of heredity, but these differences have come to matter more because social status now depends more on individual achievement. The consequence of this trend is the bipolarization of the population, with high-IQ types achieving positions of power and prestige, low-IQ types being consigned to the ranks of the impoverished and the impotent. In the authors' view, the combined ranks of the poor, the criminal, the unemployed, the illegitimate (parents and offspring), and the uncivil harbor a preponderance of unintelligent individuals. Herrnstein and Murray are disturbed by these trends, particularly by the apparently increasing number of people who have babies but fail to become productive citizens. The authors foresee the emergence of a brutal society in which "the rich and the smart" (who are increasingly the same folks) band together to isolate and perhaps even reduce the ranks of those who besmirch the social fabric.

Scientifically, this is a curious work. If science is narrowly conceived as simply carrying out correlations and regression equations, the science in *The Bell Curve* seems, at least on a first reading, unexceptional. (My eyebrows were raised, though, by the authors' decision to introduce a new scoring system after they had completed an entire draft of the manuscript. They do not spell out the reasons for this switch, nor do they indicate whether the results were different using the earlier system.) But science goes far beyond the number-crunching stereotype; scientific inquiry involves the conceptualization of problems, decisions about the kinds of data to secure and analyze, the consideration of alternative explanations, and, above all, the chain of reasoning from assumptions to findings to inferences. In this sense, the science in *The Bell Curve* is more like special pleading, based on a biased reading of the data, than a

carefully balanced assessment of current knowledge.

Moreover, there is never a direct road from research to policy. One could look at the evidence presented by Herrnstein and Murray, as many of a liberal persuasion have done, and recommend targeted policies of intervention to help the dispossessed. Herrnstein and Murray, of course, proceed in quite the opposite direction. They report that efforts to raise intelligence have been unsuccessful and they oppose, on both moral and pragmatic grounds, programs of affirmative action or other ameliorative measures at school or in the workplace. Their ultimate solution, such as it is, is the restriction of a world they attribute to the Founding Fathers. These wise men acknowledged large differences in human abilities and did not try artificially to bring about equality of results; instead, Herrnstein and Murray tell us, they promoted a society in which each individual had his or her place in a local neighborhood and was accordingly valued as a human being with dignity.

The Bell Curve is well argued and admirably clear in its exposition. The authors are, for the most part, fair and thorough in laying out alternative arguments and interpretations. Presenting views that set a new standard for political incorrectness, they do so in a way that suggests their own overt discomfort—real or professed. Rush Limbaugh and Jesse Helms might like the implications, but they would hardly emulate the hedges and the "more in sorrow" statements. At least some of the authors' observations make sense. For example, their critique of the complex and often contradictory messages embodied in certain government social policies is excellent, and their recommendations for simpler rules are appropriate.

Yet I became increasingly disturbed as I read and reread this 800-page work. I gradually realized I was encountering a style of thought previously unknown to me: scholarly brinkmanship. Whether concerning an issue of science, policy, or rhetoric, the authors come dangerously close to embracing the most extreme positions, yet in the end shy away from doing so. Discussing scientific work on intelligence, they never quite say that intelligence is all-important and tied to one's genes; yet they signal that this is their belief and that readers ought to embrace the same conclusions. Discussing policy, they never quite say that affirmative action should

be totally abandoned or that childbearing or immigration by those of low IQ should be curbed; yet they signal their sympathy for these options and intimate that readers ought to consider these possibilities. Finally, the rhetoric of the book encourages readers to identify with the IQ elite and to distance themselves from the dispossessed in what amounts to an invitation to class warfare. Scholarly brinkmanship encourages the reader to draw the strongest conclusions, while allowing the authors to disavow this intention.

DO GENES EXPLAIN SOCIAL CLASS?

In a textbook published in 1975, Herrnstein and his colleague Roger Brown argued that the measurement of intelligence has been the greatest achievement of twentieth-century scientific psychology. Psychometricians can make a numerical estimate of a person's intelligence that remains surprisingly stable after the age of five or so, and much convergent evidence suggests that the variations of this measure of intelligence in a population are determined significantly (at least 60 percent) by inheritable factors. As Herrnstein and Murray demonstrate at great length, measured intelligence correlates with success in school, ultimate job status, and the likelihood of becoming a member of the cognitively entitled establishment.

But correlation is not causation, and it is possible that staying in school causes IQ to go up (rather than vice versa) or that both IQ and schooling reflect some third causative factor, such as parental attention, nutrition, social class, or motivation. Indeed, nearly every one of Herrnstein and Murray's reported correlations can be challenged on such grounds. Yet, Herrnstein and Murray make a persuasive cast that measured intelligence—or, more technically, *g*, the central, general component of measured intelligence—does affect one's ultimate niche in society.

But the links between genetic inheritance and IQ, and then between IQ and social class, are much too weak to draw the inference that genes determine an individual's ultimate status in society. Nearly all of the reported correlations between measured intelligence and societal outcomes explain at most 20 percent of the variance. In other words, over 80 percent (and perhaps over 90 percent) of the

factors contributing to socioeconomic status lie beyond measured intelligence. One's ultimate niche in society is overwhelmingly determined by non-IQ factors, ranging from initial social class to luck. And since close to half of one's IQ is due to factors unrelated to heredity, well over 90 percent of one's fate does not lie in one's genes. Inherited IQ is at most a paper airplane, not a smoking gun.

Indeed, even a sizable portion of the data reported or alluded to in *The Bell Curve* runs directly counter to the story that the authors apparently wish to tell. They note that IQ has gone up consistently around the world during this century—15 points, as great as the current difference between blacks and whites. Certainly this spurt cannot be explained by genes! They note that when blacks move from rural southern to urban northern areas, their intelligence scores also rise; that black youngsters adopted in households of higher socioeconomic status demonstrate improved performance on aptitude and achievement tests; and that differences between the performances of black and white students have declined on tests ranging from the Scholastic Aptitude Test to the National Assessment of Educational Practice. In an extremely telling phrase, Herrnstein and Murray say that the kind of direct verbal interaction between white middle-class parents and their preschool children “amounts to excellent training for intelligence tests.” On that basis, they might very well have argued for expanding Head Start, but instead they question the potential value of any effort to change what they regard as the immutable power of inherited IQ.

PSYCHOLOGY, BIOLOGY, AND CULTURE

The psychometric faith in IQ testing and Herrnstein and Murray's analysis are based on assumptions that emerged a century ago, when Alfred Binet devised the first test of intelligence for children. Since 1900, biology, psychology, and anthropology have enormously advanced our understanding of the mind. But like biologists who ignore DNA or physicists who do not consider quantum mechanical effects, Herrnstein and Murray pay virtually no attention to these insights and, as a result, there is a decidedly anachronistic flavor to their entire discussion.

Intoxication with the IQ test is a professional hazard among psychometricians. I have known many psychometricians who feel that the science of testing will ultimately lay bare all the secrets of the mind. Some believe a difference of even a few points in an IQ or SAT score discloses something important about an individual's or group's intellectual merits. The world of intelligence testers is peculiarly self-contained. Like the chess player who thinks all games (if not the world itself) are like chess, or the car salesman who speaks only of horsepower, the psychometrician may come to believe that all of importance in the mind can be captured by a small number of items in the Stanford-Binet test or by one's ability to react quickly and accurately to a pattern of lights displayed on a computer screen.

Though Herrnstein deviated sharply in many particulars from his mentor B. F. Skinner, the analysis in *The Bell Curve* is Skinnerian in a fundamental sense: It is a "black box analysis." Along with most psychometricians, Herrnstein and Murray convey the impression that one's intelligence simply exists as an innate fact of life—unanalyzed and unanalyzable—as if it were hidden in a black box. Inside the box there is a single number, IQ, which determines vast social consequences.

Outside the closed world of psychometricians, however, a more empirically sensitive and scientifically compelling understanding of human intelligence has emerged in the past hundred years. Many authorities have challenged the notion of a single intelligence or even the concept of intelligence altogether. Let me mention just a few examples. (The works by Stephen Ceci and Robert Sternberg, as well as my own, discuss many more.)

Sternberg and his colleagues have studied valued kinds of intellect not measured by IQ tests, such as practical intelligence—the kinds of skills and capacities valued in the workplace. They have shown that effective managers are able to pick up various tacit messages at the workplace and that this crucial practical sensitivity is largely unrelated to psychometric intelligence. Ralph Rosnow and his colleagues have developed measures of social or personal intelligence—the capacities to figure out how to operate in complex

human situations—and have again demonstrated that these are unrelated to the linguistic and logical skills tapped in IQ tests.

Important new work has been carried out on the role of training in the attainment of expertise. Anders Ericsson and his colleagues have demonstrated that training, not inborn talent, accounts for much of experts' performances; the ultimate achievement of chess players or musicians depends (as your mother told you) on regular practice over many years. Ceci and others have documented the extremely high degree of expertise that can be achieved by randomly chosen individuals; for example, despite low measured intelligence, handicappers at the racetrack successfully employ astonishingly complex multiplicative models. A growing number of researchers have argued that, while IQ tests may provide a reasonable measure of certain linguistic and mathematical forms of thinking, other equally important kinds of intelligence, such as spatial, musical, or personal, are ignored (this is the subject of much of my own work). In short, the closed world of intelligence is being opened up.

Accompanying this rethinking of the concept of intelligence(s), there is growing skepticism that short paper-and-pencil tests can get at important mental capacities. Just as "performance examinations" are coming to replace multiple-choice tests in schools, many scientists, among them Lauren Resnick and Jean Lave, have probed the capacities of individuals to solve problems "on the scene" rather than in a testing room, with pencil and paper. Such studies regularly confirm that one can perform at an expert level in a natural or simulated setting (such as bargaining in a market or simulating the role of a city manager) even with a low IQ, while a high IQ cannot in itself substitute for training, expertise, motivation, and creativity. Rather than the pointless exercise of attempting to raise psychometric IQ (on which Herrnstein and Murray persevere), this research challenges us to try to promote the actual behavior and skills that we want our future citizens to have. After all, if we found that better athletes happen to have larger shoe sizes, we would hardly try to enlarge the feet of the less athletic.

Scientific understanding of biological and cultural aspects of cognition also grows astonishingly with every passing decade. Virtually

no serious natural scientist speaks about genes and environment any longer as if they were opposed. Indeed, every serious investigator accepts the importance of both biological and cultural factors and the need to understand their interactions. Genes regulate all human behavior, but no form of behavior will emerge without the appropriate environment triggers or supports. Learning alters the way in which genes are expressed.

The development of the individual brain and mind begins in utero, and pivotal alterations in capacity and behavior come about as the result of innumerable events following conception. Hormonal effects in utero, which certainly are environmental, can cause a different profile of cognitive strengths and limitations to emerge. The loss of certain sensory capacities causes the redeployment of brain tissue to new functions; a rich environment engenders the growth of additional cortical connections as well as timely pruning of excess synapses. Compare a child who has a dozen healthy experiences each day in utero and after birth to another child who has a daily diet of a dozen injurious episodes. The cumulative advantage of healthy prenatal environment and a stimulating postnatal environment is enormous. In the study of IQ, much has been made of studies of identical and fraternal twins. But because of the influences on cognition in utero and during infancy, even such studies cannot decisively distinguish genetic from environmental influences.

Herrnstein and Murray note that measured intelligence is only stable after age five, without drawing the obvious conclusion that the events of the first years of life, not some phlogiston-like *g*, are the principal culprit. Scores of important and fascinating new findings emerge in neuroscience every year, but scarcely a word of any of this penetrates the Herrnstein and Murray black-box approach.

Precisely the same kind of story can be told from the cultural perspective. Cultural beliefs and practices affect the child at least from the moment of birth and perhaps sooner. Even the parents' expectations of their unborn child and their reactions to the discovery of the child's sex have an impact. The family, teachers, and other sources of influence in the culture signal what is important to the growing child, and these messages have both short- and long-term

impact. How one thinks about oneself, one's prospects in this world and beyond, and whether one regards intelligence as inborn or acquired—all these shape patterns of activity, attention, and personal investments in learning and self-improvement. Particularly for stigmatized minorities, these signals can wreck any potential for cognitive growth and achievement.

Consider Claude Steele's research on the effects of stereotyping on performance. African-American students perform worse than white students when they are led to believe that the test is an intellectual one and that their race matters, but these differences wash out completely when such "stereotype vulnerable" conditions are removed.

To understand the effects of culture, no study is more seminal than Harold Stevenson and James Stigler's book *The Learning Gap: Why Our Schools Are Failing and What We Can Learn from Japanese and Chinese Education* (1992). In an analysis that runs completely counter to *The Bell Curve*, Stevenson and Stigler show why Chinese and Japanese students achieve so much more in schools than do Americans. They begin by demonstrating that initial differences in IQ among the three populations are either nonexistent or trivial. But with each passing year, East Asian students raise their edge over Americans, so that by the middle school years, there is virtually no overlap in reading and mathematics performance between the two populations.

Genetics, heredity, and measured intelligence play no role here. East Asian students learn more and score better on just about every kind of measure because they attend school for more days, work harder in school and at home after school, and have better-prepared teachers and more deeply engaged parents who encourage and coach them each day and night. Put succinctly, Americans believe (like Herrnstein and Murray) that if you do not do well, it is because they lack talent or ability; Asians believe it is because they do not work hard enough. As a Japanese aphorism has it, "Fail with five hours of sleep; pass with four." Both predictions tend to be self-fulfilling. As educator Derek Bok once quipped, Americans score near to last on almost all measures save one: When you ask Americans how they *think* they are doing, they profess more satis-

faction than any other group. Like Herrnstein and Murray, most Americans have not understood that what distinguishes the cultures is the pattern of self-understanding and motivation, especially the demands that we make on ourselves (and on those we care about) and the lessons we draw from success and failure—not the structure of genes or the shape of the brain.

THE SHAKY BRIDGE TO POLICY

Like Murray's earlier book *Losing Ground*, *The Bell Curve* views most recent governmental attempts at intervention doing more harm than good and questions the value of welfare payments, affirmative action programs, indeed, and kind of charitable disposition toward the poor. To improve education, Herrnstein and Murray recommended vouchers to encourage a private market and put forth the remarkable proposal that the government should shift funds from disadvantaged to gifted children. And while they do not openly endorse policies that will limit breeding among the poor or keep the dispossessed from our shores, they stimulate us to consider such possibilities.

Nowhere did I find the Herrnstein and Murray analysis less convincing than in their treatment of crime. Incarcerated offenders, they point out, have an average IQ of 92, eight points below the national mean. They go on to suggest that since lower cognitive aptitude is associated with higher criminal activity, there would be less crime if IQs were higher. But if intelligence levels have at worst been constant, why did crime increase so much between the 1960s and the 1980s? Why have crime rates leveled off and declined in the last few years? Does low IQ also explain the embarrassing prevalence of white-collar crime in business and politics or the recent sudden rise in crime in Russia? Astonishingly, no other influences, such as the values promoted by the mass media, play any role in Herrnstein and Murray's analysis.

Considering how often they remind us that the poor and benighted at society's bottom are incapable through no fault of their own, Herrnstein and Murray's hostility to efforts to reduce poverty might seem, at the very least, ungenerous. But, at the book's end,

the authors suddenly turn from their supposed unblinking realism to fanciful nostalgia. Having consigned the dispossessed to a world where they can achieve little because of their own meager intellectual gifts, Herrnstein and Murray call on the society as a whole to reconstitute itself: to become (once again?) a world of neighborhoods where each individual is made to feel important, valued, and dignified. They devote not a word to how this return to lost neighborhoods is to be brought about or how those with low IQs and no resources could suddenly come to feel worthwhile. It is as if we were watching scenes from *Apocalypse Now* or *Natural Born Killers*, only to blink for a minute and to find the movie concluding with images from a situation comedy or "Mr. Roger's Neighborhood."

RHETORICAL BOMB-THROWING

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the book is its rhetorical stance. This is one of the most stylistically divisive books that I have ever read. Despite occasional avowals of regret and the few utopian pages at the end, Herrnstein and Murray set up an us-them dichotomy that eventually culminates in an us-against-them opposition.

Who are "we"? Well, we are the people who went to Harvard (as the jacket credits both of the authors) or attended similar colleges and read books like this. We are the smart, the rich, the powerful, the worriers. And who are "they"? They are the pathetic others, those who could not get into good schools and who don't cut it on IQ tests and SATs. While perhaps perfectly nice people, they are simply not going to make it in tomorrow's complex society and will probably end up cordoned off from the rest of us under the tutelage of a vicious custodial state. The hope for a civil society depends on a miraculous return of the spirit of the Founding Fathers to re-create the villages of Thomas Jefferson or George Bailey (as played by Jimmy Stewart) or Beaver Cleaver (as played by Jerry Mather).

How is this rhetorical polarization achieved? At literally dozens of points in the book, Herrnstein and Murray seek to stress the extent to which they and the readers resemble one another and differ from those unfortunate souls who cause our society's problems.

Reviewing *The Bell Curve* of the title, Herrnstein and Murray declare, in a representative passage:

You—meaning the self-selected person who has read this far into this book—live in a world that probably looks nothing like the figure. In all likelihood, almost all of your friends and professional associates belong to that top Class I slice. Your friends and associates who you consider to be unusually slow are probably somewhere in Class II.

Why is this so singularly off-putting? I would have thought it unnecessary to say, but if people as psychometrically smart as Messrs. Herrnstein and Murray did not “get it,” it is safer to be explicit. High IQ doesn’t make a person one whit better than anybody else. And if we are to have any chance of a civil and humane society, we had better avoid the smug self-satisfaction of an elite that reeks of arrogance and condescension.

Though there are seven appendices, spanning over 100 pages, and nearly 200 pages of footnotes, bibliography, and index, one element is notably missing from this tome: a report on any program of social intervention that works. For example, Herrnstein and Murray never mention Lisbeth Schorr’s *Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage*, a book that was prompted in part by *Losing Ground*. Schorr chronicles a number of social programs that have made a genuine difference in education, child health service, family planning, and other lightning-rod areas of our society. And to the ranks of the programs chronicled in Schorr’s book, many new names can now be added. Those who have launched Interfaith Educational Agencies, City Year, Teach for America, Jobs for the Future, and hundreds of other service agencies have not succumbed to the sense of futility and abandonment of the poor that the Herrnstein and Murray book promotes.

When I recently debated Murray on National Public Radio, he was reluctant to accept the possibility that programs of intervention might dissolve or significantly reduce differences in intelligence. If he did, the entire psychometric edifice that he and Herrnstein have constructed would collapse. While claiming to confront facts that others refuse to see, they are blind to both contradictory evidence

and the human consequences of their work. Herrnstein and Murray, of course, have the right to their conclusions. But if they truly believe that blacks will not be deeply hurt by the hints that they are genetically inferior, they are even more benighted—dare I say, even more stupid—than I have suggested.

It is callous to write a work that casts earlier attempts to help the disadvantaged in the least-favorable light, strongly suggests that nothing positive can be done in the present climate, contributes to an us-against-them mentality, and then posits a miraculous cure. High intelligence and high creativity are desirable. But unless they are linked to some kind of moral compass, their possessors might best be consigned to an island of glass-bead game players, with no access to the mainland.