

## *The Bell Curve*

*Pride and selfishness, combined with mental power, never want for a theory to justify them - Frederick Douglas, 1854*

*“Yet whatever the virtues of keeping the subject of IQ out of the public square, all such efforts are futile in the aftermath of The Bell Curve. Its argument, condemned, but so far unrefuted, lies like a corpse on the tennis court. It is difficult to pretend to ignore it and keep playing. Moreover, the De Facto censorship of public discussion seems to have had the effect of strengthening private convictions that innate differences do exist and are socially important.” - Dinesh D’ Souza (The End of Racism, 1996 p. 435)*

*The book is a rhetorical masterpiece of scientism, and it benefits from the particular kind of fear that numbers impose on nonprofessional commentators. ....The blatant errors and inadequacies of The Bell Curve could be picked up by 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. - Stephen Jay Gould, Review of The Bell Curve in the New Yorker, 11/17/94)*

*Patriotism, we have been told is the last refuge of scoundrels. Psychologists and biologists might consider the possibility that heritability is the first - Leon Kamin [The Science and Politics of IQ, 1974 p. 3]*

*If there is one thing more disturbing than a ruling class based on privilege, it is a ruling class that believes it deserves its position by virtue of its intelligence. - Brigitte Berger, Professor of Sociology, Boston University in the National Review, Dec 5, 1994.*

*To criticize inequality and to desire equality is not, as sometimes suggested, to cherish the romantic illusion that all men are equal in character and intelligence. It is, however, to cherish a society that eliminates inequalities founded on social and economic injustices. - R.H. Tawney, Equality*

*Attacks on ability testing will be with us for a long time. That would be true even if there were no ethnic or racial groups, since resource and credential allocation based on test results would be correlated with class position. The legacy of past white mistreatment of blacks exacerbates the issue by giving it a racial identity, including an incarnation known modernly as the underclass, whose scholastic achievement or ability scores are going to suppress the black average for a long time to come. Since tests are quite often useful, it seemed to me worth examining why killing the messenger is so popular a response to this bad news - Rogers Elliot [Litigating Intelligence: IQ Tests, Special Education, and Social Science in the Courtroom, 1987].*

*..it is realistic to believe that young minority children can be served by public schools if they*

share the culture of the schools; if they do not share the culture of the schools, they cannot be reasonably served... Sandra Scarr [Foreword to *Litigating Intelligence*].

According to Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, we live in an age and country untainted by history, an age that springs full blown from g, or the “general intelligence” of the citizens who are here, now. Jacqueline Jones, 1995

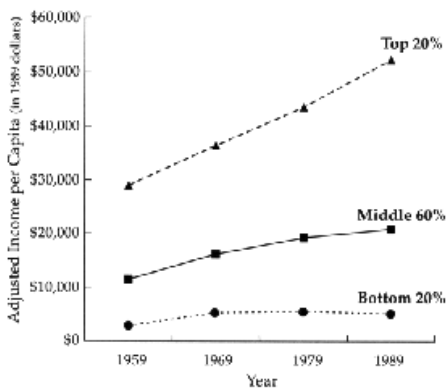
From 1930 to 1970, the lowest-income 40% of American households began receiving almost as much of American income as the highest-income 5%, but that trend reversed after 1970.



The distribution of income and wealth is more unequal in the United States than in any of the industrialized countries. Income inequality has been growing since the 1950s and especially so since the mid-1980s. As the figure shows the share of national income collected by the bottom 40% has been falling since the late 1960s. At the same time the share of the top 5% has been rising. Moreover, while income per person rose for the top 20%, it has actually been falling for the bottom 20%.

Conservatives insist that inequality is a natural and inevitable result of the operation of a free market economy. In the unfettered competitive market the spoils naturally go to the most able and talented, so they say. While the able soar in wealth the “dull” languish in poverty and all the pathologies attendant thereto. The most recent [1994], if not the first, assertion of the idea that inequality is nothing more than a reflection of the distribution of innate ability, came from Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray in *The Bell Curve*. Herrnstein, until his death in 1994 was a professor of psychology at Harvard. Murray was a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Between 1959 and 1969, income per person grew for all households. Since 1970, income per person has continued to grow rapidly for the richest households, grown at a declining rate among middle-income households, and fallen slightly among poor households. The result is significantly more inequality.



In *The Bell Curve*, it is contended that while “social class remains the vehicle of social life” it is “intelligence that pulls the train” [p. 25]. At the top, “modern societies identify the brightest youths, with ever increasing efficiency, and then guides them into fairly narrow educational and occupational channels. These channels are increasingly lucrative and influential, leading to the development of a distinct stratum in the social hierarchy, which we hereby dub the cognitive elite. The isolation of the brightest from the rest of society is already extreme” [p. 25]. On the other hand, those with low intelligence are more likely to be found in poverty; “low IQ is a much stronger precursor of poverty than the socioeconomic circumstances in which people grew up” [p.127].

of poverty that the socioeconomic circumstances in which people grew up” [p.127].

HM contend that the growing inequality observed over the past few decades is most likely the result of the growing premium paid to cognitive ability in the face of growing demand. Intelligence has become more valuable for a number of reasons. For example, as a consequence of technical change, robots replaced workers. The low paying jobs disappeared, and high paying jobs were created to design, produce and repair robots [HM p. 99]. Other socially beneficial products of intelligence are listed. For example, the capability of dreaming up a sales campaign that will add a percentage point or two of market share, the ability to help clients “slip through tax loopholes” and, finally, intelligence can help companies navigate the labyrinth of government regulations [p. 99].

Liberals contend that the growing inequality of income and wealth is not natural or inevitable, but is instead a “social construction, a result of our historical acts, Americans have created the extent and type of inequality we have, and Americans maintain it” [Fischer et al, *Inequality by Design*, 1996]. In the decade of the 1980s, for example, most of the increase in inequality can be attributed to high interest rates, the bull market in stocks, exploding CEO salaries, major salary and benefit concessions by workers, cuts by the Reagan Administration in social welfare programs and increases in defense spending.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it is hard to explain why there is so much more inequality in the United States compared to countries such as Sweden, Germany, Canada and England with similar “genetic stocks.” [Fischer et al p. 9]. One important reason, however, is, at least according to Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve, that, “America unlike its rivals in Europe and Asia, has not tried to ‘protect’ its workers from some of the presumed harsher aspects of free-market competition” [quoted in *Providence Journal* 9/17/00 p.F1]

*The Bell Curve*, is charged, by its critics, with being “historically naive,” “patently wrongheaded” and “reductionist.” It has been only since the 1980s that the share of incomes going to the top 5% began its precipitous increase and the share of the bottom 40% began to fall. This was primarily the result of the undoing of the New Deal by the conservative Reagan Administration. Most notable among Reagan’s policies was a hostility to unions. While Canada was liberalizing its labor laws, the United States became more repressive. Union membership fell 45 % in the U.S. between 1970 and 1990 [Fischer et al p.149]. Richard Freeman and David Card, attribute 20% of the growth of wage inequality in the 1980s to this factor alone [Fischer et al p. 149]. Clearly, social reality is far too complex to be satisfactorily represented by a “footrace among unequally swift individuals.” It is “how society sets up the race and rewards the runners” that matters, and these factors are decidedly political [Fischer et al p. 13]. For example, a simple way to reduce inequality is to increase the minimum wage or we might establish a negative income tax system guaranteeing a minimum income, and so on. Of course, the conservatives insist that such policies will reduce economic efficiency, and more specifically, Herrnstein would object to the effect that by reducing material incentives the supply of IQ will be reduced. But, if our material standard of living is reduced so be it, there are other values that

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<sup>1</sup> Defense spending produces fewer jobs but considerably more income than other types of spending. Well paid scientists and engineers and unionized craft workers are vastly over-represented among defense workers.

are more important. Most notable is one that Orlando Patterson calls the “principle of infrangibility”: “a commitment to a unity that cannot be broken or separated into parts, a commitment to the elements of a moral order and social fabric that is inviolable and cannot be infringed.”[Patterson p. 139].

According to Patterson, the dictum by our founding fathers that “all men are created equal” established a “basic principle for social life.” Patterson argues that the thinking of the founding fathers went something like this:

We know there are numerous differences and inequalities among people, and we live by them ourselves; for heaven’s sake we are slave holders! However, we are declaring as an end for the nation the idea that, whatever observable differences there may be between people, it will be accepted that in some profound respects they are to be treated as equal, especially in the legal and political areas of life. More generally, there is an essential core of humanity that, when all differences are shed, we all share, and in this essential core we are to be considered equal...An essential human core implies, in a fundamental way, that enslavement is wrong, even if there is not much we can do about it for the nation as a whole at the moment [Patterson 135-136].

The founding fathers did not provide us with a clear definition of this essential core, because as Patterson points out, “there are no objective grounds for selecting the ideals we consider important, so we must arbitrarily choose based on our moral principles.” Thus, we can decide to treat certain traits as “socially meaningless.” For example, no one has chosen to call to the nation’s attention to the fact that, on average, Euro-Americans in Tennessee and rural Georgia score lower on IQ tests than Euro-Americans in the Northeast. We do not make a national issue of them to avoid “wantonly insulting and dishonoring these people.”[Patterson p. 137]. Nor does anyone “dare to suggest that these states in the South are an intellectual drag on the nation.”[Patterson p. 137] Why is this so? “Because Euro-Americans in Tennessee and Georgia are seen as belonging to the social and moral community that constitutes the American people” [Patterson p. 137]. This is why, of course, in the vast literature reviewing the *Bell Curve*, no attention whatsoever was given to the issue of IQ variance within the Euro-American group and the “seemingly inflammatory remarks made by Murray on the ‘white trash’ problem [Patterson p. 137]. No one takes such matters seriously as they are beyond the moral pale. Had *The Bell Curve* not included assertions that Afro-Americans were intellectually inferior, there would have been very little press coverage by the “race conscious media”[Patterson p. 138]. The assertions of an Afro-American IQ deficit were controversial, because it is apparently still “within the pale” to wantonly insult and dishonor Afro-Americans.

The disproportionate emphasis on race differences is quite remarkable when one notes that only 27 pages out of 552 are devoted to the analysis of race differences in IQ. Yet, a full 63 pages are devoted to a critique of Affirmative Action. Afro-Americans represent only 13 % of the American population, and even with *The Bell Curve*’s accounting represent only a small segment of the “dull” people in the United States. Again, why the focus on Afro-Americans?

In my mind, there are two reasons. First, despite the optimistic representations of the improving conditions of Afro-Americans and the increase in their social acceptance manifest in

polls, there is still a great deal of suspicion that Afro-Americans are unworthy of full assimilation.

In his most highly regarded book, *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman addresses the problems of “managing diversity,” the most notable of which is prejudice. “Prejudices, he writes, “are a kind of emotional learning that occurs early in life, making these reactions especially hard to eradicate entirely, even in people who as adults feel it is wrong to hold them.” The *emotions* are planted in childhood, “while the beliefs that are used to justify them come later.” Even should one want to change, and even should one intellectually express a lack of prejudice, it is difficult to change “your deep feelings” [Goleman p. 156]. Indeed, individuals, sometimes unconsciously, are drawn to and comforted by information that confirms the prejudices buried deep in their emotional memories. “The tenacity of these subtle biases,” he continues, “may explain why over the last forty years or so racial attitudes of American whites toward blacks have become increasingly more tolerant, more subtle forms of bias persist; people disavow racist attitudes will still acting with covert bias. When asked, such people say they feel no bigotry, but in ambiguous situations still act in a biased way - though they give another rationale for their prejudice” [Goleman p. 157]. Most commonly, it is “turning a blind eye to acts of bias,” not active discrimination, that allows discrimination against Afro-Americans to persist.

*The Bell Curve*, then, served as comfort food, for those with starved unconscious race prejudice. “I knew it” was the unconscious response to the very existence of this book. Whatever cognitive dissonance a person might have been feeling about their prejudices was surely diminished. The book is just another dealing of the “race card” as a means to keep people from confronting the important issues our society faces. Which gets us to the second point.

As we have seen, overall economic inequality has been increasing for the past two decades. From the elite perspective, is it not better to have people, including social scientists focused on race differentials rather than the fact that “the gap between the average worker and the average CEO has increased by 340% since 1974 (35 to 120) [Patterson p. 178]. The “obsessive” focus on the Afro-American poor tends “to obscure the real national problem” of growing inequality. Indeed, even for Afro- Americans the real problem is inequality as “the top fifth greedily takes so much that the bottom fifth, even working two jobs, sinks deeper and deeper into poverty” [Patterson p. 179].

Dinesh D’Souza’s assertion that there has been a “de facto censorship” regarding *The Bell Curve* suggests a serious delusion (surely one of many) on his part. Charles Murray [Herrnstein passed away before the book was published] and his book appeared on the covers *Newsweek*, *The New Republic*, the *New York Times Book Review* and the *New Republic* and was reviewed extensively by the media. For the most part, the book was attacked:

Both the *New Republic* and *Newsweek* bracketed their reports with critical sidebars, over a dozen in the first case; the *New York Times Magazine* published a cover-story profile of one of the authors implying he was a boor; an interviewer for National Public Radio delivered almost every question to that author with a clear note of skepticism; the *New York Times* published at least two editorials against the book; and so on. And yet the book withstood the attacks and sold

hundreds of thousands of copies [Fischer et al p. 11]

Contrary to D'Souza's assertion, no one argued for the censorship of the book, but many did unequivocally condemn the book in quite vitriolic terms. For example, Adolf Reed, a historian at Northwestern University, called the *Bell Curve* a "vile, disingenuously vicious book by two odious men." He calls the authors, Herrnstein and Murray, "intellectual brown shirts," that is, tools of the "cryptofacist right who "display a perspective worthy of an Alabama filling station." Their book is, "beneath the mind-numbing barrage of numbers - really just a compendium of reactionary prejudices" [*The Progressive* December, 1994]. In a similar vein, the Buffalo News editorialized that the *Bell Curve* was nothing but a regurgitation of "unproven speculation"[10/21/94].

According to E.J. Dionne of the Washington Post, the book is "not a breakthrough but a flashy repackaging of a repeatedly discredited fashion." It is not more credible than the "pseudoscience about racial differences used to justify the end of reconstruction and the reimposition of a segregated caste system on the American South." H&M, Dionne writes, are not serious scholars, but rather they are "skilled polemicists aimed at defeating egalitarians."

Peter Passell, a science writer for the New York Times complained that after "wading through a long, quasi-academic examination of the statistical links between intelligence, character, race and poverty, the reader's reward is a horary lecture on the evils of the welfare state." [NYT 10/27/99]. For example, H&M note, "government policy can do much to foster the vitality of neighborhoods by trying to do less for them."

Stephen Jay Gould, a paleontologist at Harvard, and perhaps the most prolific science writer in the world, and an expert on the "mismeasure of man" involved in the IQ debate, wonders rhetorically what all the fuss is about as the *Bell Curve*, in his estimation, "contains no new arguments and presents no compelling data to support its anachronistic social Darwinism." Gould conjectures that the popularity of the book "must reflect the 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." [New Yorker, 11/28/99].

As to the book itself, Gould claims, it "fails because its central premises<sup>2</sup> are false. The "vacuousness" of the book is evident from the fact that it "hardly discusses, pro or con, the theoretical basis for its certainty" that a general factor of intelligence exists. Such a presumption, one should add, was demolished in Gould's book, the *Mismeasure of Man*. Gould goes on to note the authors' "suspect use of statistics" and the "extreme weakness of their vaunted relationships" which only a "inspire lack of confidence." Gould insists that the so-called intelligence factor is little more than reification, if a politically useful one. Quoting Mill, Gould contends:

The tendency has always been strong to believe that whatever received a name

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<sup>2</sup> H&M assert "four shaky" premises none of which are argued or defended. They are "intelligence must be depictable as a single number, capable of ranking people in linear order, genetically based and immutable."

must be an entity of being, having an independent existence of its own. And if no 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.

Gould, who is an avowed defender of the first amendment, concludes that *The Bell Curve* is a “manifesto of conservative ideology; the book’s inadequate and biased treatment of data displays its primary purpose - advocacy.”

The political agenda of both Herrnstein and Murray is no secret. For at least three decades before his death in 1994, Richard Herrnstein had been promoting the idea that IQ is an inherited trait that is socially and economically important. Herrnstein was certain that there was a “liberal conspiracy to obscure the significance of genetically based differences in the intelligence of different races, social classes and ethnic groups” [Alan Ryan, *New York Review of Books*, 11/17/99]. For his part, Murray is “obsessed with the destructive effects of the American welfare state.”[*ibid*]. Alan Ryan claims the book is thus “full of interesting, if dubiously reliable, information, and it offers the always engaging spectacle of two practical-minded men firmly in the grip of irrational passion”[*ibid*].

According to Charles Lane, senior editor of the *New Republic*, the sources used by H&M are as “tainted” as their ideological motives. For example, five of the articles cited in the book were published in an anthropology journal titled, *The Mankind Quarterly*. Moreover, seventeen of the authors cited in the *Bell Curve* were also contributors to *Mankind Quarterly*, including ten who were former editors or members of the editorial advisory board [C. Lane, *The New York Review of Books*, 12/1/94].

*Mankind Quarterly* was the response of racists to the decolonization of Africa and the American civil rights movement. It is a “notorious journal of ‘racial history’ founded and funded by men who believe in the genetic superiority of the white race. The objective of the journal was to restore “the fact of racial differences” to the discipline of Anthropology, which had, since apocalypse of Nazism, been assiduously ignoring and even denouncing the concept [Lane *ibid*]. The founder of the journal and editor until 1978, Robert Gayre, was an advocate of apartheid in South Africa and once testified in court, as an expert, that blacks were “worthless” [Lane *ibid*]. Also serving on the editorial board was Ottmar von Vershuer, a race scientist in Nazi Germany, who was an academic mentor of Josef Mengele [Lane *Ibid*]. The contributors to the *Mankind Quarterly* constitute a racist “who’s who”: Cyril Burt, Raymond Cattell, H. J. Eysenck, Arthur Jensen, Richard Lynn, J. Philippe Rushton, and William Shockley [Magnus Linkater, *The Times of London* 11/23/94].

The Mankind Quarterly is published by the Institute for the Study of Man which is supported by the Pioneer Fund. The founder of the Pioneer Fund was a Wickliffe Draper; a man fascinated by eugenics, sympathetic to Nazism and an advocate of returning American blacks to Africa. Since its inception in 1937, it has supported a number of eugenic campaigns including the movement to ban the immigration of “genetically inferior immigrants” and has been supporting scholars who do “racist research” [Lane *ibid.*]. Herrnstein & Murray quote thirteen scholars who have benefitted from funding from the Pioneer Fund [Lane *ibid.*]. Most notorious among these is Philippe Rushton.

Given an African origin of less than 200,000 years ago, a dispersal event out of Africa, about 100,000 years ago, and a peopling of the rest of the world thereafter, the question arises as to how these events led to behavioral profiles found among the races. The suggestion is made that colonizing the temperate and cold climates led to increasing cognitive demands to solve the problems of gathering and storing food, gaining shelter and raising children successfully in cold winters, including the Ice Ages, which ended only 10,000 years ago. As the original African populations evolved into Caucasoids and Mongoloids, they did so in the direction of larger brains, slower rates of maturation, and lower levels of sex hormone with concomitant reductions in sexual potency, aggressiveness and impulsivity, and increases in family stability, forward planning, self-control, rule-following and longevity - Philippe Rushton. *Race, Evolution and Behavior*, 1997, p.263-4.

Philippe Rushton is a developmental psychologist at the University of Western Ontario. Rushton is best known for his view that there are only three races, Asian, Caucasoids, and Negroids and that these race are ranked by IQ. According to Rushton ( and many of his mindset) Asians have the highest IQ (107), and Negroids the lowest (85) and Caucasoids fall in between at 100.

Rushton insists that differences reproductive strategies account for the IQ differences between these groups. The higher the group IQ the more likely it will adopt a so-called Kin-strategy. Here each reproducing pair has a small number of off-spring in which it “invests” heavily in terms of parental care and protection. Low IQ groups, on the other hand, use an r-strategy. In this case, parents have large numbers of off-spring, leave them on their own, and hope a few survive. The caring for and nurturing of children is not part of the r-strategy. According to Rushton, Negroids favor the latter strategy.<sup>3</sup> In his mind this explains why Negroids are more “sexually promiscuous and why the males have larger penises” than the other groups.<sup>4</sup> These factors in turn explain why there is anarchy in “black city-states like Detroit ( “a

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<sup>3</sup>Rushton contends that the African environment was highly variable, that is, subject to random shocks for drought and disease. As a consequence parents could not expect children to survive at any point in time. It made little sense, he argues, to invest in an asset (child) that might be taken away on the caprice of the environment. In the temperate zone, while the climate may have been more severe, it was more predictable thus allowing people to anticipate and to protect their children [Rushton, p. 249] .

<sup>4</sup>For example, Rushton reports that 84% of U.S. blacks have penis length greater than 151 mm compared to only 70% for white men and 19% for men in Thailand. White and black men differ little in circumference, but Thai men again are significantly smaller [Rushton, *Race, Evolution and Behavior* p. 168. As to brain size, Mongoloids on average exceed Caucasoids by

chaotic seething ghetto), and why “Africa cannot control its population growth,” and why AIDS is running rampant in the United States among black Americans as well as in the Caribbean and in Africa [Rushton *Race, Evolution and Behavior* p. 183].

Rushton hypothesizes that in a sexually promiscuous race larger penis size would have a selective evolutionary advantage. Assuming that many men may ejaculate into a given woman within a short period of time, the one with the longest penis will deposit his sperm closer to the ovum and thus have a greater chance of reproducing. But, this reproductive success comes with a price. It is Rushton’s main contention that intelligence is based on the size of the brain and that brain size and penis size are inversely related. As he said in an interview with Adam Miller, “you know it’s a trade-off: More brain or more penis. You can’t have everything” [A. Miller, *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 10/20/94].

Herrnstein and Murray insist that Rushton is neither a “crackpot or a bigot.” One should hope they believe this since eleven of Rushton’s books and papers appear in their bibliography. Yet even Herrnstein & Murray recognize that Rushton’s theory “remains a long way from confirmation” [Bell Curve p. 643].

Another prominent recipient of Pioneer Fund financial support is Richard Lynn. Lynn’s most significant “research” contribution to the Pioneer Fund agenda has been to show that Africans have the lowest intelligence on the planet. Lynn’s research of African IQ data led him to conclude that the average IQ of Africans was 70; a full fifteen points below that of Afro-Americans (85). The pure Africans had lower IQs because they did not have the advantage of “admixture” with Caucasoid genes with which the American “hybrids” were endowed. Lynn estimates that American Negro-Caucasoid hybrids have about a 25% admixture [Rushton p. 136].

In an article titled, “Lies, damned lies and statistics,” Leon Kamin, professor of psychology at Northeastern University takes Lynn’s “research” to task. First, Kamin notes that Lynn’s assertion of an mean African IQ of 70 suggests that one-half of Africans are mentally retarded. When Herrnstein and Murray, who consider Lynn to be “a leading scholar of race and ethnic differences from whose advice they had ‘benefitted especially,’” reported Lynn’s research, they indicated an African IQ of 75. Kamin presumes they did this because they found 70 to be “a ludicrously impossible figure.” [Kamin, *Scientific American*, 2/95]. In any case, Lynn relied heavily on a 1989 study by Ken Owen which Lynn called the “best single study of Negroid intelligence.” [ibid]. Yet, Owen himself insisted that the low test scores of blacks had little to do with innate intelligence. The blacks who took the tests were rural Zulus with a poor command of English and no familiarity with many of the things referred to on the test such as electrical appliances, microscopes, and “western type ladies accessories [ibid].

How does one get such obviously defective researched published? Lynn, is an associate

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17 cubic centimeters and Negroids by 97 cubic centimeters [p. 131]. By the way, Rushton also asserts that the putative 100 gram difference in the average weight of male and female brains is the consequence of “those intellectual qualities at which men excel, that is, in spatial and mathematical reasoning” [p. 132]. The Asian IQ advantage is a consequence of their greater “visiospatial IQs” [p. 134] which makes them “spectacularly” above average in mathematics [135].

editor of *Mankind Quarterly*, and his 1991 “research” paper was published by that journal. But, according to Kamin the paper is replete with “distortions and misrepresentations of data” and manifests a “scandalous disregard for scientific objectivity.” Kamin scolds Herrnstein and Murray for their uncritical acceptance of the work of their “scientific tutor” especially given the “sensitivity of the issues” [ibid].

When he wrote in 1994, D’Souza was correct in his assertion that the Bell Curve had not been refuted. Certainly, the book had been condemned on the basis of its premises, concepts and values, but no one had subjected the book to empirical scrutiny until a group from the University of California at Berkeley did so in 1996. In *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth*, six sociologists reexamine the data analysis done by Herrnstein and Murray.

Herrnstein & Murray [HM] analyzed data from the 1990 panel of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. A sample of 12,686 persons who were age 14-22 in 1979 when the study began, and have been followed ever since [HM, p. 36]. The data include information on many variables such as schooling, family background, earnings and includes the score on the AFQT administered in 1980. HM use the AFQT score as a proxy for IQ. The first thing the Berkeley Group [BG] demonstrates is that the AFQT is not a very good measure of innate intelligence as the test “largely assesses instruction and other environmental conditions.” Most notably those with high scores had some post-high school education while many (27%) of those with low scores had dropped out of high school three years before the test was administered and some had mental problems [BG p. 65]. HM, based on their own analysis of the data, ignored the effects of variation in years of schooling. But independent tests, using the same data, but more sophisticated methods, found the effects of schooling to be far greater than HM allowed [BG p. 62]. Moreover, scores on this test reflect, in addition to basic intelligence, how well students learned during the years they were in school. Students fail in school for many reasons unrelated to basic intelligence including “rebelliousness, apathy, ..and emotional conditions such as anxiety.” [BG p. 67]. Indeed, in Goleman’s book *Emotional Intelligence*, it is asserted that affairs of the heart are as, or more important than IQ.

My concern is with a key set of these “other characteristics” [other than IQ], emotional intelligence: Abilities such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one’s moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathize and to hope. [Goleman p. 34].

One who lives under social conditions that include “disorganized neighborhoods, stressed parents, high unemployment, and being a stigmatized minority” is going to have his or her emotional intelligence put to the test far more than those from privileged environments. Imagine your own ability to focus on what seems to be a meaningless test when you know a gang is out to get you, or you are hungry, or you have a chronic toothache.

There is some interesting research on summer learning that is germane here. Research has shown that children increase their intellectual performance more during the school year than

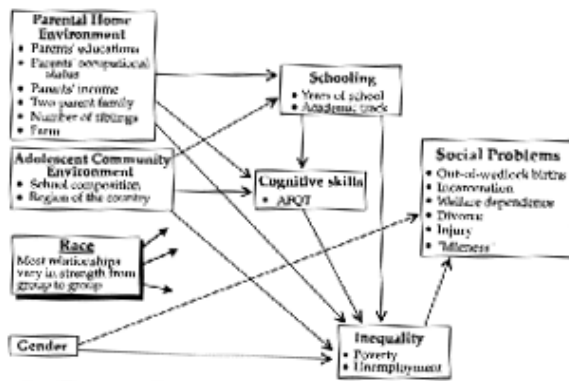
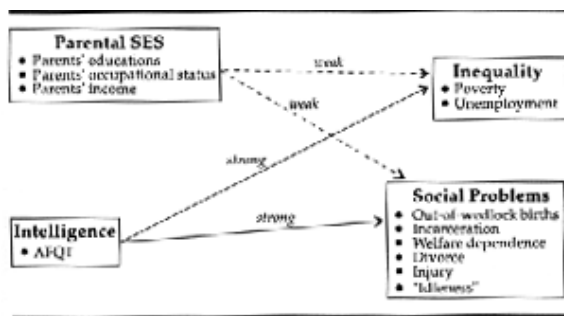
during the summer. What happens to a student’s intellectual performance over the summer depends very much on the student’s environment. While students from privileged backgrounds actually make gains in performance over the summer (if smaller than when in school), students from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to stagnate and even lose ability over the summer. The middle-class child benefits from travel, camps, lessons, and other experiences that stimulate cognitive growth and higher test scores. Disadvantaged children get none of this special stimulation, indeed they get so little stimulation that acquired skills actually deteriorate.

There is evidence that the cognitive gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged tends to close during the school year, but the school year is not long enough to close the gap. One study found that the entire gap in reading achievement between black and white children can be explained by the differences that emerge over the summer months [Fischer et al pp. 162-163].

The critics of *The Bell Curve* were skeptical of its findings because the results of

numerous previous studies had shown that IQ ranked far behind other “background variables” in terms of importance in explaining the variance of schooling, earnings and occupational attainment. That “skepticism..and the chilly reception given the book turned out to be well-founded.”[BG p. 72].

HM used a very simple model of the stratification process, one that ignored many important variables, and mismeasured others.



- HM used a conception of “social background” that was far too narrow and poorly specified<sup>5</sup>. They ignored aspects of the community such as local job opportunities, and the quality of schools, region and the degree of segregation. They also ignored important characteristics of families such as their size (siblings), whether the family lived on a farm, and whether there were two parents in the home.

- HM also did not include the amount of schooling obtained by an individual, even though the past literature had emphasized that the main pathway through which IQ affected one’s

<sup>5</sup>HM created an index for SES that was constructed in a way that forced the effects of parental income, education and occupation to be the same. It seems a bit odd to equate the effects of a low family income with those of having a mother with a low level of education and so on [p. 77]. Each of these variables should enter the model separately and allow the data to determine the effect.

future was through its effects on schooling. HM assume that IQ proxies for schooling even though years of schooling is determined by factors other than IQ and has effects on attainment beyond those of IQ.

- HM ignored the effects of being female, being unmarried and being a parent.

When a more complex model is used, HM’s main assertion that IQ rather than socio-economic background determines one’s chances of being in poverty, is demolished.

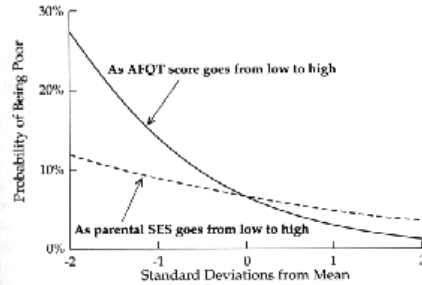
The figure on the right shows the effect of correcting for HM’s improper specification and measurement of SES. Clearly, IQ is relatively less important when the “environment” variables are measured properly and when the relevant ones are included. Note also that the size of the effect of IQ is diminished. The vertical intercept is smaller and the slope of the line is more flat. Note also how much steeper the line measuring the effects of home environment is compared to that of HM’s SES.<sup>6</sup>

The home, of course is only part of the “environment” of an individual, aspects of the “local community matter too”[p. 83]. A child who lives in a poor family can, nonetheless, derive benefits of a “well-endowed community. Similarly, “an inner-city child bears the burdens of a low-income community even if her family might have a moderate income. This factor is particularly important among Afro-Americans where patterns of residential segregation may have forced middle-class families to live intimately with the very poor.

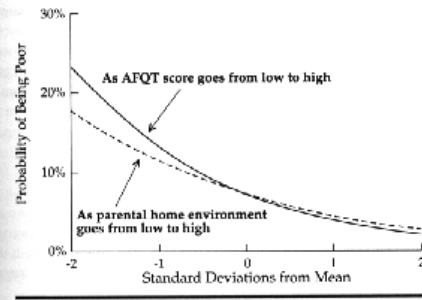
The data base in the NLSY includes information about the racial composition of the respondents high school, the drop out rate, and the percentage of the student body that was economically disadvantaged (qualified for subsidized lunch). When these variables re added to the model structure the results change rather dramatically. As the figure to the right shows, home and community environment now are just as important as IQ in determining the probability of being poor [p. 85].

The comparative effects of AFQT scores and parental home environment on the probability that young white adults are poor: Herrnstein and Murray’s original results show AFQT scores to be much more important, but corrections show that they are not.

(a) Herrnstein and Murray’s Calculations



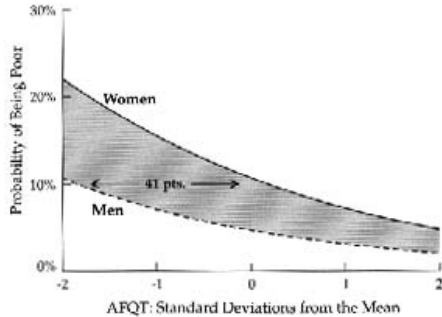
(b) Corrected Measures of the Effects



<sup>6</sup> A perfectly flat line has a slope of zero and tells us that the variable in question has no effect. The steeper the line the greater the effect.

A third correction adds years of schooling to the model. When this is done, the measured effect of IQ falls to about ½ the level estimated by HM and the combined effects of schooling and “environment” are, after correction, greater than the effect of IQ.

A white woman needs to score 41 AFQT points higher than a white man from the same environment and with the same education in order to reduce her probability of being poor to his lower level.

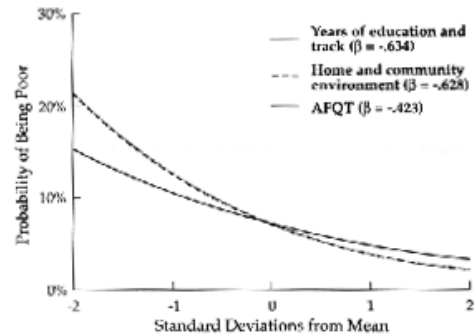


Among the most important determinants of poverty risk is gender. Given one is born female, BG show that it would take a full 41 IQ points to reach parity with men in terms of poverty risk [p.89]. Similarly, a female would have to have \$63,000 added to parental income to equate her risk of poverty that of an otherwise observationally equivalent male [p.88]. The best way a female can reduce her risk of poverty

is to be married. Being married reduces a woman’s risk of poverty from 45% to 4% [p.90]. Women add to their poverty risk by having children. Children reduce a woman’s ability to work. Fully 2/3 of the unmarried women with two children were poor. Unmarried women from affluent backgrounds were rarely poor, “but coming from a poor background meant that the consequence of being unmarried, or of having children, or the combination of the two was disastrous” [p. 91]. Women with children most often fell into poverty as a consequence of a divorce or a marital separation [p. 95].

Marriage reduces poverty risk considerably. For men being married reduces the chances of being poor from 23/100 to 1/100. For women the risk of poverty falls from 45/100 to 4/100 [p. 90]. The obvious reason is marriage can produce two incomes. For women with below average backgrounds being unmarried raised the risk of poverty greatly. Coming from a poor background, being female and being unmarried is a real triple-whammy. Matters get worse when children are factored in. An unmarried white woman, with an average family background and a highschool diploma, but who has two children, has a poverty risk of about 65% [p. 90]. Unfortunately, one will find none of this kind of analysis in *The Bell Curve*. Indeed, why would HM want to avoid dealing with the fact females, although they have the same IQs as males on average (the test is designed to insure this result), have considerably greater chances of being poor?

Adding education to the analysis gives a more complete description of what determines the probability that young white adults are poor: education and environment more than AFQT.



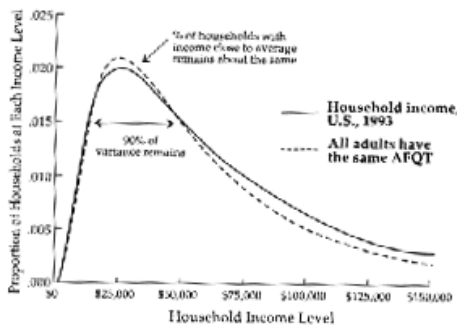
HM claim that the problem of females and children living in poverty could be solved if we simply get single mothers married. However, as Fischer et al point out, “the actual incomes single American men are not sufficient to keep all single mothers out of poverty, even if we could pair them off... single men are disproportionately poor, too” [p. 91].

Obviously women with children who fail to marry are quite likely to be poor. But even married women with children are at considerable risk, should their marriages fail. Over the course of the 1980s, by far the single most important reason [seven out of ten cases] for a family becoming poor was a divorce or a separation [p. 95].

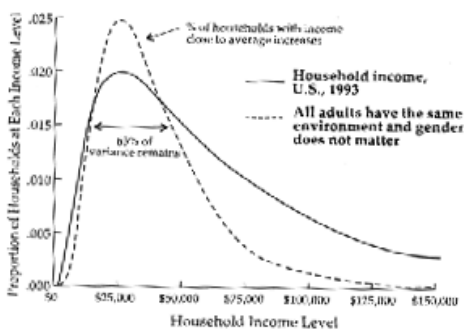
To get a better idea about how important IQ scores are in shaping the distribution of income in the United States, let us conduct the following statistical experiment. Given the parameters of the models estimated by Fischer et al, we can estimate what the income distribution would look like should we equalize IQ, but leave at present levels the variance in “environments.” From the figure we see that giving all adults the same test scores would reduce overall income inequality very little, by about 10%.

On the other hand, should we equalize “environments,” leaving unchanged the variance in IQ, we would realize a reduction in inequality of 37%. In other words, if we produced an ideal world where all families shared the same family structure, the same income, the same quality neighborhoods and schools, the same values, and the same gender, in other words, the same human, social and cultural capital, we should observe far less social inequality.

**If all adults had the same test scores (but different family origins and environments), inequality of household incomes would decrease by about 10 percent.**

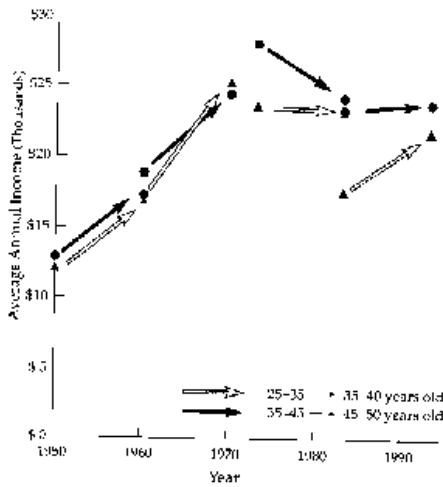


**If all adults had the same family origins and environments (but different test scores), inequality of household incomes would decrease by about 37 percent.**



But why, one might ask, given that IQ is so unimportant, has not the equalization of “background” eliminated most of the inequality? The answer is that we can only explain about 63% of the variance in income with the measurable variables we have. The remaining variance is attributed to “omitted variables.” There are many aspects of a person that can have an influence on their success that we simply cannot measure, or do not have data on in the present data base, or did not include in the analysis. These variables measure aspects of a person’s personality, character, motivation and energy. The NLSY does include data on personality characteristics such as “internal locus of control” and some studies have found it to be an important variable in determining labor market success and marital stability [see Starkey 1996]. Yet, neither HM nor Fischer et al used these variables. We also know that looks, athletic ability and charm can influence earnings, but have no measures of these variables in the current NSLY sample. Then, of course, there are networks, the web of social contacts so important in finding jobs and moving along what labor economist Michael Piore once called, “mobility chains.” Finally, there is luck which we must assume is random. As Stephen Jay Gould has

Before the 1970s, 30- and 40-year-old men made major gains in income over a decade, but that has not been true since 1970.



2.4. Income Changes Over a Decade for Men in Their Thirties and Forties, 1950-1993 (Note: Modeled on Levy, *Dollars and Dreams*, p. 81. Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, various series, and *Statistical Abstract* 1994)

emphasized time and again, we cannot overestimate the role of contingency in understanding the past. It is a dishonest person that claims he or she cannot find, somewhere in his or her life, a major point of contingency, where, should the outcome have been different, there would have been a significant alteration in their life course.

Young men who entered the labor market in the 1970s, the beginning of a period of long-term wage stagnation, and above “natural rates” of unemployment is one group particularly disadvantaged by contingency. As we have seen in another context, the employment and earnings difficulties of this group has translated into higher rates of out-of wedlock births and marital instability. The latter was the consequence of the marital discord produced by the new necessity of dual-earner families. These men were not less intelligent, or less moral and desirous of a stable family life, than the previous cohort. They were just unlucky to enter the labor market during a period of long-term stagnation and structural change (deindustrialization). Children have

been the main victim of this process. The sharp decline in the income of young men since the 1970s means more children living in poverty because either their fathers cannot support them, or even worse, their young fathers desert them and their young mothers [Fischer et al p. 133]. Poor American children are worse off than poor children in other western nations. America’s poor children have 25% less real income than Canadian poor children and 40% less than West German poor children [Fischer et al p. 133].

Earnings of younger men became more unequal. For College educated men, real earnings rose 13% over the decade of the 1980s, but fell for every other educational category [college drop-outs, 8%; High school graduates, 13%; High school drop-outs, 18%. Fischer et al p. 116]. These changes were occurring in all the industrialized countries so clearly had nothing to do with IQ or the choices that individuals were making [Fischer et al p. 122]. The effects of this global process have been particularly acute in the United States, however, because the United States does less than other countries to remedy the effects of the marketplace. The United States simply does not provide the income supports to middle and lower class families, in the form of money and in-kind subsidies, that families in other industrialized nations get as a matter of course. If one factors-out the aid given to the elderly in the United States, which is substantial, the aid disbursed by the government has virtually no effect on the inequality produced in the marketplace. Among the industrialized countries, America has the greatest inequality of income equality before and after government alteration of the marketplace

distribution of income<sup>7</sup> [Fischer et al pp. 122-123].

The income and wealth inequality in the United States “is by design” writes the Berkeley group, it is not given by nature, by the market or by people’s talents. Other western nations, with the same talents and facing the same global competition have managed, nevertheless, to avoid developing into the “divisive,” “class-riven” and “hierarchical” society that America has become [p. 125]. Although the people of the United States support “equal opportunity” they oppose any policy directed toward equalizing outcomes.

coda

There can be little doubt that IQ tests measure something and that something seems to be correlated with achievement in school, and to some extent, in life. Even were IQ scores everything the hereditarians claim they are, and of course they are not, they would yet explain very little of the process of social attainment. The reason is very simple, even the very best statistical models of social attainment explain only about 30% of the variance in social attainment be it measured by income, education, the probability of being poor etc.. This means that as much as 70% of the variance is either random (luck) or due to the absence of variables for which data do not exist, e.g. effort, appearance, personality, special talents (athletic, musical, artistic), and tastes (high IQ people become low paid teachers). And, as noted above, government policies that have the potential for shaping the distribution of rewards cannot be ignored. For example, economists have found that being considered “attractive” can produce a 5-10% income premium and being obese can lower income by the same amount. These effects are of the same order of magnitude as those attributed IQ scores. Moreover, we have also seen that being born to the right family in terms of SES is much better in terms of producing social attainment than being born with a few more IQ points. Being born wealthy and attractive is even better. And, by the way, being born wealthy, as it offers you a high quality education and cultural experience is likely to produce a relatively high IQ score. Being born rich makes one smart, being smart does not necessarily make one rich.

All of this said, there can be no denying that there are real differences among people in the specific cognitive skills, measured by IQ tests. To some extent these scores are an artifact of environment, but to some extent they are real. There have been, and there are some very academically smart people in the world, and many were/are wealthy. While very useful in academic pursuits such as science and university teaching, high IQ scores are not the *sine qua non* of most of life pursuits. Society rewards a vast repertoire of personal characteristics the range of which includes great talents and great breasts. In the “big picture,” IQ counts for very little.

Finally, there is the question of group, that is, “race” and “gender” differentials in IQ

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<sup>7</sup> In 1992, On the basis of earned income alone, 22% of non-elderly Americans would have fallen below the poverty line. Government tax and transfer programs, e.g. the earned income tax credit, AFDC, food stamps, medicaid etc. reduced that percentage to 12%. For the elderly the percentage in poverty was reduced from 50% to 10%, primarily by the social security system. For children the poverty rate fell from 24% to 17% [Fischer et al. P. 131].

scores. We have seen that both Afro-Americans and, at one point in the past, women, score lower on IQ tests. In 1937, the Stanford-Binet IQ test was “re-scaled” so that females scored on average the same as males. Nevertheless, it remained true that females on average scored lower on mathematics achievement tests. This observation was presumed to be the consequence of differences in brain structure that gave males more “viso-spatial ability”<sup>8</sup> and thus greater ability to do mathematics and science. There was a similar gap between Afro-Americans and Euro-Americans. In both cases, it had been alleged that the IQ-gap is a biological, race/gender fact of life. Research has shown that it is not; the gap was the result of differential opportunity to study math not differential math ability.

In 1982, researchers gave math tests to 77,000 eighth graders from around the world. On average, boys and girls scored about the same. There were, however, “significant variations among nations;” in some countries girls scored higher, in others the boys did and in some cases they did equally well [Fischer et al p. 200]. The pattern of variation was related to the level of educational attainment of females and the degree to which women were integrated into modern industries. Moreover, over the previous two decades (since 1962) the gap between males and females had been closing in each nation, more or less at the rate one would expect given the observed changes in women’s participation in the work force in each nation [Fischer et al p. 200]. The researchers [David Baker and Deborah Perkin Jones] explained the “stereotypical gender gap as follows:

If male students are afforded the possibility of future educational and occupational opportunities as a function of their performance in mathematics, then they try harder, teachers may encourage them more, and parents and friends may help them see mathematics is a domain for performance that they should take seriously. On the other hand, female students, who are faced with less opportunity, may see mathematics as less important for their future and are told so in a number of ways by teachers, parents and friends. In short, opportunity structures can shape numerous socialization processes that shape performance [quoted in Fischer et al p. 200].

As Fischer et al note, “substitute ‘white’ for ‘male’ minority’ for ‘female’ and ‘academic’ for ‘mathematics’ in this quotation - the logic is the same. A study published in the American Psychologist in 1984 [Lyle V. Jones 39(11) 1207-1213], reported that the “evidence for a narrowing gap between average scholastic achievement level of white and black youth seems incontrovertible.” [p. 1212]. The study found that a “strong correlate of ethnic group differences in mathematics achievement scores is the lower enrollment in algebra and geometry courses in those high schools enrolling the most blacks.” [p. 1212] Only 13% of blacks compared to 32% of whites have 3 or more years of high school math by age 17 [p. 1211]. Most significantly, *the study found that at age 13 there was no racial mathematics gap, not was there any gender gap.*

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<sup>8</sup> It was also alleged that women were compensated for their deficiency in math ability by having more “verbal” ability than males. There is research that shows that once male math prodigies are removed from the population, the average scores of males and females are the same.

By age 17, however, there were significant racial and gender gaps [p. 1210]. The “best predictor” of this gap was differential enrollments in high school mathematics classes [p. 1210].

