

# Race and IQ

Years ago, while doing research on education and IQ, I happened to be in the principal's office at a black school in Cincinnati, as he was preparing to open a large brown envelope containing the results of IQ tests that his students had taken. Before he opened the envelope, I offered to bet him that a large majority of the students with IQs over 110 would be girls.

He was too smart to take the bet. Studies had shown that females predominated among high-IQ blacks. One study of blacks whose IQs were 140 and up found that there were more than five times as many females as males at these levels.

This is hard to explain by either heredity or environment, as those terms are usually defined, since black males and black females have the same ancestors and grow up in the same homes. Meanwhile, white males and white females have the same average IQs, with slightly more males at both the highest and lowest IQs.

This is just one of many unsolved mysteries that is likely to remain unsolved, because doing research on race and IQ has become taboo in many places. My own research was financed in part by a grant from a foundation that told me to remove any mention of IQ research from the activities listed in my project's application.

They didn't care if I used their money for that purpose but they did not want it on the record that they had financed research into race and intelligence. Many schools

and boards of education also did not want it on the record that they had cooperated by supplying data for any such research. Only when assured of complete anonymity would they let me into their records.

A well-known black “social scientist” urged me not to do any such research. His stated reason was that it would “dignify” Professor Arthur Jensen’s thesis of a genetic basis for black-white differences in IQ scores. But my own suspicion was that he was afraid that the research would prove Jensen right.

As it turned out, the research showed that the average IQ difference between black and white Americans—15 points—was nothing unusual. Similar IQ differences could be found between various culturally isolated white communities and the general society, both in the United States and in Britain. Among various groups in India, mental test differences were slightly greater than those between blacks and whites in the United States.

In recent years, research by Professor James R. Flynn, an American expatriate living in New Zealand, has shaken up the whole IQ controversy by discovering what has been called “the Flynn effect.” In various countries around the world, people have been answering significantly more IQ test questions correctly than in the past.

This important fact has been inadvertently concealed by the practice of changing the norms on IQ tests, so that the average number of correctly answered questions remains by definition an IQ of 100. Only by painstakingly going back and recalculating IQs, based on the initial norms, was Professor Flynn able to discover that whole nations had, in effect, had their IQs rising over the decades by about 20 points.

Since the black-white difference in IQ is 15 points, this

means that an even larger IQ difference has existed between different generations of the same race, making it no longer necessary to attribute IQ differences of this magnitude to genetics. In the half century between 1945 and 1995, black Americans' raw test scores rose by the equivalent of 16 IQ points.

In other words, black Americans' test score results in 1995 would have given them an average IQ just over 100 in 1945. Only the repeated renorming of IQ tests upward created the illusion that blacks had made no progress, but were stuck at an IQ of 85. But we would never have known this if some researchers had not defied the taboo on studying race and IQ imposed by black "leaders" and white "friends."

Incidentally, Professor Jensen pointed out back in 1969 that black children's IQ scores rose by 8 to 10 points after he met with them informally in a play room and then tested them again after they were more relaxed around him. He did this because "I felt these children were really brighter than their IQ would indicate." What a shame that others seem to have less confidence in black children than Professor Jensen has had.

## Race and IQ: Part II

Professor John McWhorter, a black faculty member at the University of California at Berkeley, has made a suggestion that is explosive in itself and directly the opposite of what is being said by those who are seeking to promote lower college admissions standards for blacks through affirmative action.

One of the reasons given for wanting more black students on a given campus, even if that means lowering admissions standards, is the claim that a certain number of blacks—a “critical mass”—on campus is necessary, in order for these students to feel comfortable enough to relax and do their best work. It sounds plausible, but lots of things have sounded plausible.

Professor McWhorter says just the opposite in his book *Losing the Race*. According to McWhorter, anti-intellectualism in the black culture keeps many black youngsters from doing their best. If he is right, then creating a critical mass is creating a bigger handicap for black students.

There have been many media stories about hard-working black school children being ostracized, or even threatened with or subjected to violence, for “acting white” by trying to succeed academically. Creating a critical mass with that attitude is unlikely to help anyone.

More direct factual evidence is available, however. A study of the effect of an increased proportion of black students in a racially integrated school found little effect of this on the academic performances of most other students—

except for high-ability black students, whose performances declined.

Another study, about the effects of ability-grouping, found that high-ability students performed better when put into classes with other high-ability students—and that this was especially so with high-ability minority students. In other words, a critical mass of students sorted by high ability did more for bright minority students than a critical mass of students sorted by race.

If Professor McWhorter is right, then his thesis might also help explain another puzzling phenomenon. A study of black orphans adopted by white families found their test scores to be higher than those of black youngsters raised by their own biological families. However, this initial finding eroded away when these same students were tested again in later years.

One of the things that can change as black kids grow older is that they become more conscious of race as they go into adolescence—and more responsive to peer pressure. If Professor McWhorter is right, then an anti-intellectual culture would be more likely to handicap them in the later period.

In an earlier era, when there were seldom enough blacks on most elite white college campuses to form a “critical mass,” did those students not do as well as in the post-affirmative action era, when blacks became more numerous on such campuses?

It is significant that no such evidence has been sought by those promoting the critical mass theory. However, students who graduated from an academically outstanding black high school in Washington between 1892 and 1954 left an impressive academic record at Amherst College during that

era, even though there were seldom more than a handful of black students on that campus at that time.

About three-quarters of these black students graduated from Amherst and more than one-fifth of these graduates were Phi Beta Kappas. This was long before the era of grade inflation or affirmative action.

None of this is definitive proof. But those with the critical mass theory offer no evidence at all and none is asked. Their views prevail by default—and dogmatism.

The time is long overdue to judge beliefs and the policies based on them by what actually works, not by what sounds good or what makes people feel good.

Having opposed the racial inferiority thesis in various writings over the years, I have in my own teaching held black students to the same standards as white students, though not all black students appreciated this kind of equality. Many of those who promote double standards for blacks seem convinced that blacks cannot achieve what whites have achieved. That is part of the ugly secret behind affirmative action.

## Race and IQ: Part III

I happened to run into Charles Murray in Dulles Airport while he and Richard Herrnstein were writing *The Bell Curve*. When I asked him what he was working on and he summarized what he was writing, he could tell that I was concerned about him, so I told him why: “Charles, no matter what you say, people will hear what they want to hear.”

That is one prediction that I wish had not come true, but it has. There are people who have never read a single word of *The Bell Curve* but who are convinced that they not only know what it says but also know what the motivation was for saying it.

Partly this is because there are increasing numbers of people for whom indignation is a way of life. But that is not the sole reason. Historically, blacks have been among the many peoples accused of being innately inferior, especially in intelligence.

Back in the days of the Roman Empire, Cicero warned his fellow Romans not to buy British slaves, because he found them hard to teach anything. A 10th century Muslim scholar noted that Europeans grew more pale the farther north they were and that the “farther they are to the north the more stupid, gross, and brutish they are.”

With our love of labels today, we might dismiss both these statements as “racism.” In reality, both statements were probably true, as of the time they were made. At the very

least, the people who said these things were eyewitnesses, which we cannot possibly be.

Britain was a primitive, illiterate, tribal land at a time when the Roman Empire was in its glory as one of the most advanced civilizations on earth. A Briton transplanted to Rome in captivity must have found this complex civilization completely baffling and was probably none too quick to understand instructions on what to do and how to do it in such a wholly unfamiliar setting.

As of the 10th century, the Islamic world was more advanced than Europe in general and far more advanced than the northern regions of Europe, which had for centuries lagged behind Mediterranean Europe. The relative development of these different regions of Europe, especially in economic terms, would be reversed in later centuries, but what the Muslim scholar said in the 10th century was probably still true then.

The point here is that there have always been gaps between the development of one people and another, even if their relative positions did not remain the same permanently, and even if their genes had nothing to do with it. In the case of blacks in the United States, there was a special reason for particularly negative pronouncements.

Although slavery existed all over the world for thousands of years, among people of every race, it was considered a "peculiar institution" in the United States because it was in complete contradiction to the principles on which the country was founded. Slavery was controversial among Americans when it was still accepted as just another fact of life in other countries.

Nowhere else in the world was such a literature of justification of slavery produced as in the antebellum South, because nowhere else was slavery under such sustained



attack. An especially virulent racism arose to try to justify slavery, and this racism lasted long after slavery itself was gone.

That history and its painful consequences are undeniable. But, in a world where whole nations have in effect raised their IQs by 20 points in one generation, it is time for black “leaders” and white “friends” to stop trying to discredit the tests and get on with the job of improving the skills that the tests measure.

A number of black schools, even in rundown ghettos, have already reached or exceeded national norms on tests, so there is no question that it can be done. The question is whether it will in fact be done, on a large enough scale to change the abysmal educational results in too many predominantly black schools.

So long as demagogues are concentrating on demonizing anyone who points out the problem, do not expect the kind of general improvement that is needed. This demonization has made *The Bell Curve* one of the most misrepresented books of our time. But such demagoguery has not helped one black child to get a better education.