

Book review

Steam-age sociologizing fails to deliver

The Black–White Test Score Gap

Jencks and Phillips

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This volume tries to overturn one thesis of *The Bell Curve* (Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, 1994) – that Black intellectual inferiority in the USA has substantially genetic origins; and its team of contributors, led by Harvard Professor of Social Policy, Christopher Jencks, finds its work hailed in the dustjacket's blurb by Black Harvard Professor of Sociology, Orlando Patterson, as 'the most important work to appear in recent decades on this controversial subject'. At their strongest, some of the authors argue essentially as follows. 'Though within-race individual differences in IQ are perhaps 70% genetic, the Black–White (B–W) gap is entirely environmental. Firstly, there are traditional social factors that have appealed to the left – Black people being held back by poverty, poor nutrition and poor medicine. These account for a third of the gap, and their amelioration in recent decades explains the closing of the gap that studies have observed. Secondly, there may be cultural factors as believed by the right – notably the incidence of single-parenting, drug addiction, crime and AIDS in Black communities. Thirdly, there will be 'complex dimensions of experience' such as low expectations by teachers, alienation, poor Black social networks, negative stereotypes, poor Black parenting skills and plain racial discrimination. Lastly, beyond all such individual and researchable factors, there are probably 'relational, organizational and collective processes' amounting to a 'social structure of inequality'. At least, Harvard's Black Professor of Social Policy, William Julius Wilson, reckons thus to account for 100% of the Black–White (B–W) difference.

Sadly for social-environmentalists, the findings contained in the 15 chapters of this volume itself are seriously unresponsive of this strong thesis. Firstly, although the Scholastic Aptitude Test gap has decreased in line with environmental improvements for Black people, Charles Murray showed in 1999 that the IQ gap has *not* been narrowing, at least not since the mid-1980s. Secondly, cultural factors like single-parenting have never seemed causal to low IQ – indeed, it is more readily observed that low IQ leads on to single-parenting (or zero-parenting, as some perceptively call it). Thirdly, the author's more 'complex' social-environmental factors turn out not to work. For example, teachers are reported here to have expectations no lower than would be reasonable given Black children's low IQs. Far from being alienated, Black children participate keenly in

school work, having good attendance records and winning prizes as frequently as White children. (One researcher thinks things may be worse for Black children in racially mixed schools – an interesting argument for resegregation). Black students have lower scores on all sorts of tests when told by experimenters that they are likely to do poorly, but all sensible testing requires a level of anxiety that is not too high (especially for complicated tasks) so the relevance of such experiments to understanding the results of normal testing procedures is unknown. The sheer sunniness of many Black children is an embarrassment to sociologizers. Anyhow, if negative self-stereotyping were a problem, it should have been greatly eased in recent decades by the conspiracy of the media in the USA to deny both that Black people have lower intelligence and, for good measure, that IQ tests measure intelligence. As to racial discrimination, this is now so slight in the USA that this volume reports that there is no B–W income difference at all that cannot be explained in terms of IQ, job experience and weekly hours worked. Most seriously, America's social environmentalists have now had almost 90 years in which to explain the measured B–W gap and to begin to rectify it using the multi-billion-dollar sums put into Head Start programmes since 1965. Yet this volume's review concludes that the evidence for long-term academic boosting from preschool programmes is at best 'mixed' – even though schools cannot be blamed for wiping out gains later by providing inappropriate tracking or larger class sizes for Black children. The one manageable problem that several authors agree to identify is the low intellectual quality of Black teachers; however, they neglect another manageable problem – the low rate of breast-feeding by Black mothers.

Even if some of the environmental factors favoured by enthusiasts were accepted, there is no attempt here to make them add up to account for 100% of the race difference. Indeed, the authors forget that if the achievements of a child's grandparents provide extra prediction of its intelligence, this may be quite as much for genetic and for environmental reasons. Richard Nisbett makes the best of a study of half-Black babies born around 1948 to German mothers (the children of Black US servicemen) – brazenly calling this 'the best modern study' and dismissing the fact that impoverished German women would have sought higher-earning partners who would have been well above the Black average in IQ; but even Nisbett concedes that the American adoption study by Scarr and Weinberg (1983) provides 'serious support for genetic claims' (except that the authors themselves chose to rehearse speculative doubts about why their Black children did so poorly in enriched homes). Nisbett notes the old problem for hereditarians that there is little relation in Black people between lightness of skin colour and IQ (in the pitifully few studies that exist); however, he omits Shockley's (1974) study finding a lower IQ in Georgian than in Black Californians (the latter markedly more Caucasian in their Duffy gene frequency), he

dismisses too readily the likelihood that much of the miscegenation that occurred historically involved white farming people with relatively low-IQ, and he ignores altogether the fact that US Black people with their 20% Caucasian genetic admixture, perform markedly better on IQ tests than do Black people in Africa.

This book can be commended for its empiricism and for maintaining a moderate and academic tone. Jencks' own chapter on test bias is quite a model – and largely exonerates the tests, although concluding rather vainly that features other than intelligence should also be measured. The authors even mention Arthur Jensen's name five times – although they have not bothered to read Richard Lynn, Phil Rushton, or the late Glayde Whitney or myself. Nevertheless, their 500 pages of scholasticism will not fool any serious reader. The truth is that these authors have nothing serious that they can demonstrate. Let Jencks and Phillips speak for themselves: 'We recognize that few readers will find our sketchy agenda for reducing the black–white test score gap entirely persuasive.' Instead of such a 'sketchy agenda', it is time for Black people to call for reversing the perverse government incentives that cause college-educated Black women to have the lowest birth rates and underclass Black women to have the highest; and for legalized polygamy so that they can more quickly start breeding in quantity from their better stock. This would have rapid effects because the African gene pool is so much more varied than the White, allowing plenty of Black children of the future to reach or exceed White and East Asian levels of intelligence. It is a pity that the

antiquated, when not mystificatory, environmentalism of Jencks and Phillips' contributors will continue to retard Black progress.

(Note: In 2001, *Professor Jencks* counselled against continuing low-quality immigration into America.)

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