

The Geek Shall Inherit

The United States remains the world's technological leader—for now. Various factors probably contribute, from the entrepreneurial spirit to a certain maverick

attitude: “Who says I can't do that? Watch me.” The crucial element, however, has to be trained brains. People of almost unimaginable intelligence invent science, the merely brilliant turn it into useful things, and the rest of us buy it. Where do our phenomenally smart people come from?

Harvard is perhaps the country's pre-eminent university. The best figures I can find are that the average IQ at Harvard is 130, which is the entry level for Mensa, the high-IQ society; 17 percent of the students are said to be National Merit Finalists. That's bright.

There is a brutally difficult math course at Harvard, Math 55, regarded as the hardest at the school and probably in the country. A recent article in the Harvard *Crimson*, the student newspaper, noted, “The final course drop forms are dutifully submitted. The class roster: 45 percent Jewish, 18 percent Asian, 100 percent male.”

That Jews are bright is perhaps not breaking news. “Asian” is vague, being a geographical rather than an ethnic or genetic category. Still, if you take Jews as 2 percent of the population, and Asians as 6, you have 8 percent of the population producing 63 percent of the class. Since they were all male, the 8 percent becomes 4 percent. It being unlikely that Harvard has some secret means of discriminating against utility whites, Christians, or females, it follows that the students are there on their merits.

If the foregoing were a fluke, we might ignore it. But it isn't. A friend, writ-

ing a book about Harvard, puts the studentry at roughly a quarter Jewish and a quarter Asian—half the school from 8 percent of the population. At the University of California at Berkeley, the flagship of California's state universities, so many Asians gained entry that whites wanted a protective quota.

In my guise as technology writer for the *Washington Times*, I have often read the staff lists at high-end research facilities, for example Bell Labs. The numbers vary. Sometimes Asians predominate. More women appear in the life sciences. Schools of lower rank look more like America. At the top, it's Math 55.

Now, if 1 percent of the population—Jewish males—produce 45 percent of Math 55, one might reasonably conclude that ability is not evenly distributed through the population and that certain groups carry much more than their weight in maintaining the country's competitive position. Wisdom might suggest staying out of their way and letting them do it.

It is not acceptable, however, to say that smarter people are smarter and even less acceptable to suggest that the differences may be genetic. The notion arouses endless political furor, but has a depressing way of fitting the facts. Among people engaged in mental testing, it is well known that at the extreme levels of ability, mathematics is a man's game.

Discrimination is a poor explanation. College-track students in high school take very much the same

courses. College students can major in anything they choose. Environment? Karl Friedrich Gauss, widely regarded as one of the world's three greatest mathematicians, grew up in a family of German peasants. So did tens of thousands of other children. On the environmental theory, all of them should be among the world's three greatest mathematicians. If I had grown up in Michael Jordan's family, presumably I would have an intercontinental jump shot.

Feminists, of course, see the dominance of males in the field as a consequence of prejudice. To remedy this presumed injustice, we now see attempts to apply the “gender equity” provisions of Title IX of the Education Act to education in the sciences. Although the argument tends to be stated as seeking equality of opportunity, anything short of statistical proportionality will be seen as evidence of discrimination. It always happens. Women are 51 percent of the population, and therefore should be 51 percent of mathematicians and, one might argue, weightlifters and NASCAR drivers.

The same reasoning suggests of course that we should reduce the Jewish presence in the sciences to 2 percent and get rid of most of the Asians. And, since women earn more Ph.D.'s than men, we should reduce their numbers to 51 percent. Any takers?

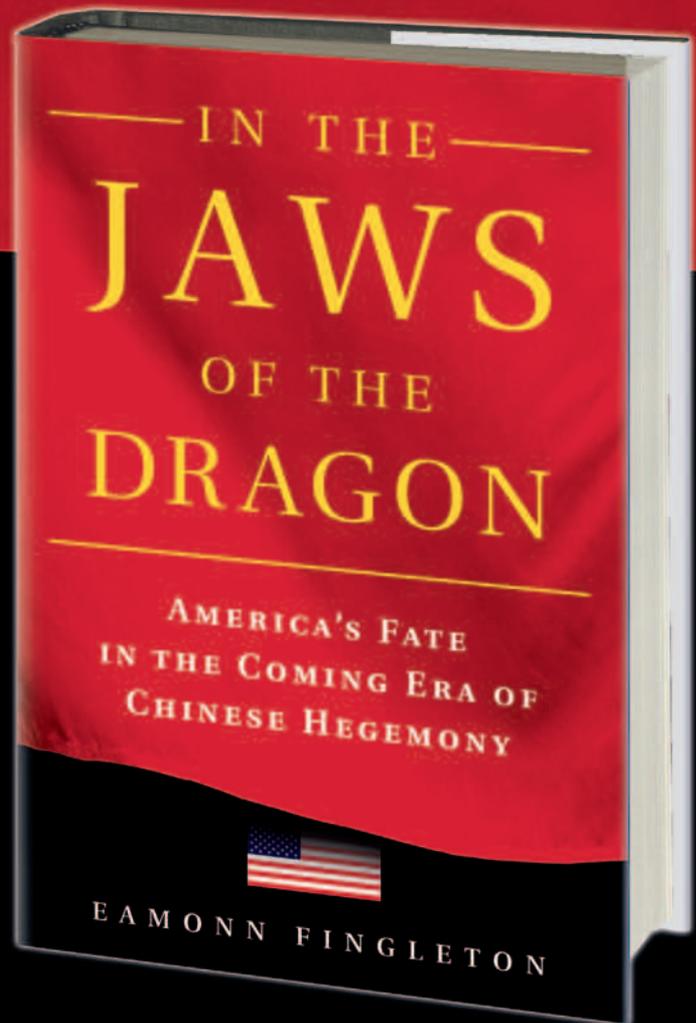
The sciences are the basis of America's position in the world. We can't play games with them. Classes to which students are admitted by measures other than ability inevitably will be watered down. Politically appointed professors will inevitably teach at a lower level than those chosen by ability. It's a road to the Third World. If Math 55 looks like America, America won't. ■

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