

nied admission to Harvard because the sons of the landed had a special deal—in other words, when there was a patrician system that favored the affluent—that was great, according to *The Bell Curve*. Now that some smart white kids are denied admission to Harvard because the sons and daughters of *poverty* have a special deal—the new system no longer rigged in favor of the affluent—that’s offensive, according to the same book.

► ***Those inherited differences that have been confirmed are small.*** It’s obvious that there exist inheritable physical differences among racial groups. But all such differences are too minor to mean anything, except as sources of the many forms of prejudice. Perhaps there are inherited mental differences among racial groups, but the observed pattern in physical differences suggests any mental differences would also be too minor to matter in practical terms. For instance, African Americans are on average about an inch and a half taller than Caucasian Americans. This distinction is real but

just too small to make a difference except in highly competitive situations like, say, entry into the small number of slots in the National Basketball Association: There, a competition between two players of otherwise equal skills might end in the taller being selected. Similarly, suppose there really are on average a few points of difference between whites and blacks in IQ. This is too little to matter in practical terms, except in highly competitive situations like, say, entry into the small number of clerkships to the Supreme Court, where an extra margin of IQ might carry the day.

► ***If this stuff is really true, it’s whites that ought to feel inferior.*** The same IQ tests that Murray says show blacks one “standard deviation” (in this case, very roughly 15 percent) less smart than whites show white children duller than Asian-American children by almost the same margin. Simple-minded me might say that is mainly because of the phenomenal (probably excessive) study time many Asian-American parents impose on their kids. But if genes are

WELFARE LINES

“What a racially segregated system once taught the young black about living with his inferiority [is] now taught by a benevolent social welfare system. The difference was that in an earlier age a black parent could fight the competing influences.”

—Charles Murray, arguing for the abolition of welfare in *Losing Ground*, 1984

“The United States already has policies that inadvertently social-engineer who has babies, and it is encouraging the wrong women. . . . The technically precise description of America’s fertility policy is that it subsidizes births among poor women, who are also disproportionately at the low end of the intelligence distribution.”

—Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, arguing for the abolition of welfare in *The Bell Curve*, 1994

Ten years ago, Charles Murray published *Losing Ground*, a pathfinding, eloquently argued

Charlotte Allen is a Washington writer who is at work on a book about the search for the historical Jesus.

book that called for getting rid of most government assistance programs for the poor. Murray contended that the programs encouraged laziness, dependence on handouts, and endemically low self-esteem among recipients that translated into self-fulfilling prophecies of failure for many poor blacks and members of other minority groups. As the above passage from *Losing Ground* indicates, Murray had nothing but scorn for a well-intentioned liberal elite that professed compassion for the underclass but doomed its members to permanent dependency by expecting nothing of them. His thesis: Welfare is bad because it subsidizes bad habits and attitudes. Take away the check, and you will be treating the poor like equals, spurring them to take responsibility for their lives and possibly climb to prosperity.

On the way from 1984 to 1994, something happened to Murray’s thinking. His core proposal—get rid of welfare—is unaltered, but his characterization of the welfare problem has changed drastically. First there was his much-

the IQ destiny that *The Bell Curve* asserts, shouldn't whites be maneuvering to protect themselves against Asians, given that Asians already out-number Caucasians worldwide? Instead, nearly all of the book's prescriptive material focuses on reasons to retaliate politically against blacks: end affirmative action, shift money from compensatory education programs like Head Start to programs for the "gifted" (that is, white students), scale back welfare.

● **What's the mechanism?** All human beings are physically similar because they share a line of descent and have all been subject to about the same "selection pressure" from evolution. For there to be significant inherent mental differences among racial groups, there would have to have been significantly different selection pressure. Scientists call this the "What's the mechanism?" question. Any researcher claiming to have found a substantial genetic difference among similar creatures is expected to propose a selection mechanism by which the differential arose.

Early in *The Bell Curve* controversy, *The New York Times* ran an op-ed article asserting that from an evolutionary standpoint, differential intellect among human groups could not have evolved in fewer than "hundreds of thousands of years." This is weak science: Most recent discoveries tend to support the notion that natural selection can operate relatively quickly in geologic terms. So differential intellect is not precluded. Yet neither Herrnstein and Murray nor any credentialed believer in the brain-gene theory has suggested how, on an evolutionary basis, black and white intelligence DNA could have diverged significantly.

The sole researcher asserting a hypothesis in this category is J. Philippe Rushton, a psychologist at the University of Western Ontario. *The Bell Curve* makes a point of praising Rushton as "not . . . a crackpot." But a crackpot is precisely what Rushton is. He believes that among males of African, European, and Asian descent, intellect and genital size are inversely proportional, and that evolution dictated this outcome in an

In the span of a decade, Charles Murray has moved from hating welfare because it hurts people to hoping people on welfare won't be born

discussed *Wall Street Journal* op-ed in the fall of 1993. In that article, and in a longer piece for the spring 1994 issue of *The Public Interest*, Murray's villains were no longer the kindly but deadly liberal social engineers of *Losing Ground*. Murray's new welfare villains were the welfare mothers themselves. Welfare is bad, he argued, because it subsidizes illegitimacy, which he tied to crime and other antisocial behavior prevalent in fatherless, low income families. Take away the check, he concluded, and you will shrink the size of the underclass.

And now we have *The Bell Curve*, with an even newer Murray thesis: Welfare is bad because it subsidizes the breeding of stupid people. As the above quotation from *The Bell Curve* indicates, Thesis no. 3 is actually a refinement of Thesis no. 2 because its corollary is the same: Take away the check, and you will shrink the size of the underclass, not by spurring its members to self-reliance and the repairing of frayed family and community ties, but by *ensuring that they won't be born*.

And as for the old libertarian Murray who derided the social engineers in *Losing Ground*, well, he's gone. The new Murray of *The Bell Curve* believes—and says so explicitly—that a little social engineering might be a good thing if it's the kind that cuts the reproduction rate of the lower orders. Not because he believes poor young men and women would be better off postponing childbearing until their lives were more economically stable, but because he believes *we* would be better off if those people didn't self-replicate, period. Thus, Murray wants the government to get out of the welfare business and into the birth-control business, "making available. . . mechanisms that are increasingly flexible, foolproof, inexpensive, and safe."

This foray into the big government camp may seem uncharacteristic for Murray—until you remember that he, too, now assumes, like his so-called "government bureaucrats" in *Losing Ground*, that the people at society's bottom are born to fail. □

as-yet-undetermined manner. Sound like something the 16-year-olds at your high school believed? That should not stop Rushton or any researcher from wondering if there might have been different selection pressures on different racial groups. But Rushton's "research" methods, defended by *The Bell Curve* as academically sound, are preposterous. For instance, Rushton has conducted surveys at shopping malls, asking men of different races how far their ejaculate travels. His theory is the farther the gush, the lower the IQ. Set aside the evolutionary absurdity of this. (Are we to presume that in prehistory low-IQ males were too dumb to find pleasure in full penetration, so their sperm had to evolve rocket-propelled arcs? Give me a break.) Consider only the "research" standard here. Is it possible that one man in a hundred actually knows, with statistical accuracy, the average distance traveled by his ejaculate? Yet *The Bell Curve* takes Rushton in full seriousness.

► ***Are the natives doltish as well as restless?*** Herrnstein and Murray note that not only do African-Americans score somewhat below white Americans on IQ tests but tribal black Africans score significantly low even in pure-logic tests designed to correct for language differences. (Mazes and so on.) Though many claims of cultural bias are exaggerated by the we're-all-victims lobby, here IQ tests would be expected to be of little reliability, considering the gulf between cultures as different as those of the United States and tribal Africa. Yet *The Bell Curve* takes the low scores of tribal Africans in earnest, implying this proves the existence of an entire continent of morons.

Just what mechanism of selection pressure would have caused this wide disparity? The authors do not say, gliding past this and all other complications of genetic science. More, they make a tee-hee implication, citing IQ scores among South African "coloureds," that American blacks are smarter than African blacks because of interbreeding with whites. Objection One: If black-white interbreeding in North America were substantial enough to transfer the presumed white intellect to the black gene pool, would not the same process have transferred the presumed black athletic gifts to the white gene pool, leading to an NBA dominated by guys named Blaine and Todd? Objection Two:

Though geologic time would probably not be required for differential intellect to arise if a selection mechanism could be shown, a couple of centuries seems insufficient. That is, unions between whites and blacks since colonial times would be unlikely to account for African-Americans doing substantially better on IQ tests than tribal black Africans. The exposure of African-Americans to an educational system teaching (as it should) book-based culture would, on the other hand, explain it pretty neatly.

► ***Geneticists don't claim genes explain IQ.*** "The people who say intelligence is genetic are the ones with no training in genetics," says Evan Balaban, a former professor of evolutionary biology at Harvard and now a fellow at The Neurosciences Institute, a research organization. Murray is a social scientist; Herrnstein was a psychologist. Balaban continues: "Any serious biologist would be horrified by the idea of using the little we know about genes as the basis for social policy. Current genetic research cannot even explain how basic body parts form." Nearly all contemporary discoveries about human genetics concern only markers or genes associated with protein coding, vastly less complicated than a developmental trait like intellect.

Troy Duster, a sociologist at the University of California at Berkeley who has studied the history of claims of inherited intellectual inferiority, notes that, "Since the turn of the century the people making political assertions about population genetics always reason backwards from the phenotype [observed trait] to the presence of a gene. This is the reverse of the way molecular biology reasons. Since molecular biologists have discovered genes for diseases like cystic fibrosis and Tay Sachs, the public has begun to believe biologists already understand the human genome. People like Herrnstein and Murray use the halo effect of that belief to give their views a sheen of modern genetics, when in truth their assertions run counter to what can be supported by modern genetics." I called prominent molecular biologists at Harvard, MIT, Penn State, Stanford, and the University of Washington, and all asserted that the notion of a traceable gene line for intelligence has no grounding in present research.

Telling in this regard is *The Bell Curve's* misunderstanding of Mendelian genetics. The

authors treat inheritance from parents as if it could be charted in straight lines: Smart parents A beget smart kids B, etc. This is a common blunder. Trait-inheritance charts more often look like zig-zags, as phenotypes bounce around among offspring and may skip entire generations. Two red-haired parents may have two brunette children, each of whom in turn have one red- and one black-haired child, and so on. Herrnstein and Murray allude in a few sentences to the common outcome that the children of very bright parents may be only somewhat above average in intellect, but otherwise depict IQ as reliably passed through the generations in straight-line fashion. If IQ does pass down generations in straight lines, then the cause must be mainly the environment families create, since genetic traits don't express so predictably.

● **Nonsense dysgenics.** A substantial doom section of *The Bell Curve* is devoted to "dysgenics," the reverse of eugenics—the fear that high fertility rates among those of low mental prowess will swamp society with dumbness. At least since Malthus, this has been a belief of the privileged classes whose concerns Murray and Herrnstein hold foremost. It was the central fear of Darwin's cousin Galton, and was a reputable paranoia among the educated in the United States as recently as the years when the Nazi use of eugenics became known. Even Norman Thomas, the most important American socialist of this century, in the thirties denounced the high rate of fertility among "those of a definitely inferior stock."

Yet during the very century in which, *The*

Bell Curve says, dysgenics has run wild globally, overall scores on IQ tests have consistently risen by decade, among blacks as well as whites. Now, how can it be that overall IQ scores are

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going up, yet society simultaneously is being swamped by fertile dullards? One possible explanation is that in decrying high fertility rates among low-achieving inner-city women (a problem, to be sure, though first for the women themselves), *The Bell Curve* conveniently overlooks a parallel social phenomenon: the rise of the American black middle class. Today, for every one African-American whose life pattern fits the dysgenic nightmare, there are roughly two following the eugenics prescription—moving out of the city, having smaller families, advancing

financially and scholastically. Black middle class school achievement trails comparable white numbers, but a small trailer effect seems easily explained as a remnant of segregation.

Herrnstein and Murray say little about the black middle class, a significant group which for good or ill is busily embracing suburban American norms. The authors can't deal with this factor because not only would it foul up claims of dysgenics; dealing with it forces you to confront the fact that many studies show children's IQs tend to be higher in smaller families. This is what might be expected, as other things being equal smaller families offer children more attention and have better social and economic circumstances. That's er, ahem, nurture rather than nature, which falls outside the desired conclusion of *The Bell Curve*.

● **Spin disguised as scholarship.** The most disquieting aspect of *The Bell Curve* is its insis-

tence on phrasing as detached data analysis what is in truth an ideological argument about social policy. Ideology regarding social policy is fine, but should be presented as such. The authors of *The Bell Curve* adopt a weary tone of “we hate these conclusions, yet as scientists we are driven to them by impartial reading of neutral data.” The data they offer as impartial has, however, been elaborately scrunched to fit the desired ideological boxes.

The book’s main artifice in this regard is to present the work of those researchers who do conclude that IQ is mainly inherited and is the main determinant of life outcomes (there are a few such researchers, with full credentials), then describe their studies as generally accepted or no longer seriously contested by other researchers. This is duplicitous. Most academic researchers now accept the notion that IQ tests have become reasonably fair and reasonably predict performance in school. Beyond that there exists a fantastic range of opinions about what the tests really tell you. Many credentialed academic “psychometricians” (students of IQ) come to conclusions dramatically at odds with what Herrnstein and Murray think about IQ, genes, and mental determinism, Robert Sternberg of Yale probably standing as the leading example. *The Bell Curve* makes passing reference to the existence of prominent academics who would reject its thesis, but in the main represents to readers that few researchers now contest the notion that IQ rules. This borders on intellectual dishonesty.

► **Spin disguised, period.** Murray’s work on *The Bell Curve* was underwritten by a grant from the Bradley Foundation, which *National Journal* in 1993 described as “the nation’s biggest underwriter of conservative intellectual activity.” Bradley is a respectable foundation about whose financial support no author need apologize. But Bradley backs only one kind of work: that with right-wing political value. For instance, Bradley is currently underwriting William Kristol. *The Bell Curve* identifies Murray as a “Bradley Fellow” but gives readers no hint of the foundation’s ideological requirements. Telling readers this would, needless to say, spoil the book’s pretense of objective assessment of research.

Slipping down the slope from the respectable Bradley Foundation, Herrnstein and Murray

praise some research supported by the Pioneer Fund, an Aryan crank organization. Until recently, Pioneer’s charter said it would award scholarships mainly to students “deemed to be descended from white persons who settled in the original 13 states.” Pioneer supports Rush-ton and backed the “Minnesota Twins” study, which purports to find that identical twins raised apart end up similar right down to personality quirks. The Aryan crank crowd has long been entranced by the Minnesota Twins project, as it appears to show that genes for mentation are entirely deterministic. Many academics consider the protocols used by the Minnesota Twins study invalid.

Lesser examples of disguised ideological agenda are common in *The Bell Curve*. For example, at one point Murray presents an extended section on problems within the D.C. Police Department, saying their basis lies in “degradation of intellectual requirements” on officer hiring exams. Information in this section is attributed to “journalist Tucker Carlson.” No one who lives in Washington doubts its police department has problems, some of which surely stem from poor screening of applicants. But who is the source for the particularly harsh version of this problem presented in *The Bell Curve*? “Journalist Tucker Carlson” turns out to be an employee of the Heritage Foundation; he is an editor of its house journal *Policy Review*. Heritage, for those who don’t know it, has a rigid hard-right ideological slant. Its *Policy Review* is a lively and at times insightful publication, but anyone regarding its content as other than pamphleteering would be a fool. The article *The Bell Curve* draws from lampoons the intelligence of D.C. police officers because some cases have been dismissed owing to illegible arrest records. And just how many high-IQ white doctors have unreadable handwriting? If an article in *Policy Review* were an impartial source of social science observations, Murray would simply come out and say where his citation originates. Instead he disguises the source, knowing full well its doctrinaire nature.

► **Even the worst-case claimed by the brain-gene believers just doesn’t sound so bad.** Herrnstein and Murray estimate that intelligence is 60 percent nature, 40 percent nurture. Since genes get the majority number here, to them this

clinches the argument for inborn intellectual determinism.

But think about this worst-case—intelligence as 40 percent nurture. “Forty percent variability based on environment would make intelligence an exceptionally pliant trait,” Balaban says. It’s known, for example, that better nutrition can improve height—but only by a few inches, about a five percent swing based on the potential range of human statures. If IQ swings by 40 percent owing to circumstances and life experiences, then human society has more control over intelligence than virtually anything else in its genetic inheritance. Thus, even *The Bell Curve*’s own contentions would seem solid ground upon which to support further attempts to improve the school and home environments of underprivileged children.

In the end, *The Bell Curve* should be seen not as racist or violating a taboo, but simply as an attempt to torment data to make it support a right-wing agenda. That’s fine so far as it goes: Right-wing ideas have as much claim on society’s attention as any other kind, and some of the conclusions Herrnstein and Murray offer are surely correct ones. (They’re surely correct, for example, in contending that in most cases small, stable, “legitimate” parents-wedded families are in the best interests of the child.) It is essential, however, that *The Bell Curve* be seen as a tract advocating a political point of view, not a detached assessment of research. In that regard two final common-sense objections to the book are particularly strong:

● **You don’t have to be real smart to grasp test-score convergence.** For decades black scores on IQ and aptitude tests have been converging upward toward white scores, even as white scores rise. Exceptionally high intelligence is not required to theorize that this is happening because of improved educational opportunity.

The Bell Curve makes a passing mention of black IQ score increases, calls them encouraging, then quickly switches back to doom pronouncements about genetic determinism and the feeble-mindedness of minorities and the poor. Anything more than a passing mention of black IQ test convergence would have kicked the chair out from under the premise of Herrnstein and Murray’s tract. If someday black scores stop ris-

ing toward white scores, that might be alarming. But this hasn’t happened yet, and until it does all the marching data in *The Bell Curve* and similar works will contain a huge common-sense defect.

● **Even if *The Bell Curve* were right about genes, then it’s still wrong about policy.**

It turns out that since IQ testing became common, approximately in the 1920s, the scores of American blacks have shifted upward by about two “standard deviations”—that is, about twice as much positive shift as the negative gulf Herrnstein and Murray find between whites and blacks today. But then almost every American group’s IQ score has upshifted by about two standard deviations in recent decades. Blacks, whites, yellows, reds, browns: According to IQ testing, we’re all getting smarter dramatically fast. The explanation would seem obvious—quality and quantity (especially number of years of schooling) of education has gone up for everybody, so everybody now does better on tests of educational aptitude. Herrnstein and Murray reject this view, saying it must be mainly genes.

Suppose they’re right. If rising IQ levels are mainly genetic, then some evolutionary force must be propelling genus *Homo* in the direction of more DNA for brainpower. Modern society rewards education and mental prowess, so evolution may now be rewarding the same. (Genes do not change during life, but changing circumstances influence which genes are deemed fit and passed to offspring—this is the definition of selection pressure.) Thus if *The Bell Curve* is correct about intellect being mainly genetic, then some aspect of modern social circumstances and government policy must be encouraging or at least neutral to a fantastic wave of improvements in the human genetic endowment for IQ.

Yet *The Bell Curve* concludes by calling for drastic changes in social circumstances and government policy—the very forces which, in Herrnstein and Murray’s analysis, seem to be causing natural selection to favor IQ as never before. The book ends up mired in such illogic either because its authors do not understand the science of genetics on which they pretend to premise their case, or have produced what should properly be seen as an unusually lengthy promotional brochure for a rather unattractive political package. □

Why Are Jews So Rich?

A social scientist's troubling answer may provoke a national debate.

THE JEW CURVE

Greed and Income in American Life.

By Charles Murray.

Illustrated. 837 pp. New York.

The Free Press. \$35.

By Malcolm W. Browne*

A scant two years after Charles Murray's incendiary *The Bell Curve* provoked a furor among liberal opinion-makers with its views on race and intelligence, Mr. Murray has returned with an even more controversial work on yet another taboo subject: Jewish wealth. As he did in the earlier work, Mr. Murray marshals an impressive body of evidence that will surely send liberals into paroxysms of outrage. But whether one agrees or disagrees with the findings in Mr. Murray's book, the government or society that persists in ignoring the vital issues raised by his research does so at its peril.

"At a time of widening class divisions and shrinking opportunities for well-paying jobs," he argues, "a hidden source of resentment—the role of Jews in the economy—lurks beneath the surface of American life and clouds our ability to solve our economic dilemmas. It is vital that people begin to talk about this publicly. Failure to do so could only heighten the anti-Semitism that arises during periods of economic dislocation." In Mr. Murray's grim view, the lingering resentment towards Jews—as many as a fifth of Americans hold some anti-Semitic views, surveys show—could lead to an upsurge in discrimination and even hate crimes. The author posits a disturbing future in which Jews, increasingly isolated from other Americans, wall themselves off in high-priced ghettos and find themselves attacked by an impoverished Gentile underclass. Only by exploring in an honest, tough-minded way Jewish economic power—and the significant role of what he argues is the largely inherited trait of greed—can we hope to avoid such a tragic fate, he says.

Jews are the most economically successful group in American society, or, as Mr. Murray dubs them, "the overclass." Jewish family income is 72 percent more than the national average and even when minor-

ity groups are removed from the analysis, Jewish income is 34 percent more than that of Gentile white ethnic groups. (The author notes that Jewish families earn 50 percent more than "God-fearing, hard-working Irish-Americans.") Although Jews make up only three percent of the population, they account for approximately a fifth of the very rich, i.e. millionaires and above.

The book effectively uses graphics and charts to underscore these points. In one striking chart, the income curve for "Jews" and "Regular Americans" is compared, with a disproportionate Jewish clustering at the higher end of the \$50,000 scale or above.

What accounts for these differentials in group achievement? Aware of the storm of criticism this book may arouse, Mr. Murray offers extensive evidence that shows that educational background or even IQ are not the primary factors that account for Jews' higher income. "Even when educational attainment is the same, Jewish families headed by males with four or more years of college still earn 75 percent higher incomes than those of other ethnic groups," he notes. The slight advantage in IQ test scores reported by Jews is not large enough to explain why they in general are richer than everyone else. "Something more than brains is at work," he says.

That something, he argues in the book's most controversial chapter, is greed. Here, Mr. Murray's provocative analytic insights and policy prescriptions go beyond those of earlier American students of ethnicity and income. The author uses a veritable cornucopia of research, both current and historical, to underscore the picture of Jews driven by what Mr. Murray, a free-market advocate, concedes is "the basic engine of capitalism: greed." As academics have pointed out since the early 1900s, greed is the "g-factor" that motivates anyone—Jew and non-Jew alike—to strive to earn more money for themselves and their families. Pointing to the overwhelming evidence of Jewish economic superiority, Mr. Murray contends, "Everyone has the 'g-factor,' but Jews have more of it."

In making his case, he explores everything from medieval writings about Jewish money lenders to the role of Jewish-dominated investment banking firms, such as Goldman Sachs, in the spate of corporate raids in the 1980s. He pays special attention to Michael Milken and Ivan Boesky, whose "Greed is Good" credo serves, the book contends, as the "secret text" of Jewish life.

*As told to Art Levine, a contributing editor of *The Washington Monthly*.