

that individuals be judged as individuals. That was the meaning of the disappearance from college and job applications of the customary photograph. Of course, the revolution was not quickly completed. But it was begun, and America was better for it.

Now, again, there is a new norm in place, and it is one that is particularly prevalent where society's most coveted prizes are awarded. It is this: the prizes are not only given to individuals on the basis of merit but, when they go to blacks and to members of other designated minority groups, they are presented as a group right, as an entitlement, to the gifted and the less gifted, equally.

The regime of racial and ethnic set-asides in education and employment makes victims of others who, on simple standards of merit, would have won the places reserved now by custom and law for members of particular groups. We have thus far been spared the historically laden nightmare of having legislatures and courts decide what constitutes membership in these groups. Our luck, however, may not hold out. In an economy in which good jobs and scholarships are ever scarcer, someone will finally have to decide: What constitutes being black? Will one grandparent do?

The new mechanisms assume that, were fairness to rule, blacks would be represented at about 10 percent in all of the preferred professions and schools. But the fairest distributive patterns of society would have had more random results than the notion of representation suggests. Many discernible groups are "under-represented" in the advantaged places. How many Slavic-Americans are on the faculty of the University of Chicago in a city where their numbers help define the character of urban life? Are the right number of Irish-Americans partners in Boston's tony law firms? Needn't there be more Arab-American curators?

Where proportionality is the norm it will not long be tenable for half the students at the Julliard School of Music to be of Asian descent. So their surplus will simply have to make way for those who are inadequately represented. It would be preposterous—wouldn't it?—if we were to establish set-asides in medical schools for, let us say, Greeks and Italians. But that is precisely what society does on behalf of blacks and a few other groups. To those groups not favored and also not much numerically present in prestige schools and positions, these preferences are especially unfair instances of social engineering. That this social engineering does not actually succeed in producing many more black sci-

entists is scarcely consolation to those who are left out. But what it does do is sharpen the sense of group differences. No surprise.

There is, however, *pace* Murray and Herrnstein, some grounds for practical hope. The ingathering of exiles in Israel was not an altogether unprecedented venture. The migrations to the United States also resulted in a grand mixing of different racial types and ethnic histories. This mixing was not nearly so inclusive as it has been in Israel. But its signs are everywhere apparent around us. Almost no one is pure anything, and the process continues. When, finally, we are all mixed up together we will be a wiser, warmer, more witty, more lyrical, more beautiful people. And, then, all the standard measurements will be able to tell us about individuals only. God willing, the time is not far off. Let's hope science doesn't get there before us.

MARTIN PERETZ

## Tom Cat Blues

Our is a country in which the responses to failure are often nearly the same as the responses to excessive success: low-boiling resentment and explanations of why the other guy without as much or the one with more should either stay down there where he is or be debunked for getting so much better a line of comforts.

*The truth is hard to swallow as a fat piece of broken glass if you ask me and besides I heard tell that if you just look at it and don't mess around and just be honest about things and don't let anybody push you until you keep your mouth good and shut especially when it comes to the truth and let everybody know that it doesn't matter how much you try it can't amount to anything more than what it is which is something we all just have to face up to and let the chips keep on keeping on because it couldn't be any kind of way different than it is and trying to say something else won't even come close to making it so because there happen right now to be people who go to the schools way up yonder and they study this kind of stuff and you couldn't even get them to lie about something if you paid them because being honest is what the hell they spend all their damn time trying to be as it is. I mean Jesus H. Christ and the angel that tickled the hyena out of heaven!*

The other side is, perhaps, somewhat different.

*You mean to tell me I should take them serious when they try to tell me that just because they can afford this and they can afford that we should be willing to bow down to them and kiss whatever they put in our faces when it stands to reason that if they were*

*all that why are their kids as bad as cancer and how come their wives are always laying down and looking up at somebody else and besides that let me tell you some people who are friends of the family who have a son working out of town in one of those real expensive hotels will give you the chapter and the verse on what the so-called Mr. Man of that big fancy house does when he goes to town and besides which if you put the entire bunch of them out here in the wind with the rest of us they'd get knocked over and roll away before you could say I told you so.*

The panoramic lyrics of W. C. Handy's *Beale Street Blues* refer to a class-mixing world of secret lives, illegal celebration, potential disorder and nostalgia. They formed the basis of the themes F. Scott Fitzgerald rendered in *The Great Gatsby*, a masterpiece that continues to clarify just who we are. In a fat book Tom had read—*Oh, Lord!*—that the lower races were going to rise up in cannibalism, licking their chops and ready to gnaw those at the top into a dead and bloody mess. Something had to be done about it. In his fantasy, Jimmy Gatz thought that upper-class identity could easily be achieved through name changes, claims to social pedigrees, expensive emblems and big parties.

Neither the nightmares nor the dreams were right. Mistakes of one sort or another caked up the blood. It all came down to paranoia, counterfeit elegance, the corruption of national ideals and athletic games, the endless stomach the masses have for rot and gore, and our stubborn belief that we should be able to sit in our sandboxes and strike those next to us or those at the edge with the costly shovels and buckets that were made way up in high places. Even so, as the blind man on the corner sings in *Beale Street Blues*, "I'd rather be here than any place I know. It's going to take the sergeant for to make me go."

STANLEY CROUCH

## A Political Act

The Murray and Herrnstein article addresses three distinct questions: (1) What do we know about differences on the average in cognitive functioning between identifiable population subgroups? (2) How, if at all, should such matters be discussed in public? and (3) to what extent must the self-esteem enjoyed by a group be diminished, should it be found to rank relatively low in the cognitive hierarchy?

The first question is a scientific one; it can be addressed only by the collection and analysis of evidence. While it is possible to argue with some of their interpre-

tations, it is difficult in my view to dispute their central contentions, based on an impressive array of evidence: that there are measurable differences, on the average, in the cognitive functioning of the members of various population subgroups; that in the case of black and white Americans this difference is of a quantitatively substantial magnitude; and that group difference in cognitive functioning of this extent must be part of the explanation for the differences between blacks and whites in their educational and economic achievements.

Other of their conclusions—the importance of genetic factors in accounting for group cognitive differences, or the immutability of such differences in the face of egalitarian policy efforts—are less compelling to me. But even here, they are making important scientific claims that cannot be dismissed out-of-hand. It cannot be proved that the evident average difference in cognitive functioning between blacks and whites in America has no genetic component. Nor is it

clear, on the evidence at hand, that interventions of social and educational enrichment offer the realistic prospect of significantly reducing this disparity. So while we may, and must, argue about exactly what the data establish in this explosive area of social science analysis, we need also to come to grips with some very uncomfortable facts.

What is the meaning for our society—the moral and political significance—of substantial racial disparities in cognitive functioning? This is the matter addressed in questions (2) and (3). Sadly, Murray and Herrnstein's discussion is not helpful. Early on they say it is essential for people to begin to talk openly of a matter already being discussed behind closed doors. But why? It is easy to imagine that open talk, when not coupled with useful action, could be terribly destructive, even if rooted in demonstrable fact. In a way, by concluding that no useful policy interventions exist for narrowing cognitive differences between racial groups, the authors defeat their own justification for the urgency of the discussion they intend to provoke. What, exactly, is it that we are to talk about? Just how necessary is it that we engage in a public discourse of regret concerning what they present as the unfortunate but recalcitrant disabilities of an identifiable set of our fellows?

It is only in connection with the formulation of policy that the public discussion of the matters of individual differences in cognitive capacity becomes essential. And even then, it is far from clear

why an emphasis on group I.Q. differences is necessary. The fact that "everybody's whispering about it" hardly constitutes an adequate justification. For, Murray and Herrnstein's declarations of intent notwithstanding, the fact is one cannot engage in such a discourse without simultaneously signaling other moral and political messages. These other messages bear on the worth of the disadvantaged "clans," and the legitimacy of collective ameliorative efforts undertaken on their behalf.

*Declaring a stark and intractable gap between the intellectual abilities of black and white Americans is a political act.* It inevitably implies something about the intrinsic value of persons in the respective groups, and about the fundamental obligations we have to one another, as fellow citizens of a common republic, to redress the stark inequalities evident all about us. When as scholars we write about intelligence we engage in politics whether we like it or not. This is no reason to abandon the field; but it



is good reason to write with circumspection and care, so as to avoid giving gratuitous offense to the sensibilities of our readers. Unfortunately, this was not done in this article. Quite to the contrary, the speculative discussion of sources of group esteem offered at its end seems totally inconsistent with the earnest claim to the disinterested pursuit of science put forward at the beginning. I can only urge, in the strongest terms, that in future discussions of the scientific findings of their work, the authors forgo such speculations.

I am not here questioning the motives of the authors. Rather, I am saying that the authors unnecessarily invite the questioning of their motives by introducing extraneous and unproductive speculation into what should be a discussion of the facts, and the facts alone. This talk of "clans" that appropriately impute to themselves superiority over others by virtue of some desirable trait that they manifest to a greater degree than do other "clans" is errant nonsense. One can make no sense of it in rigorous sociological or anthropological terms. At a point when the authors should in my view be stressing individualism as the antidote to the racist sentiments that their objective analyses might feed, we find them instead engaging in the crudest of racial generalization.

Let me speak plainly. Blacks are in no need of a defense of our humanity in the face of Murray and Herrnstein's evidence concerning an average disparity

between racial groups in performance on intelligence tests. Least of all do we need to invoke, "It's a black thing; you wouldn't understand"—declaring ourselves separate in some essential way, members of a different sphere within which even we can see ourselves as superior to all other "clans." I would have thought, and have always supposed, that the inherent equality of human beings was an ethical axiom, not a psychologically contingent fact. Indeed, it has always seemed to me that learning to see ourselves as individuals first and foremost is the surest way to guarantee against the pernicious chauvinism that leads a black to feel himself superior in view of the demographic composition of the NBA, or a Jew to sneer at the goyim in light of the religious affiliations of recent Nobel physicists. What, one must wonder, would lead Murray and Herrnstein to the condescending apologia with which they conclude their article?

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## White on White

I will, for present purposes, accept Murray and Herrnstein's finding that the aggregate of Americans with European forebears score better than fellow citizens having African ancestries. And I will also, for present purposes, agree with them that the capacity for doing well on standardized tests is "substantially heritable." So much of what we call I.Q., as measured by the multiple-choice method, has a genetic basis. At the same time, the authors warn us that while individuals get their genes through their parents, this does not entitle us to generalize on a racial basis. "That a trait is genetically transmitted in individuals does not mean that group differences in that trait are also genetic in origin."

Really? I would have thought that what we know about gene pools suggests that if groups of humans live and procreate for a considerable period, certain traits will come to predominate and be reproduced. After all, black people are apt to mate with one another, as are French-Canadians and Koreans. If this passes on physical features, why not also the breadth and depth of cognitive capacities?

My aim here will be quite modest. It is to take the authors' premise a step further, and apply it to the generic race they call "white." However, here we are

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