

"The Dumbbell Curve"

Since American teachers switched in the 1930s from reading instruction that worked for everyone to reading instruction that neuroscientists now tell us doesn't work for anyone, school-produced illiteracy has soared. And it is illiteracy--not low IQ--that is not only responsible for decades of declining test scores but is also critically linked to every critical social problem in Oklahoma and nationwide.

by Regna Lee Wood

June 1996

"Regna Lee Wood, who is already a major national resource because of her brilliant analyses of illiteracy, shows in relentless detail the extent to which Murray and Herrnstein, authors of "The Bell Curve," ignore the effect of illiteracy on scores on IQ and other tests. We are not, she argues persuasively, facing a crisis of intelligence but one of literacy."

--Dr. John Silber, Chancellor Boston University

INTRODUCTION

If social scientist Charles Murray - coauthor with the late Harvard psychology professor, Richard Herrnstein, of The Bell Curve, a bombshell published in October 1994 - truly believes that America is breeding back to a feudal caste state because tiny isolated groups of "cognitive elite" graduates from two dozen prestigious universities are begetting a few legitimate little masterminds - potentially richer and more powerful in a hightech world than their brilliant mommies, daddies, and nannies . . . while larger but equally isolated groups of "underclass" graduates and dropouts from public high schools, mostly in minority neighborhoods, are producing many illegitimate little muddleheads - potentially poorer and more helpless in an information age than their simple single mothers and their no-name fathers . . . then he is due for a long sabbatical.

And those who willingly or unwillingly have accepted The Bell Curve's terminal diagnosis for America's societal ills (the authors say the continued separation of the nation's brightest and dullest citizens means "the end of American civil society as we have known it") [1] without questioning the validity of copious but nevertheless critically incomplete MurrayHerrnstein behavioral data and the soundness of bizarre reasoning that leads to such a grievous conclusion . . . should also take respite from their cognitive activities. For until now the published and aired discussions on this 850-page study of how differing degrees of inherited mental potential supposedly affect U.S. social structure have generated little but incomprehensible sounds

from American whites and comprehensible fury from American blacks.

Clearly, neither The Bell Curve writers nor The Bell Curve reviewers have done their homework. They share an astonishing ignorance of American history - particularly American education history. Neither authors nor critics seem to know what has changed a once literate, responsible, industrious, freedom-loving people into a barely literate, irresponsible, fragmented, violent society with burgeoning numbers of public housing projects called prisons.

The failure to learn what happened in American schools before the rioting Sixties has produced costly misperceptions. No one seems to know who caused what.

For example, those who don't know that over 600,000 military registrants with 6 to 12 years of schooling were rejected during the Korean War (1950-53) because they could not read with the Army's required 4th grade proficiency [2] think "dumbing down" textbooks and simplifying curriculum in the Sixties was an unwilling response to student activist and minority leader demands for easy courses that anyone could pass. But the truth is that teachers and school administrators asked publishers for simple "Little Golden" textbooks because students with limited 300 to 3000 word "see and say" vocabularies couldn't read the 10,000 words in traditional high school math, science, history, and literature books. And because no one has discovered ways to greatly simplify secondary math and science books or write history without proper names for people, places, and things (few capitalized names are in a sight repetition list of frequently used words) or rewrite classics and produce anything but plots and outlines, most secondary core subjects were dropped. The alternative was to close the high schools. Such misinterpretations, followed by mistaken diagnoses and very wrong prescriptions occur again and again in The Bell Curve. Chapter I begins with one of these sad sequences.

THE SMART AREN'T GETTING SMARTER -- EVERYONE IS GETTING DUMBER

The authors are bewildered because the 1960 Harvard freshmen were nearly 200 SAT composite points smarter than the 1952 Harvard freshmen. Because Murray and Herrnstein were evidently unaware of radical changes in the extent of college entrance testing that occurred between 1952 and 1960, they assume high school seniors AND Harvard admissions boards were both getting smarter. And they believe this amazing difference in SAT scores proves that whiz kids with money or scholarships were flocking to schools where they could associate with other wellendowed whiz kids as early as 1960. [3]

Not so. The true explanation has little to do with how many young Americans inherited high IQs or who persuaded them to congregate

in the nation's prestigious institutions of higher learning in 1960. But it has much to do with a rebellion by taxpayers.

After doubling faculties and facilities for World War II veterans going to public colleges and universities on the first GI Bill and at the same time furnishing a never ending string of new schools and teachers for "baby boomers," who boosted public school enrollment from 23 million in 1946 to 43 million in 1966 [4], state and local taxpayers said they couldn't afford dormitories, classrooms, and teachers for dropouts among the millions of veterans' children they knew would start to colleges in 1960. They refused to house and teach poorly prepared students who would stay in college only a semester or two.

So, they asked for and received state laws or directives requiring college entrance test scores on transcripts of all students entering postsecondary public schools. They assumed that state or city colleges and universities would post required minimum admittance scores that would stop those who couldn't pass college courses from enrolling thus saving money for potential dropouts and oppressed taxpayers.

Minimum SAT or ACT scores could have saved billions in higher education expenditures. But elected officials allowed few colleges to post them. Telling constituents in districts with poor schools that only five or six percent of their graduates can go to public institutions of higher learning is not recommended reelection strategy. So, for every state university that posted minimum college entrance test scores, hundreds of new and old two year colleges posted open admission policies. Consequently, over half of the college and university students then and now have dropped out before receiving any degree. [5]

But college entrance testing hasn't been the same since states joined individual schools in mandating college entrance examinations. In 1952 only 80,000 took SATs [6] most of them headed to private schools which had required Scholastic Aptitude Testing (SATs) since the late Twenties. In 1960 a MILLION took college entrance examinations: 740,000 SATs [7] and 260,000 ACTs [8] (given the first time in 1959 by the American College Testing Corporation). Most of these were headed for public colleges and universities.

By 1970 over a million seniors, largely in 22 west and east coast states and Washington, D.C., were taking SATs. And a million seniors, mostly in 27 midwestern, southern, southwestern, and western states, were taking ACTs [9]. Around 2 million prepared and unprepared seniors have taken annual college entrance tests for the last 25 years.

But in 1952 and 1960 nearly all seniors taking these tests were ready for college because high school college preparatory courses in the Forties and Fifties were still adequate. Therefore, 1500 best-performing young men, with money or scholarships, chosen from

740,000 SAT participants should have produced a SAT average higher than the average posted by 1500 high scoring youths, with money or scholarships, chosen from only 80,000 SAT participants some of them veterans with interrupted school attendance. Conceivably, the SAT composite average for the 1960 Harvard freshmen, chosen from a group nine times larger than the comparable 1952 pool of SAT participants could well be 200 points higher.

Another likely reason for the big difference in 1952 and 1960 Harvard freshmen SAT scores is that 1952 Harvard freshmen took a more difficult SAT verbal test. After the national SAT verbal average of 500 plummeted 24 points in 11 years between 1941 and 1952 [\[10\]](#) a plunge that started 12 years after most school districts adopted sight repetition of whole word reading instruction SAT administrators rewrote some verbal questions, decreased the numbers of multiple choice answers, and rescored the whole test. Ostensibly SATs were changed to meet specifications for automatic graders.

However, the new version was demonstrably easier. Instead of sinking 24 points in 11 years, the verbal and still unaffected math averages each rose 2 points in the ensuing 11 years to a verbal 478 and a math 502. [\[11\]](#) And these were the SAT averages when the first enormous class of postwar baby boomers who had learned or NOT learned to read in crowded "looksay" sight repetition reading classes, took SATs and ACTs in the fall of 1963 and the spring of 1964. The rest is history.

Between 1963 and 1980 national SAT composite scores fell 90 points: from 980 to 890 54 verbal points to 424 and 36 math points to 466. [\[12\]](#) Before an easier revised and rescored SAT was introduced in 1995, the average 1994 SAT verbal score was down one more point to 423, and the average math score was up 13 points to 479 [\[13\]](#) producing a 902 composite score 98 points lower than 1941's composite of 1000 and 78 points lower than 1963's composite average of 980.

Unlike other analysts, Murray and Herrnstein give little credit for the partial recovery in SAT math scores since 1980 to the ballooning participation of high-scoring Asian math students. [\[14\]](#) But years of low to very low verbal scores surprisingly linked to high and very high math averages in California and Hawaii, two SAT states with the nation's largest Asian populations, suggest that highly proficient Asian math students are indeed responsible for much of the 13 point gain in SAT math averages since the low 466 in 1980. No one, including Murray and Herrnstein, has a reasonable explanation for the movement of national SAT verbal averages. After the numbers of seniors taking college entrance tests peaked in the late Sixties, SAT verbal averages dropped 26 more points; the numbers (not percentages) of those scoring over 700 on the SAT verbal section dropped by 50% in 7 years [\[15\]](#); and the totals for seniors scoring above 600 (out of 800) on the SAT verbal section slid from 116,630 in 1972 to 60,612 in 1981 a jolting 40% decrease. [\[16\]](#)

Perhaps the 1960 Harvard admission board was savvier than the 1952 Harvard admissions directors. And there's no denying the 1960 Harvard freshmen their very high SAT scores. But nothing in decades of falling SAT averages supports The Bell Curve contention that the smart are growing smarter through association and marriage with cognitive elite peers they meet in college, business, foundations, or government.

Actually, scores on millions of standardized tests taken since 1940 suggest a contrary conclusion. The smart are not getting smarter. Everyone is getting dumber. All categories on the "bell curve" have shifted to the dull end.

THE SHRINKING POOL OF LITERATE, EMPLOYABLE GRADUATES

Another puzzling misinterpretation of behavior, apparently based on insufficient data, is in "Higher Ladders, Narrower Doors." In this chapter of The Bell Curve, Murray and Herrnstein supposedly prove that employers pay much more for high IQs today than they paid yesterday. [17]

After noticing that wages for recent high school graduates and dropouts fell 20% and 16% during the same eight years in which salaries and incomes for new graduates from four-year colleges rose 11% to 30% (for those in difficult fields from top-rated schools), Murray and Herrnstein declare information-age employers will require a drastically different labor market. They say jobs for those with only 12 or fewer years of schooling are disappearing. And they gloomily predict that only those with the inherited mental capacity to pass college courses will have good jobs or maybe ANY jobs in the future.

Ironically, if average college graduates (who can't read bus schedules, according to the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey) [18] had made these ominous forecasts, school psychologists would probably have given them high marks for their "ability to infer relationships and draw conclusion," no matter what the counselors thought about the accuracy of the predictions. But average college graduates did not make these implausible deductions. Murray and Herrnstein made them. The Bell Curve psychometricians with doctorates from MIT and Harvard who should understand the significant scores on millions of standardized academic tests given by the U.S. Departments of War, Defense, HEW, Labor, and Education reached these very wrong conclusions.

Apparently Murray and Herrnstein never really studied the score summaries on 25 years of National Assessment of Educational Progress reading, math, and science tests (NAEP exams). They just noticed they are consistently low. They never examined scores on 70 million Armed Forces academic tests (AGCTs and AFQTs) especially those made by prospective recruits in the 1940 to 1973 draft years. Supposedly they weren't familiar with the disheartening scores on congressionally commissioned 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey

tests given to thousands representing 190 million Americans over the age of 16. And obviously, The Bell Curve authors didn't realize that scores on all of these tests show frightening increases in adult illiteracy.

The numbers of illiterate American adults have jumped from 3 million with little or no schooling in the early Thirties [19] to about 43 million with an average 12 years of school instruction in the early Nineties. [20] The 96% literacy rate for 18 million military registrants tested during World War II dropped to nearly 80% for several million prospective recruits tested during the Korean War. [21] This was an incredible 400% increase in illiteracy for young men in the 8 years between 1945 (the end of World War II) and 1953 (the end of the Korean War).

Seemingly Murray and Herrnstein did not know that NAEP and NALS reading tests show that nearly a third of our high school students can't read, half can't read 6th grade lessons or write a simple two or three sentence note, and almost twothirds can't read 9th grade assignments in any core subject. [22] This is a school--produced illiteracy that has turned most American high schools into day care centers for twothirds of the nation's secondary students.

If Murray and Herrnstein had analyzed these test results, they surely would have realized that the shrinking labor market for high school graduates has little to do with increased complexity of jobs in this hitech information age and much to do with the scarcity of high school OR college graduates with skills equivalent to those with 8th grade certificates in the Thirties and early Forties.

In a July 15, 1991 Wall Street Journal article, the long time president of the American Federation of Teachers, Albert Shanker, admitted that most high school diplomas mean very little. He described America's abysmal educational status this way:

"First we should realize that the overwhelming majority of the American children perhaps 90% are not learning very much. Middle class parents are happy with the education their children get because the kids go to colleges. They don't realize that most of these youngsters would not be admitted to universities in any other industrialized country. THESE KIDS ARE GETTING THEIR JUNIOR HIGH AND HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATIONS IN COLLEGE."

So much for why employers aren't anxious to hire RECENT high school graduates.

THEY'RE NOT STUPID, JUST ILLITERATE

But the most troubling misinterpretation of behavior based on partial and sometimes insignificant data collected in the wrong decade, followed by a wrong determination of causes and a prescription that will surely end this nation "as we have known it" is in "The Leveling of

Education In America". In this chapter of The Bell Curve the authors discuss consequences of "dumbing down" curriculum and textbooks, a practice they say was introduced in the Sixties to give students with varied socioeconomic backgrounds and genetic mental capacities an equal chance to succeed.

In opposition to most critics, Murray and Herrnstein think this "dumbing down" to give everyone a chance to pass high school courses "may have worked". In spite of conclusive evidence to the contrary, they say, "An American youth with average IQ is probably better prepared academically than ever before." They have only one objection. Measures to simplify high school studies "let the gifted get away without developing their potential." Consequently, "The problem in American education is confined mainly to one group of students, the cognitively gifted." [23]

In plain language this is what the MurrayHerrnstein dissertation on the effects of "dumbing down" American education seems to say:

1. Because extraordinary numbers of U.S. citizens aren't very bright, dumbed down books and simplified courses have given students with average to low average IQs an excellent chance to reach their fullest potential. But the authors admit this potential is not very high.
2. Therefore, Americans should not be alarmed if 20% to 30% of the nation's seventeenyearolds can't read. Critics of U.S. schools must realize that "in a universal education system many students will not reach the level of education that most people view as basic."
3. But critics should be alarmed to learn that dropping tough subjects and grading down textbooks have not helped students with the highest IQs. Such diluted instruction is not challenging to those with the brightest, inquiring minds.
4. So, because we can't raise low IQs with better nutrition, Head Start, Chapter I, or adoption (and democracies certainly can't use Hitler's government-sponsored cohabitation or China's mandatory sterilization), the only way to improve American academic performance is to take some of the billions spent on teaching the disadvantaged and use it to give students with the highest IQs the best possible education. Hopefully, we can produce compassionate super citizens who can make the right decisions for the 3 out of 4 Americans old enough to vote who can't read a proposition on a ballot or can't read a newspaper article explaining a proposition on a ballot.

Of course the argument that America's disastrous educational performance is due to mass inheritance of inferior minds plus the failure to adequately educate the very few with genetically superior minds is valid only if Murray and Herrnstein can prove that average American students have never learned any more than they are learning today. The Bell Curve psychometricians meet this challenge

by offering proof that average students in earlier 20th century American schools were even less academically proficient than average students in later 20th century schools. They say the necessary evidence is in three sets of standardized test scores:[\[24\]](#) 1. Consistently low scores on Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Tests (PSATs), given regularly to groups representing all 11th graders not just college bound juniors between 1955 and 1983;

2. Low, unchanging scores on NAEP tests, regularly given to cross sections of all high school juniors between 1969 and 1990;

3. Rising scores on Iowa Basic Skills tests given annually to Iowa 9th graders since 1940 (except for a 14 year drop between 1964 and 1978, termed "aberrational" by Murray and Herrnstein though it parallels the 90 point SAT slide between 1963 and 1980).

If analysts are unaware of the 400% increase in illiteracy among military registrants between World War II and the Korean War (1950-53) and the 4000% increase in 4th grade illiteracy among registrants with at least 4 years of schooling during the same period, the 35 years of PSAT and NAEP tests scores for 11th graders seemingly give strong support to the Murray-Herrnstein argument. Here are the results:[\[25\]](#)

The 1955 PSAT averages for all juniors were considerably lower than the comparable 1983 averages.

The 1969 NAEP scores for all 11th graders are virtually the same as the 1990 scores.

And neither of these PSAT and NAEP averages for all juniors seem to have been affected between 1963 and 1980 by the steep, 90 point slide in SAT scores for college bound seniors supposedly proving the Murray-Herrnstein contention that only students with high IQs have been hurt by dumbed down books and curriculum.[\[26\]](#)

But some former Defense Department manpower specialists are aware of that increase in illiteracy. They remember the shocking dive in AFQT scores during the Korean War when a reluctant Army rejected over 600,000 young men because they couldn't read road signs, orders, and safety instructions. They know that 1955 testing for all 11th graders was too late to show the enormous difference between very literate World War II registrants and barely literate Korean War registrants. Thirtyfive years of PSAT and NAEP cross-section testing AFTER 1955 cannot show what 20 million AGCTs and AFQTs taken in the 15 years BEFORE 1955 clearly suggest: The World War II generation was the last highly literate generation produced by American public schools in the 20th century.[\[27\]](#)

However, the 24 years of rising scores on the 9th grade Iowa Basic Skills Test between 1940 and 1964 are not so easily dismissed. Why were SAT scores the highest and Iowa scores the lowest in 1941?

Why did Iowa scores rise while SAT verbal averages sank 24 points and AFQT scores dropped out of sight during the Korean War? [\[28\]](#)

Testing specialists know that giving the same test for successive years will produce higher scores because teachers consciously or unconsciously teach the test. This explains some of the increase. Surely the test was modified and renormed for national sales several times during those 24 years. If so, 9th graders in Iowa, many times the state with the highest ACT average, would make higher percentile scores because 9th graders in other states made lower percentile scores. There is a plausible reason. However, believing that the educational level for Iowa 9th graders rose while the 4th grade literacy rate among millions of young military registrants with at least four years of schooling from every state in the U.S.A plummeted from 99.5% to less than 80% is not plausible. [\[29\]](#)

In contrast, the increases in achievement test scores in Iowa and other states since 1978 are easily explained. In chronological order these are the reasons:

1. In 1975 Congress passed the Education For The Handicapped Law, now called the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), for students with mental, physical, or emotional handicaps. [\[30\]](#)
2. In 1976 Specific Learning Disabilities, a category now containing over 52% of the 5 million Special Education school enrollment, was added to the official list of Special Education disabilities though the government describes Specific Learning Disability students and Language Impairment pupils as normal with no mental, physical, or emotional handicaps. [\[31\]](#)
3. In 1977, state legislators and school superintendents started excusing all Special Education pupils from taking statewide achievement tests (though 65% of the first year Special Education enrollment was in these two nonhandicapped categories Specific Learning Disabilities and Language Impairments). [\[32\]](#)
4. By 1978, those wanting higher district test averages, were placing considerable numbers of teaching failures most of them normal but illiterate students with no mental, physical, or emotional handicaps in Specific Learning Disability and Language Impairment classes, which today comprise about 75% of the 5 million in public school Special Education programs. [\[33\]](#)
5. By excusing the poorest performing 8 to 14 percent of the normal, non-handicapped students from participation in their annual achievement testing, virtually all states that give these tests (most do) happily post average scores above the national averages. For publishers of CATs, MATs, and IBSTs pretest or "norm" these achievement tests on a national school population that includes all but the truly handicapped such as the deaf, blind, or severely retarded. This produces the Lake Woebegone Phenomenon, named

after Garrison Keillor's mythical town where all children are above average. This is the probable reason Iowa 9th grade scores on IBSTs started rising in 1978 and have not stopped going up in the Special Education elevator since. [\[34\]](#)

Many who judge schools by looking at standardized test results know that the most revealing scores can be missing scores. They may be nonexistent scores on state achievement tests that real, nonhandicapped students should have taken but didn't take scores that would decidedly lower any state's achievement test averages. They may be scores on unpublicized tests, unknown to researchers. Or unbelievably, they may be published grades on national tests that young Americans from every school district in the nation DID take, and are still taking.

Of course these missing scores are Armed Forces Qualification Tests (AFQTs), called Army General Classification Tests (AGCTs) in World War II, taken by 50 million prospective recruits since 1940 and by 20 million high school juniors since 1968. [\[35\]](#) And no one knows why Murray and Herrnstein did not report available results from 50 years of very extensive and almost continuous military testing (except for three years after World War II when the Defense Department was busy discharging 9 million service men and women).

But they didn't. The Bell Curve authors didn't even put these well known tests on their list of important "longitudinal measures" for assessing American educational performance. And that's more than ironic.

For The Bell Curve is essentially a compilation of what Murray and Herrnstein learned or thought they learned in a study of scores on these same AFQTs. These were AFQTs given to a special group of 12,000 young people, chosen by the U.S. Labor Department to represent all Americans 14 to 22 years old, in a survey to find out who could do what jobs in the Eighties and Nineties. [\[36\]](#)

The Bell Curve analysts chose to study these particular AFQT scores ten years after the test was given in 1980 for two reasons. In their judgment AFQTs were excellent intelligence tests. And the Labor Department had collected an extraordinary amount of demographic information on the 12,000 participants and their parents data they needed to test The Bell Curve hypotheses.

The Labor Department survey directors knew the sex and age; racial and ethnic back-grounds; places of residence; and job, income, welfare, education, marital, and medical histories (including birth weights) of the participants. This enabled researchers to correlate most socio-economic factors with the individual AFQT "IQ" scores.

And they did. Using formulas with a hundred numbers, letters, mathematic symbols, and punctuation marks, Murray and Herrnstein supposedly could determine what a year of college was worth to

students with varied IQs and what a ten point difference in IQs could mean in profits for an employer hiring people to do unskilled jobs. They learned that poor students with high IQs and single mothers on welfare will most likely succeed while rich children with low IQs and two wealthy parents may take and need handouts all their lives. According to "multiple and logistic regression analyses," The Bell Curve devolution theory is fact. [37] Every serious social problem such as crime, illegitimacy, or unemployment is linked to if not caused by a socioeconomic factor that no democracy can do much about: genetically limited mental capacity for astonishing numbers of Americans, most of them living in crowded but isolated communities.

But this grim conclusion is based on the questionable assumption that all low scores on written intelligence tests indicate genetically limited mental ability. Before converting 12,000 AFQT scores to 12,000 IQs, later correlated with many sociological factors from sick leaves to birth weights - Murray and Herrnstein should have discovered that 3,000 to 4,000 of the 12,000 in the Labor Department youth survey group could not read the questions or the multiple choice answers on the AFQTs they took in 1980.

If The Bell Curve psychometric experts had looked at the scores on 30 million AFQTs and AGCTs taken between 1940 and 1973 BEFORE they looked at scores on 12,000 AFQTs taken in 1980, they would have noticed that the percentage of scores in the noninductible Category V for low IQ and illiterate registrants soared from 9% in World War II to an appalling 27% at the end of the Vietnam War. [38] And of course they would have wondered why. Certainly all of the 27% couldn't be retarded; many had to be illiterate.

Enough. The Bell Curve critics and reviewers did not need to know about the scores on 130 million standardized tests before challenging the Murray and Herrnstein devolution theory. Three major questions should have occurred to anyone who read the book.

QUESTION ONE: If the damaging isolation of a nation's brightest and dullest citizens is inevitable in hitech societies, why is America the only "information age" society so acutely affected?

Why don't other advanced countries have ballooning concentrations of violent citizens like those in American cities? Why don't Japan, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Britain, and France have at least one identifiable group so stupid they cannot link today's actions with tomorrow's consequences?

Is it because their indigents aren't illiterate blacks? If so, why can average citizens in majority black populations in British Commonwealth Bahamian and West Indies islands read better than average white citizens in the United States? Literacy rates in the Bahamas and Jamaica are 95 and 98.5 percent. Nearly all of these black, formerly British island people can read anything they want or need to read. But the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey tests show

that only 81 to 84 percent of the American whites and 56 to 60 percent of the American blacks who share their genetic history with West Indian and Bahamian blacks can read.

And if a high toll from deaths by intent is a measure of racial idiocy, why were 8000 out of 31 million blacks killed during 1990, 1991 and 1992 in warring South Africa while 33,000 out of 31 million American blacks were murdered in family and neighborhood violence during 1989, 1990, and 1991 in the peaceful USA? [\[39\]](#) Is this really a price the U.S. must pay for entering the "information age"?

QUESTION TWO: Because very low scores on written intelligence tests are symptoms of dull minds and ALSO symptoms of very bright but ILLITERATE minds, how did psychometricians Murray and Herrnstein know which low test scores were due to genetically limited mental capacity and which low scores reflected illiteracy?

If Albert Einstein, whose name is synonymous with "20th Century Genius," had taken a written IQ test at age eight, he most likely would have scored in a section at the wrong end of the "bell curve" because he did not learn to read until he was nine. And if he had started to American schools in the 1980's rather than to Swiss schools in the 1880's, chances are excellent that a very dyslexic Albert Einstein would not have learned to read at nine or any age. Exit information on Specific Learning Disability Special Education students and scores on AGCTs, AFQTs, ASVABs, NAEP, and NALS tests all suggest that a young, dyslexic Albert Einstein in New York or Oklahoma public schools probably would have become one out of four U.S. adults who can't read; or two out of four U.S. citizens who can't read middle school lessons; or three out of four Americans over age sixteen who can't read and understand high school textbooks in any core subject including math and physics.

Obviously, inheriting the right, bright genes is not the guarantee of success that The Bell Curve authors say it is. Certainly it isn't for three-fourths of the American adults who can't read or who can't read very well.

Without literacy one of the learned skills and habits that Murray and Herrnstein believe are just 20 to 40 percent of being bright or dull (compared to an inherited intelligence quotient they think is 40 to 80 percent of being smart or stupid) Einstein might have been an extraordinarily observant but illiterate night watchman. If so, the difference between what he might have added to the world's knowledge of the universe in that position and what he did contribute as a literate scientist is, of course, beyond reckoning.

And the difference between private incomes and public contributions made by normal literate and illiterate Americans with IQs above 70 comprising 97% of the U.S. population is the difference between wealth and welfare for them and for the nation. Conservative

estimates for the yearly dollar cost of American school produced adult illiteracy usually start around \$400 billion. [40]

QUESTION THREE: How can sociologists focusing on American behavioral data collected in the 1960's, 70's, 80's, and 90's find causes of a collapsing social structure that demonstrably started to crumble in the 1930's when American grade schools suddenly and amazingly began to lose their capacity to produce literate citizens? Historians don't look for causes of the Civil War in the 1860's, 70's, 80's, and 90's. If they want to know why America lost half a million men in this nation's worst of all wars, they look for causes in the 1830's, 40's, and 50's. In like manner, sociologists who want to find causes for societal explosions in the Sixties the riots, gang wars, demonstrations, etc. must focus on what happened in the 1930's, 40's, and 50s.

If they do, they will discover that America's illiterate school children doubled the U.S. juvenile crime rate between 1948 and 1955 while other Axis and Allied countries were still experiencing the post World War II decreases in youth delinquency that occurred after fathers went home. [41] They will see that the numbers of fatherless children and unmarried mothers doubled in the Fifties when illiterate juveniles reached their twenties. [42] Mothers could not afford to marry illiterate fathers who couldn't support themselves much less wives and children. And they still can't. They will understand why drugs were increasingly attractive to bored, illiterate teens, forced by state laws to stay in school until age sixteen.

Researchers who look at what happened in the Thirties, Forties, and Fifties will find one socioeconomic factor that is inseparably linked to every critical U.S. social problem. But it isn't an inordinate number of low IQs. Incredibly, it is an inordinate number of school-produced illiterates. The illiteracy came first, before the terrible increases in illegitimacy and crime.

If analysts look at AFQT, NAEP, and NALS test results, they can see that over 60 million 4th graders have not learned to read in whole word or whole language sight repetition reading classes since World War II. They will realize that 43 million of these non reading 4th graders have never learned to read in later grades or adult literacy programs. And that another 50 million with very limited reading vocabularies are able to read only 4th and 5th grade material. [43] The literacy that enables Americans to read anything they want or need to read is missing, and it has been missing for a long time.

Count the years of high percentage literacy for adults in racial, ethnic, or religious communities in cities, states and nations. Then count the years of instruction that children in these demographic categories have received in schools where all 2nd graders can read 2nd grade lessons, all 3rd graders can read 3rd grade assignments, and all 6th graders can do 6th grade work. Either count will be a better gauge

than The Bell Curve IQs for predicting success or failure of groups and members of groups in their academic and economic pursuits.

Jews have been reading scriptures for four millennia. More than 400 years ago Christian Protestants in Europe and the British Isles started teaching townspeople to read so they could read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Lutherans in German states established the first public elementary schools at the same time in the middle 1500s for the same reason.

Protestants in the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed literacy laws in the 1640s, requiring parents to teach children to read and towns with over 50 families to provide grammar school teachers for children.

[44] The laws apparently worked. Historians say that 95% of the Massachusetts men could read in 1700. Protestants Lutheran, Congregational, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, Baptist, Quaker, and Methodist and Jews have literacy histories measured in centuries and millennia. Logically, Jewish students and states with many descendants of European and British Isles Protestants such as Iowa and New Hampshire should make the highest SAT and ACT averages. And they do.

About 90% of the white American adults could read in 1870. The accepted 80% U.S. literacy rate for 1870 includes millions of blacks (13 to 14% of the population) who were illiterate by longstanding laws in slave states and colonies until the Civil War ended in 1865.

[45] Census data plus AGCT scores indicate that 98% of the nation's white residents, with an average eight to ten years of schooling, could read in 1930, 1940, and 1950. [46]

Though U.S. Labor Department surveys and NALS test results show that this high 98% white literacy percentage sank to an alarming 83 or 82% by 1990, [47] white parents and grandparents were able to teach many of their children, who could not learn to "sight" words and sentences at school, how to "sound out" syllables and words at home. They gave their children alphabet books that taught them to spell 26 of the 44 English sounds in at least one way before they ever went to school. Unwittingly, white parents taught their children to read the same way they and their forefathers had learned to read for four and five generations by matching spoken sounds with letters that usually spell those sounds. Thus white parents were able to diminish and delay the terrible consequences of the new "see and say" whole word repetition reading instruction.

But most didn't realize that their children were not learning to read in school. Even parents who questioned teachers about a child's failure to read did not understand that sight repetition teaching was radically different from the phonics instruction they had received when virtually all of their World War II generation learned to read well during the first two years in school. And of course they couldn't know that years later neuroscientists, using PET scans (positron emission tomography screens) which show the brain's reading cells in action,

would prove conclusively that no one, not just their children, learns to read by recognizing the overall shape of words and sentences that all must learn to match sounds with proper letters or they cannot read.

But black parents and grandparents, knowingly or unknowingly, were in no position to decrease the awful impact of the switch in reading methods on their children. With an average schooling of three plus years in 1930 and four plus years in 1940 [\[48\]](#) and a starkly different literacy history that didn't begin until after the Civil War blacks were helpless when teachers suddenly stopped teaching their children to read in the first two grades.

And they were helpless for reasons that had nothing to do with The Bell Curve's "genetically limited mental capacity." [\[49\]](#)

Though bankrupt, most southern states or counties ran segregated Reconstruction schools the first legal schools for 90% of the blacks for three or four months a year between 1866 and 1877. [\[50\]](#) Many white students could continue grade school lessons at home with literate parents after the schools closed. Black schoolchildren waited for next year and, hopefully, three more months of instruction, often from exslaves who had learned to read in spite of hundred-year slave codes prohibiting literacy for blacks. An eighth grade certificate, representing eight normal years of instruction, would have taken 18 to 24 years. So black grade school graduates taught grade school children, and black high school graduates taught high school students for a long time. Southern blacks did not have teachers with college degrees in appreciable numbers until after World War II. [\[51\]](#)

As soon as whites regained control of southern local and state governments in 1877, they began to change the average spending ratio for white and black students from an equal \$1 for \$1 distribution to an unequal \$7 to \$2 division. [\[52\]](#) In some states the difference in white and black student appropriations was unbelievably extreme. Between 1915 and 1930 the white to black funding ratios in South Carolina, always the lowest scoring SAT state, and in Mississippi, always the lowest scoring ACT state, were \$10 to \$1 and \$6 to \$1. [\[53\]](#) This shows how long the damaging effects of these painfully unequal disbursements have lasted. For some black students in these two states, this unfair division of scarce school dollars was the difference between having a school for two or three months a year and having no school at all.

In the critical years between 1866 and 1930, when virtually all normal children learned to read in two years and read to learn for another six to ten years before receiving grade school or high school diplomas, northern students received 64 regular eight or nine month school years of instruction. Though they went to school every year, southern white students received only 40 to 45 equivalent full years of schooling. And southern black students had access to just 30 or 35 regular length school years of instruction. This explains why northern

black scores on Army General Classification Tests were sometimes higher than southern white AGCT scores during World War II.

Nevertheless, American blacks as well as whites, wherever they lived, reached their highest levels of educational achievement in the Thirties and early Forties during the Depression and the war years. In 1930, 80% of the blacks and 98% of the whites over 14 were literate. [54] Nearly all black and white students in the 4th through the 12th grade could read at 4th through 12th grade levels. For teachers rarely promoted unprepared students.

In contrast, scores on the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey tests show that only about 56% of the blacks and 83% of the whites over sixteen are literate. [55] Scores on 1994 NAEP reading tests indicate that 42% of the 4th graders can't read; 72% of the 8th graders can't read 8th grade assignments; and 66% of the nation's high school seniors can't read 9th grade textbooks in any core subject. [56].

Congressional subcommittee hearings on postsecondary education in 1991 revealed that "illiteracy" was a major reason for defaults on \$13 billion in college and trade school loans. [57] No one seemed surprised just angry at the reprehensible trade schools who were taking advantage of America's illiterate high school graduates. Scores on 1994 NAEP 12th grade reading tests show that "illiteracy" is still a major reason for defaults on college and trade school loans - now totaling \$22 billion.

CONCLUSION

Who knows? If the literacy history for American whites and blacks were reversed, perhaps black graduates with doctorates from Harvard and MIT might be writing a "bell curve" book showing that blacks are 16 IQ points brighter than whites. And they would be just as wrong as The Bell Curve authors, Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein.

For not even Harvard or MIT psychometricians can determine the mental potential of illiterates with written IQ tests. At least 3,000 of the 12,000 scores on the AFQTs, taken by the Labor Department's youth survey group in 1980, are as fictitious and maybe as deceptive as the Wolf in Little Red Riding Hood. These unidentified scores don't reflect degrees of intelligence. They show how lucky or unlucky 3,000 illiterate young Americans were in guessing answers to multiple choice questions.

But even if some cognitive elite genius does find a speedy way to accurately determine IQs for thousands of illiterates, why use it? What's the profit in knowing how many geniuses and fourth quartile dullards live in the United States? Repeatedly, The Bell Curve authors remind us that IQs are genetic. And that inherited characteristics change very little. So why spend time on factors no one can alter?

What matters to social and political scientists and to educators are those things that are changeable such as illiteracy. Illiteracy matters because the only thing teachers of any subject in any grade can teach illiterate students is how to read.

To put it simply, schooling doesn't start, even for potential geniuses, until students learn to read. And because American teachers switched in the 1930s from reading instruction that worked for everyone to reading instruction that neuroscientists now tell us does not work for anyone, schooling has never begun for over 43 million Americans with an average 12 years of school attendance. And every year the number of high school graduates who receive diplomas they cannot read grows.

Few realize it has been growing for 45 years. In 1952, Army personnel officers started hiring psychologists to interview thousands of nonreading high school graduates they mistakenly thought were faking illiteracy to stay out of the Korean War. [58] After the psychologists told the officers that the graduates weren't faking, Defense Department administrators knew that something terrible had happened to grade school reading instruction. And they knew that it had started in the Thirties. Why they remained silent, no one knows. The switch back to reading instruction that worked for everyone should have been made then.

But it wasn't. So now we have The Bell Curve devolution theory that is patently unprovable because so many Americans can't read IQ tests. But who knows what may happen if, just as in other countries, everyone learns to read? Perhaps 25 years from now when cognitive elite psychologists and sociologists gather to discuss the effects of differing mental capacities on American society, they'll wonder where all the dunces went.

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Summaries of scores on NAEP reading tests, given at regular intervals since 1969 to 4th, 8th, 11th, and 12th graders, show that 40% of the nation's 4th graders can't read 4th grade lessons (the range in The Nation's Report Cards, prepared by the Educational Testing Service for the USDE, has been 36 to 40%). Forty percent of 150 percent is 60 million. These summaries also show that 25 to 30% of the 8th, 11th, and 12th graders can't read 4th grade lessons. Apparently twothirds to threefourths of the 60 million illiterate 4th graders do not learn to read in school no matter how many expensive Chapter I and Special Education reading classes they attend.

Scores on nearly 150 million AFQTs, given since 1950, indicate that 20 to 30 percent of the volunteers and draftees with four or more years of schooling cannot read with the Army's required 1940's fourth grade proficiency (equal to present day 5th and 6th grade reading skills).

Scores on the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey tests confirm the NAEP and AFQT scores. About 43 million (out of 190 million Americans over 16) could not read at today's 4th grade level. And over 50 million could not read at the Army's required 1940's grade level.

44. The Reader's Digest Family Reference Series. These United States. p. 106.

45. USDE. 1993. 120 Years of American Education. p. 9. Estimates for black illiteracy rates after the Civil War range from 80 to 95%. If 80% of the Blacks, who were 13 to 14% of the population, were

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Even in the late Forties, most black teachers with college degrees taught in northern schools because many southern states paid black teachers less then they paid white teachers. And southern white teachers received much lower salaries than teachers in other regions of the United States.

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56. USDE. 1994. NAEP Reading: A First Look. p. 18.

57. U.S. House of Representatives. 1991. Hearings Before The Subcommittee On Postsecondary Education of the Committee On Education and Labor. p. 17 & pp. 6669.

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