

—Looking Backward

Charles Murray first slithered into American public life when he published *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950–1980*, in which he argued that the cause of poverty among black Americans is the very effort to alleviate poverty through social provision. He purported to show, by means of a mass of charts and straw formulations he called “thought experiments,” that the social welfare system institutionalizes perverse incentives encouraging indolence, wanton reproduction, and general profligacy. He proposed, appropriately for a book bearing a 1984 publication date, that the poor would be best helped by the elimination of all social support; a regime of tough love would wean them from debilitating dependency, on pain of extermination. (Now we have to wonder how the lazy dreck had enough sense to identify and respond to the incentives, but that was, after all, a different book for a different day.)

Losing Ground made a huge splash, catapulting Murray into prominence as the Reagan Administration’s favorite social scientist and winning him luminary status in the social policy research industry. One can only wonder what heights of popularity Thomas Malthus would attain if he could come back into a world stocked with computers that perform multiple regression analysis!

Murray returned to the center of the public stage with publication of *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, the product of a diabolical collaboration with Richard Herrnstein, the late Harvard psychologist known outside the academy—like his Berkeley counterpart, Arthur Jensen—for a more-than-twenty-year crusade to justify inequality by attributing it to innate, and therefore supposedly ineradicable, differences in intelligence.

As their title implies, Herrnstein and Murray contend that the key to explaining all inequality and all social problems in the United States is stratification by a unitary entity called intelligence, or “cognitive ability”—as measured, of course, in I.Q. This claim has surfaced repeatedly over the past seventy-five years only to be refuted each time as unfounded class, race, and gender prejudice. (See, for

instance, Stephen Jay Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man*.) *The Bell Curve* advances it with the same kind of deluge of statistical and logical sophistry that has driven its predecessors, as well as Murray's opus of tough love for poor people.

Herrnstein and Murray see rigid I.Q. stratification operating through every sphere of social life. And they put two distinct wrinkles on this long-running fantasy. First is Herrnstein's old claim that I.Q. stratification is becoming ever more intense in a postindustrial world that requires cognitive ability over all else. As democratic institutions have succeeded in leveling the playing field, differences of individual merit become all the more pronounced. Second, the demonic duo back cooly away from the implications of their eugenic convictions (no doubt because cultural memory decays slowly enough that people still remember the Nazi death camps). Instead of directly endorsing extermination, mass sterilization, and selective breeding—which nonetheless implicitly shadow the book—they propose a world in which people will be slotted into places that fit their cognitive ability, in which each of us will be respected for what we actually are and can be (which will amount to more or less the same thing).

The effect of this reform will be, as they see it, to end *ressentiment* from and against those who seek more than their just deserts or aspire beyond their natural capacities. Of course, we'll need to have controls to make sure that dullards do what is best for them and don't get out of line. But that is a necessary price to stem the present tide of social breakdown. We shall, that is, have to destroy democracy to save it.

The Bell Curve's message about the inevitability of existing patterns of inequality rests on a series of claims concerning intelligence. These are: (1) that human intelligence is reducible to a unitary, core trait that is measurable and reliably expressed as a single numerical entity, I.Q.; (2) that I.Q. increasingly determines (or strongly influences—Herrnstein and Murray frequently try to hide behind the weaker claim while substantively assuming the stronger one) socioeconomic status and behavior; (3) that I.Q. is distributed unevenly through the population in general and by race in particular; and (4)

that cognitive ability is given and “substantially” (another bogus hedge) fixed by genetic inheritance. These claims are highly dubious. Some of them are preposterous and loony. All are marinated in self-congratulatory class prejudice and racism.

The book begins with a lengthy attempt to rehabilitate the old reductionist notion that there is a biologically based, hereditary “general factor of cognitive ability,” a variant of the semi-mystical entity that Charles Spearman, a pioneer psychometrician (i.e., intelligence tester), labeled “g” in the early 1900s. The defense rests largely on protests that proponents of hereditarian I.Q. theories—for example, explicit racists like William Shockley and Arthur Jensen and the racist and fraud Cyril Burt—have been maligned and persecuted by ideologically motivated environmentalists and egalitarians. (Hereditarians, of course, are only tough-minded scientists who pursue truth courageously in the face of personal danger and ostracism.) The authors even try to sanitize psychometry’s sordid history of eugenicist affiliations bordering on genocide. “[D]uring the first decades of the century,” they coo, “a few testing enthusiasts proposed using the results of mental tests to support outrageous racial policies,” such as forced sterilization, racist immigration restrictions, and the like. By contrast, Daniel Kevles (*In the Name of Eugenics*) and others have amply documented prominent psychometricians’ active and extensive involvement in shaping eugenicist public policies in the United States that affected thousands of lives in the first third of the century and beyond. Stefan Kühl (*The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism and German National Socialism*), moreover, details the close connections and mutual admiration among American and German Nazi eugenicists throughout the 1930s and for years after. *The Bell Curve*’s tepid acknowledgment smacks of white Southerners’ claims that the original Ku Klux Klan consisted of pranksters whose high jinks sometimes got out of hand—sort of the DKEs of the Reconstruction era.

Having, at least in their view, rescued psychometry’s reputation from its own heinous past, the authors then offer a two-pronged, ostensibly pragmatic defense of their version of “g.” They point to the tendency of tests of mental aptitude to converge, such that

performance on some tests correlates with performance on others. For Herrnstein and Murray, as for Spearman and his epigones, that convergence indicates that the tests variously measure a single, fundamental property—general cognitive ability. They also adduce the authority of “the top experts on testing and cognitive ability” in support of the contention that this “g” exists.

As Gould and others (for example, R.C. Lewontin, Steven Rose, and Leon J. Kamin in *Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology, and Human Nature*) have pointed out, though, the numerical representation of a vector of test scores does not necessarily denote a real, empirical entity. To presume that it does it to succumb to a fetishism of numbers that inverts the relation between statistical analysis and the world it is intended to illuminate. The hard certainty of the formal mathematical abstraction imbues it with an apparent reality of its own: If a firm statistical relation exists, then it must correspond to something in the empirical world. (Gould characterizes this idealist fallacy, which lately has been resurgent among social scientists, as “physics envy.”) In the absence of neurological or other physiological evidence, there is no reason to believe that the numerical “Intelligence Quotient” captures anything but a mathematical relation among a battery of test scores. This relation, in addition, is doubly arbitrary. It is not the only mathematical relation thinkable among the tests, nor are the tests themselves self-evidently measures of innate abilities that can be arrayed hierarchically. And since we can know “g” only through test scores and their correlation, determination of a test’s accuracy in identifying core cognitive ability becomes to some degree a function of the extent to which the scores converge in variance. There is at least a potential for idealist circularity in this argument: We know a test is a reliable measure of intelligence because we stipulate that intelligence is indicated when the test’s parts correlate well with one another.

In fact, both prongs of *The Bell Curve*’s defense of the reductionist notion of intelligence rest on circular argument. Appealing to the consensual authority of psychometricians to validate I.Q. testing is like appealing to the consensual authority of creationists to validate creationism. Psychometry by and large *is* intelligence testing, so it

would be more than stunning to find a consensus of psychometricians that didn't endorse I.Q. testing. Similarly, the contention that the vector of test scores measures a core cognitive ability depends on a prior assumption that what tests measure is indeed core intelligence. As Lewontin et al., note, to determine whether a test is accurate requires some pre-existing notion of what it should measure and what results it should yield. We know that early psychometricians took girls' outperformance of boys on certain items to indicate flawed test design. And other scientific racists of that era, when confronted with blacks' greater possession than whites of some trait or thought to be desirable, simply reversed their interpretations of that trait's significance.

Herrnstein and Murray consistently bend over backward to give the benefit of the doubt to research whose conclusions they find congenial, and they dismiss, misrepresent, or ignore that which contradicts their vision. For instance, they decline to engage the work of Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner (*Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* and *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*) or Yale's Robert Sternberg (*Beyond I.Q.*), among others, who argue for multiple fields of intelligence that are not hierarchically organized. They don't even mention the work of Gardner's colleague David Perkins, whose *Learnable Intelligence: Breaking the IQ Barrier* appears in the same Free Press catalogue as *The Bell Curve*. They also repeatedly and disingenuously accuse anti-hereditarians of contending that genes play no part in social life. Herrnstein and Murray justify their insistence on the I.Q. standard, to the exclusion of other ways of construing intelligence, primarily by pointing to the apparently strong positive relationship between I.Q. and school performance, income, and other measures of success. This presumably shows that I.Q. is the critical form of intelligence because it is such an important predictor of life chances. At the same time, they insist that I.Q. is not just or even mainly an artifact of class position. They frequently even take education or socioeconomic status as proxies for I.Q. when they lack actual test scores. This circularity reaches its zenith—and reveals the ideological motor that drives the authors' vision—in the following formulation:

The broad envelope of possibilities suggests that senior business executives soak up a large portion of the top IQ decile who are not engaged in the dozen or so high-IQ professions. . . . A high proportion of people in those positions graduated from college, one screen. They have risen in the corporate hierarchy over the course of their careers, which is probably another screen for IQ. What is their mean IQ? There is no precise number. Studies suggest that the mean for . . . all white collar professionals is around 107, but that category is far broader than the one we have in mind. Moreover, the mean IQ of four-year college graduates in general was estimated at about 115 in 1972, and senior executives probably have a mean above that average.

Let's pause a moment to marvel at the elegant precision of science.

Herrnstein and Murray seek to avoid the appearance of circularity through two strains of statistically based argument. On the one hand, they claim that the relation between I.Q. and social performance persists even when all environmental differences are taken into account. On the other, they revert to the stock-in-trade that has always underscored the hereditarian camp's sideshow quality; I mean, of course, the studies of separated twins.

I admit to not having tracked down and examined closely the research they cite to support these two lines of defense. Four points nevertheless suggest cause for skepticism. First, social environments are complex, and it is very difficult—especially in a large aggregate sample like the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, on which *The Bell Curve* principally relies in this regard—to wash out confidently the multifarious consequences of social stratification. Simply controlling for parental income, as these studies typically do, is hardly sufficient. The effects of stratification can work in subtle and indirect ways that persist through momentary parity of income. For instance, the child of a first-generation middle-class black or Puerto Rican family is likely to have fewer social resources—given the effects of ghettoization and discrimination in access to sources of personal capital (mortgages and other bank loans, accumulation of capitalizable home equity, investment opportunities, inherited wealth)—than her white counterpart, and to shoulder an additional burden of everyday racial discrimination. Herrnstein and Murray are crudely, and strategically, insensitive to

this level of complexity, as they show when dismissing the possibility that racial discrimination might account for persisting black/white differences in I.Q. scores:

An appeal to the effects of racism . . . requires explaining why environments poisoned by discrimination and racism for some other groups—against the Chinese or the Jews in some regions of America, for example—have left them with higher scores than the national average.

Second, as Lewontin and Richard Levins (*The Dialectical Biologist*) reflect a consensus among professional geneticists in painstakingly arguing, the attempt to apportion definitively the separate effects of heredity and environment is hopelessly wrongheaded and naïve. I quote them at some length because of the importance of the point:

All individuals owe their phenotype to the biochemical activity of their genes in a unique sequence of environments and to developmental events that may occur subsequent to, although dependent upon, the initial action of the genes. . . . If an event results from the joint operation of a number of causative chains, and if these causes “interact” in any generally accepted meaning of the word, it becomes conceptually impossible to assign quantitative values to the causes of that individual event. . . . It is obviously . . . absurd to say what proportion of a plant’s height is owed to the fertilizer it received and what proportion to the water, or to ascribe so many inches of a man’s height to his genes and so many to his environment.

Herrnstein and Murray presume that in measuring patterns of variation in I.Q. scores in a way that neutralizes the effects of selected aspects of environment, they can distill the part played by heredity in determining cognitive ability. Thus they repeatedly invoke the claim that intelligence is at least 40–80 percent determined by inheritance. This presumption and the claim derived from it are plain stupid.

Third, even if we grant their cracker barrel view of causation and variation, their case is defeated by the weight of its own numbers. By their own precious calculations, I.Q. accounts for no more than between 10 and 20 percent of the variation they discover between individuals and “races” on most measures, and usually closer to the lower end. (Howard Gardner makes this point also in his important

review of *The Bell Curve* in *The American Prospect*, where he also discusses at length other approaches to theorizing human intelligence that Herrnstein and Murray ignore.) If, as they take as a consensual figure, I.Q. derives 60 percent from genetic inheritance (and what could that statement possibly mean as a practical matter, anyway?), then heredity accounts for no more than 6–12 percent of the total variation they find. Why should the tail wag the dog for all those leaden, deceitful pages?

Fourth, we come to the twin studies. Herrnstein and Murray report that Thomas Bouchard at the University of Minnesota (about whom more later) has found the same strikingly high correlations in I.Q. among his sample of supposedly real twins raised apart that Sir Cyril Burt found among the imaginary twins in his fraudulent “research.” (Burt, by the way, was easily the most respected psychometrician of his time, knighted for his accomplishments as a theorist of scientific racial hygiene.) Perhaps, though the possibility that life would so faithfully and dramatically imitate art ought to give pause, particularly considering that few other twin impresarios had ever reported the consistent strength of relationship that Burt claimed. And then there is the troubling issue of what exactly one means by separated twins.

Lewontin, Rose, and Kamin in *Not in Our Genes* examine the samples on which the best-known twin studies prior to Bouchard’s were based. They note, first, that pure cases of twins separated at birth and raised completely apart would be exceedingly difficult to locate because they would most likely not know each other’s whereabouts or even that either sib was in fact half of a twin set. As it turns out, most of the putatively separated twins lived with close family members, and most of those who didn’t lived with nearby family friends. Nearly all lived within a few miles of and had regular, if not constant, contact with each other. According to research notes, one English set lived within a few hundred yards of each other, played together regularly and wanted to sit at the same desk at the school they both attended. Another English set had been separated until age 5, then finished growing up under the same roof and were in continuous contact thereafter until they were interviewed for the

study at age 52. A set in a famous Danish study were “cared for by relatives until the age of seven then lived together with their mother until they were fourteen.” The research notes indicate that

they were usually dressed alike and very often confused by strangers, at school, and sometimes also by their stepfather. . . . [They] always kept together when children, they played only with each other and were treated as a unit by their environment.

Such is the twin research that is the hereditarians trump card. (Maybe they can make dog-faced boys the next scholarly frontier.)

Several of *The Bell Curve*'s reviewers have detected a damning empirical flaw in the logic of its case. On the one hand, Herrnstein and Murray contend that I.Q. is largely fixed by nature and cannot be improved. On the other, they note that studies inside their own paradigm have recorded a steady upward trend in test scores across time. They squirm mightily to make those points fit, but they can't. Nor can they face up to the entailments of that contradiction, because the point of the book, like the point of every line that Murray has ever written, as well as every syllable of Herrnstein's I.Q. research, is only to advance a reactionary, racist, and otherwise anti-egalitarian ideological agenda by dressing it with a scientific patina.

Beneath the mind-numbing barrage of numbers, this book is really just a compendium of reactionary prejudices. I.Q. shapes far-sightedness, moral sense, the decisions not to get pregnant, to be employed, not to be a female househead, to marry and to remain married to one's first spouse (presumably the divorced and remarried Murray has an exemption from this criterion), to nurture and attend to one's offspring, and so on.

Simply being stopped—but not charged—by the police becomes evidence of an I.Q.-graded tendency to criminality. White men who have never been stopped have an average I.Q. of 106; those stopped but not booked have to schlep along at 103; those booked but not convicted check in at 101; the convicted but not incarcerated peer dimly from a 100 wattage; and those who go to jail vegetate at 93. Even putting aside the bigotry embedded in their

cops' view of the world, this is batty. Not only is the slope of this curve—as with so much of their data—too perfectly straight but the suggestion that minute increments of difference could portend such grave consequences is numerical fetishism gone off the deep end. Two points on an I.Q. test can separate conviction from acquittal!?

Instructively, the authors restrict their analysis of white criminality to a male sample and parenting to a female sample. Parents = mothers. And while they examine abuse and neglect of children (found to be almost the exclusive province of the lower cognitive orders) among this female sample, spousal abuse is mentioned nowhere in the book, much less considered a form of male criminality.

In his review Howard Gardner accuses Herrnstein and Murray of practicing “scholarly brinkmanship.” The description is apt. They repeatedly leave themselves enough wiggle room to avoid responsibility either for the frightening implications of the line they advance so insistently or for defending the crackpot pseudoscience on which they ultimately base their interpretation. Just a few examples of the way the authors try to have it both ways: Early in the book—and Murray has repeated this canard ad nauseam in his soft-spoken, carefully measured tones on newschat shows since publication—they announce piously that they want all to understand that “intelligence is a noun, not an accolade.” Small matter that the book is entirely an attempt to justify the opposite view. Similarly, they end with an equally pious call to treat every person as an individual and declaim against making judgments about groups, when group difference has been the central organizing principle of their entire argument.

This kind of mendacity is one of their narrative's main tropes. When forced by the logic of their own account to a point at which they would have to declare explicitly as militant hereditarians, they say, Well, it really doesn't matter ultimately whether or not I.Q. is inherited because the environmental changes required to increase I.Q. are impossibly huge. Yet that argument depends completely on the hereditarian justification of inequality that they spend the whole book trying to establish.

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Nowhere is the authors' dishonesty clearer than with respect to race. Their analysis of white variation in I.Q. is ultimately a front to fend off charges of racism. What really drives this book, and reflects the diabolism of the Murray/Herrnstein combination, is its claim to demonstrate black intellectual inferiority. They use I.Q. to support a "twofer": opposition to affirmative action, which overplaces incompetent blacks, and the contention that black poverty derives from the existence of an innately inferior black underclass.

Murray has protested incessantly that he and Herrnstein wanted in no way to be associated with racism, that the book isn't even about race, which is after all the topic of only one of *The Bell Curve's* twenty-two chapters. But in addition to the infamous Chapter Thirteen, "Ethnic Differences in Cognitive Ability," three others center on arguments about black (and, to varying degrees, Latino) inferiority. The very next chapter, "Ethnic Inequalities in Relation to IQ," is a direct attempt to explain existing racial stratification along socioeconomic lines as the reflection of differences in group intelligence. The other two chapters in Part III seek to pull together claims about racial differences in intelligence and behavior. Those four chapters set the stage for the book's only two explicitly policy-driven chapters, "Affirmative Action in Higher Education" and "Affirmative Action in the Workplace," both of which are about initiatives directed toward blacks, and both slide into stoking white populist racism with "thought experiments" positing poor or working-class whites shunted aside in favor of underqualified, well-off blacks.

Murray's protests do suggest something about his views of race, however; it's apparently a property only some of us have. *The Bell Curve* makes a big deal of restricting the eight chapters of Part II to discussion of whites alone. If we assume that they are no less a "race" than everyone else is, then well over half the book is organized around race as a unit of analysis. Moreover, the theme of racially skewed intelligence and its significance for public policy runs through the entire volume. (In the third chapter the authors speculate about how many billions of dollars the Supreme Court's 1971

Griggs v. Duke Power Company decision, striking down the use of all but performance-based tests for employment and promotion, has cost the “American economy,” and they argue gratuitously for choosing police by I.Q.) And how could it be otherwise in a book whose punch line is that society is and must be stratified by intelligence, which is distributed unequally among individuals and racial groups and cannot be changed in either?

Despite their concern to insulate themselves from the appearance of racism, Herrnstein and Murray display a perspective worthy of the stereotypical Alabama filling station. After acknowledging that genetic variations among individuals within a given “race” are greater than those between “races,” they persist in maintaining that racially defined populations must differ in genetically significant ways because otherwise they wouldn’t have different hair texture or skin color. And besides, they say, there must be differences between races because races “are by definition groups of people who differ in characteristic ways.”

Despite Murray’s complaints that it has been misinterpreted, *The Bell Curve* is committed to *racial* inequality. Admitting that they can’t isolate biologically pure racial categories, Herrnstein and Murray opt to “classify people according to the way they classify themselves.” But this destroys the possibility that their statistical hocus-pocus does any of the hereditarian work they claim for it. What they describe at most is race as a category of common social experience. Therefore, whatever patterns they find among racialized populations can only reflect that experience.

Most tellingly, however, they attempt quite directly to legitimize J. Philippe Rushton, the Canadian psychologist whose career has centered on demonstrating fundamental, almost species-like, racial difference. They announce self-righteously that “Rushton’s work is not that of a crackpot or a bigot, as many of his critics are given to charging.” This about a man who presents, in his book, *Race, Evolution, and Behavior*, racial rankings on “Criteria for Civilization” (only “Caucasoids,” naturally, consistently meet all twenty-one items on his checklist) and “Personality and Temperament Traits,” in addition to erect penis size (by length and circumference, no

less), as well as the rest of the stock-in-trade of Victorian scientific racism, and who computes an “Interbreeding Depression Score” to help clarify his statistical findings!

Rushton is in fact only the tip of the iceberg. *The Bell Curve* is embedded in the intellectual apparatus of the racist, crypto-fascist right. The central authorities on whom Herrnstein and Murray rely for their claims about I.Q., race and heredity are nearly all associated with the Pioneer Fund, an ultrarightist foundation that was formed in the 1930s to advance eugenicist agendas. The Fund boasts of having been almost entirely responsible for funding I.Q. and race and heredity research in the United States since the 1970s, and much of it worldwide. Rushton, along with nearly all those who contribute jacket blurbs for his book, is a major recipient of Pioneer grants. This includes Thomas Bouchard of the Minnesota twins, as well as Richard Lynn, on whom Herrnstein and Murray draw extensively, describing him as “a leading scholar of racial and ethnic differences.” Among Lynn’s leading scholarship to which they refer are the following articles: “The Intelligence of the Mongoloids,” *Personality and Individual Differences* (1987); “Further Evidence for the Existence of Race and Sex Differences in Cranial Capacity,” *Social Behavior and Personality* (1993); and “Positive Correlations Between Head Size and I.Q.,” *British Journal of Educational Psychology* (1989). In addition, Lynn is editor of *Mankind Quarterly*, the Pioneer Fund’s flagship journal.

Herrnstein and Murray take pains to sugarcoat and hedge their more outrageous claims, but their nasty political agenda, always visible in the wings, occasionally comes to center stage. They warn of the “dysgenic” effects for the nation of low-I.Q. women’s relatively greater fertility and that the “shifting ethnic makeup” resulting from immigration of low-I.Q., high-breeding populations will “lower the average American I.Q. 0.8 points per generation.”

What makes this international vipers’ nest of reactionaries so dangerous is that many of its members maintain legitimate academic reputations. Rushton, for instance, as recently as 1988 won a Guggenheim Fellowship. Others routinely do contract research for the U.S. military. Most hold respectable university appointments.

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This brings me to the final and perhaps most important point to be made about this hideous book. It is worthwhile to pause for a moment to compare the appearance of *The Bell Curve* to the last significant eruption of pseudoscientific, hereditarian political reaction into American public life. Only two decades ago, the same Herrnstein, Jensen, and Shockley flooded the channels of the public information industry with essentially the same arguments I've been discussing here.

At that time I refused to attend to the controversy, partly out of a conviction that it is both beneath my dignity and politically unacceptable to engage in a debate that treats as an open question that I might be a monkey. Progressive forces were still at least a residual presence in American politics, however, and liberal intellectuals could be counted on to fight the foes of minimal human equality. I am still convinced that having to do what I've done in this review besmirches my dignity. It's a statement about the right's momentum that *The Bell Curve* makes such a splash that *The Nation* (for which this essay was originally written) had to devote so much space to arming our troops against it.

Mainstream racial discourse is dishonest and polluted enough to take the book seriously. Jason DeParle, in his *New York Times Magazine* puff piece, can't decide whether the Charles Murray who burned a cross in his youth, who alleges that the Irish have a way with words, Scotch-Irish are cantankerous, and blacks are musical and athletic, and who proposes a separate but equal world in which "each clan will add up its accomplishments using its own weighting system . . . and, most importantly, will not be concerned about comparing its accomplishments line-by-line with those of any other clan," is a racist. *New Republic* editor Andrew Sullivan opines that "the notion that there might be resilient ethnic differences in intelligence is not . . . an inherently racist belief."

Now liberals of all stripes—and even illiberals like Pat Buchanan, John McLaughlin, and Rush Limbaugh, which should make us wonder what exactly is going on—are eloquently dissenting from Herrnstein and Murray's unsavory racial messages. It's necessary to

remind them that more than any other force in American politics, they are responsible for this book's visibility.

Murray has always been the same intellectual brownshirt. He has neither changed over the past decade nor done anything else that might redeem his reputation as a scholar. And it doesn't matter whether he is a committed ideologue or an amoral opportunist. Nazis came in both varieties—think of Alfred Rosenberg and Paul de Man—and in real life the lines separating the two are seldom clear.

We can trace Murray's legitimacy directly to the spinelessness, opportunism, and racial bad faith of the liberals in the social-policy establishment. Although Murray's draconian conclusions seemed unpalatable at first, they have since come to inform common sense about social policy, even in the Clinton White House. Liberals have never frankly denounced Murray as the right-wing hack that he is. They appear on panels with him and treat him as a serious, albeit conservative, fellow worker in the vineyard of truth. They have allowed him to set the terms of debate over social welfare and bend over backward not to attack him sharply.

Many of those objecting to Herrnstein and Murray's racism embrace positions that are almost indistinguishable, except for the resort to biology. Mickey Kaus in his scurrilous tract *The End of Equality* presents a substantive agenda for American politics quite like theirs, minus the I.Q. and explicit hereditarianism. Herrnstein and Murray note the similarities and draw on him for their absurd concluding chapter. Although William Julius Wilson in *The Truly Disadvantaged* criticizes Murray's thesis in *Losing Ground*, he does so only by suggesting alternatives to Murray's interpretation of data. Wilson reserves harsh moral judgment for left-liberals, whom he scolds for not being tough-minded enough about pathologies among the poor. He urges a pre-emptive focus on "ghetto-specific cultural characteristics," thus ceding important ground to Murray's perspective. Many of those so exercised in *The New Republic's* special feature on *The Bell Curve* have joined Murray in meanspirited bashing of "political correctness" and affirmative action. And many more join him in writing about inner-city poor people as an alien

and defective Other, a dangerous problem to be administered and controlled—not as fellow citizens.

I have argued that the difference between racially inflected “underclass” ideology and old-fashioned biological racism is more apparent than real. Racist ideologies in the United States have always come in culturalist and biologicistic, and often overlapping, strains. The point is the claim of essential inequality, not the location of its source.

While reading Herrnstein and Murray and the literature of which they draw, I often felt like a mirror image of Julian West, Edward Bellamy’s protagonist in *Looking Backward*, who fell unconscious at the end of the nineteenth century and awoke at the end of the twentieth. And indeed, the authors’ strategic hedging of their hereditarian claims could presage the return of an updated version of the Lamarckian race theory popular a century ago. As “culture” has increasingly become a euphemism for “race”—an expression of inherent traits—it is only a short step to characterizations of group difference more overtly inflected toward biology, yet avoiding what remains, for the moment anyway, the stigma of biological determinism.

There’s not much reason for optimism. Daniel Patrick Moynihan once announced at his Senate Finance Committee hearing on welfare reform that we could be witnessing the processes of “speciation” at work among the inner-city poor. Nodding their agreement were the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, and her two world-class poverty researcher undersecretaries, Mary Jo Bane and David Ellwood (the originator of the “two years and off” welfare policy, who incidentally shows up in *The Bell Curve*’s acknowledgments). Just how different is that from Rushton or the Aryan Nations or the old White Citizens’ Council?