

RELIGION

The Bell Curve Ball

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

People are talking about it. Time, Newsweek, the New Republic and the New York Times have reviewed it. USA Today has written an editorial against its arguments and the Wall Street Journal devoted an entire op-ed page to them. Too many people are buying the book and the theory underneath it. The Bell Curve is trying to put a new spin on an old, racist belief, that black people are genetically intellectually inferior to whites.

The Bell Curve is the name of a new 845-page book by Charles Murray and the late Richard Herrnstein and it's causing quite a media uproar. But if you're over 40 it sounds like old hat, albeit dressed up in a 1990s Halloween costume. Indeed many of us remember the 1960s-1970s Schockley-Jensen debate on IQ and race. Even in the early days of this century "scientists" were even measuring our skulls and comparing bumps on our heads to prove that blacks were intellectually inferior.

The Bell Curve is based on three arguments. First, that the "cognitive elites," smart people selected by IQ

tests, SATs and admission to elite colleges and universities, are now the ruling class in America. These people are mostly white.

Their second argument is that intelligence is the primary factor in determining success, wealth and social status (I guess they didn't see Forrest Gump). At the bottom end of the intellectual spectrum, Murray and Herrnstein place the growing underclass whom they deem intellectually inferior (I guess they've never tested some of the brilliant but illegal businessmen of the street either). The people they place in the underclass are mostly black.

Their third point is that American society is becoming more and more polarized between these two extremes. Newsweek says this argument culminates in a vision of "political apocalypse" which foresees the transformation of the welfare state into the "custodial state - a high tech... version of the Indian reservation." A frightening scenario for us all.

Murray and Herrnstein are careful to point out that they are talking about groups of people in general

and therefore this should have no impact on the way individual whites and blacks see each other. But, they also use test-score data to show that the black-white IQ gap exists even for middle-class blacks. Or, as Leon Wieseltier of the New Republic magazine said, "Having delivered African Americans to inferiority and inequality, Murray tells them to 'Have a nice day.'"

The fact that we are once again having this debate about IQ and race and that this book is receiving so much media attention only points to the reality that racism is still alive and well in America. Sadly, some Americans are still looking for ways to prove that African Americans are less than human.

The dangers that these theories pose are several-fold. They give academic legitimacy to an old, unproven argument. They will be used as political fodder by those who want an excuse to end government programs such as Headstart. For example, some would question the funding of Headstart if it can't change the IQ of the children, without taking into account that raising IQ is not the primary reason for Headstart. Headstart's purpose is to enrich the lives of children and give them self-

esteem and basic skills tools for a fighting chance.

The theories of Murray and Herrnstein, if taken to their logical conclusion, can lead to the selective breeding programs of Nazi Germany. And they can have a more troubling danger as well. I call it the God complex. For when humans decide another human's destiny, they're trying to be God. God doesn't make decisions about destiny based on race or there never would have been a George Washington Carver or a Leontyne Price or a Frederick Douglass or a Mary McLeod Bethune.

There may well be a "cognitive elite" developing in America. In fact other scholars and academics are writing about the "symbolic analysts" and the "knowledge workers" who they predict will be the working class of the future. But when race is seen as the primary determinant of such a future, that's when some of us begin to look for the white hoods and sheets underneath the discussion table.

The Bell Curve isn't just an attempt "to substitute IQ for moral worth" as Newsweek wrote. It's a curve ball thrown at efforts to end racism in this country. Don't buy the book and don't buy the argument.

Ministry Supports EPA Enforcement

The Commission for Racial Justice and the United Church Board for World Ministries of the United Church of Christ, is praising a decision by the Environmental Protection Agency to address the problem of environmental pollution in the area of the New River, which flows north from Mexico into the United States.

For years, residents who lived in the vicinity expressed concern about the river's pollution and the threats that it might pose to health and the environment. Hazardous chemicals have been released illegally from chemical manufacturing and processing facilities in the river.

In a press release last month, the EPA announced it would issue subpoenas to 95 U.S. parent companies of

Mexico facilities in the vicinity of the river.

This is one of the most comprehensive international government actions ever taken by the EPA, being coordinated with the Mexican government, the Secretariat for Social Development. The EPA took its action in response to a petition filed by Imperial County, Calif. and two joint petitions from the Environmental Health Coalition and the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice.

In response to the petition filed by Imperial County, the EPA acknowledged that "there appeared to be serious pollution problems in the New River resulting from pollution coming across the border from Mexico and from Imperial County."



Thomas Green (left) of the Grace Collins Memorial Center, Portland, and Sammy of Pro-youth Ministries, attend last weekend's youth leadership conference for Christian youth in Hood River.

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Lents Founders Day 1995

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Obituaries

James Robert Rutherford Sr.

Graveside services were held Nov. 2 at Willamette National Cemetery in Portland for James Robert Rutherford Sr., 71, who died Oct. 28 at a Portland hospital. Funeral arrangements were conducted by the Killingsworth Little Chapel of the Chimes.

He was born Feb. 11, 1923 in Bridgewater, N.C. He worked as a furniture maker for Drexell Heritage Furniture Co. in North Carolina before retiring about six years ago. He lived in Nebo, N.C. and

Bridgewater before moving to the Portland-Vancouver area about a month ago.

He served in the Army from June 1943 to March 1946.

Survivors include his wife, Bertha Mae Rutherford of Vancouver; two daughters, Janice Y. Rutherford and Barbara A. Rutherford, both of Portland; a son, James R. Rutherford Jr. of Portland; a sister, Gertrude Wilson of Painsville, Ohio; two grandchildren and a great grandchild.

Virginia Nettles Alexander

A memorial service was held Nov. 4 at the Bethel A.M.E. Church, Portland for Virginia Nettles Alexander, 75, Portland, who died Oct. 31, 1994. Burial was at Willamette National Cemetery, Portland. Funeral arrangements were conducted by the Killingsworth Little Chapel of the Chimes.

She was born Nov. 11, 1918 in Mobile, Ala., where she attended school. She married William Alexander in June 1954 in Columbus, Ga. and they moved to Port-

land in 1957.

She was a member of the Bethel A.M.E. Church for many years where she served in the Women's Missionary Society. She also was a member of the Worthy Matrons Club and Oasis senior group.

Survivors include her husband, William; a brother, Alfonso Nettles of Mobile; a sister-in-law, Venice Warren of Portland; nephews Oreis Ellies and Nathaniel Shipman of Los Angeles; and a many other nieces and nephews in Mobile.

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