

Gould S, (1982) A Nation of Morons

Intelligence is the ability to learn or understand. IQ (Intelligence Quotient) is a measure of intelligence. An IQ test produces a score which represents a person's mental age. The major debate surrounding intelligence is whether the differences between individuals can be explained by genetic or environmental causes. Eugenics is a political idea which argues that the human race should be 'improved' by preventing 'undesirables' from breeding so they cannot pass on their supposedly inferior genes.

Gould's Aim was to review the mass IQ testing conducted by Robert M. Yerkes during the First World War.

Gould's procedure was a review. A review article is an essay or article that gives a critical evaluation. Gould was reviewing the work conducted by Yerkes and his colleagues. Gould argued that there were many problems with the way the testing was carried out and with the conclusions that can be drawn from the testing.

Yerkes wanted to conduct the intelligence testing because he wanted to establish Psychology as a rigorous science. He believed that intelligence testing should be as rigorous as any other science and he equated science with number and quantification. He conducted the testing in 1914-1918 and conducted it on over 1.75 million army recruits.

The three types of intelligence tests Yerkes used were Army Alpha; a written test for literate recruits, Army Beta; a pictorial test for men who were illiterate or who failed the alpha, and an Individual Examination; an individual spoken test for men who failed the Beta. The Alpha test had eight parts, such as analogies, filling in the missing number, and unscrambling a sentence. The Beta test had seven parts including running a maze, number work and the picture completion task. Yerkes believed the tests measured 'Native intellectual ability', which is intelligence that is unaffected by culture or education.

According to Yerkes the average mental age of White American males was 13. This was just above the level of 'morosity'. As you can imagine, this caused eugenicists to blame the unconstrained breeding of the 'feeble minded', the spread of Negro blood through inter-breeding and the swamping of an intelligent America with immigrating 'dregs' from Southern and Eastern Europe. European immigrants could be graded by their country of origin. The average man of many countries was a moron, but the darker people of Southern Europe were less intelligent than the fair people of Western and Northern Europe. Negroes had the lowest mental age of just 10.41.

These results had an enormous effect on the immigration debate. Immigration quotas were set so as to bar people from Southern and Eastern Europe. This

meant that huge numbers of people fleeing Hitler were not allowed to enter the US and hence had nowhere to go. These findings were used to support the idea of genetic differences between 'races'. Carl Brigham, one of Yerkes' colleagues, using a genetic explanation of the data proposed the racial superiority of the people from Northern Europe.

Cultural bias is when someone is biased due to their culture. Examples of how the Alpha test was biased include; 'Washington is to Adams as first is to . . .' and 'Crisco is a: patent medicine, disinfectant, toothpaste, food product'. Many who were illiterate in English were still allocated to the Alpha test and so scored zero or near to zero. Recent immigrants who had a poor grasp of English, and Black men who had not been given much, if any, formal education, were unable to score on the Alpha test. Similarly the Beta test also required a level of cultural and educational knowledge to be completed successfully. For example, recent immigrants would have to be familiar with phonograms, tennis courts and light bulbs. The Beta test required the use of pencil and the writing of numbers, and many men had never even seen or used a pencil before. The administrator of the tests was seriously flawed. Recruits were often wrongly allocated to Alpha tests measuring that they failed, often not being recalled to take the Beta test. Racism was also evident here; in some camps it was the black recruits who were not given a second chance at the tests. The data showed that the average score rose with length of time spent in the USA. This is a clear indication that the more experience a person had of the USA the higher their score on the test, suggesting a cultural bias in the questions.

Gould's review highlights the scientific racism, (i.e. the use of bogus scientific arguments to oppress another group) in the arguments made by Yerkes and uncovered some of the awful consequences of this racism. The tests were not valid