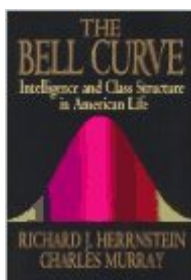


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The Bell Curve: Intelligence And Class Structure In American Life



Synopsis

In a book that is certain to ignite an explosive controversy, Herrnstein and Murray dare to reveal their belief that it is intelligence levels, not environmental circumstances, poverty, or lack of education that are at the root of many of our social problems.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Since you're reading this, I assume you're thinking of buying " " or at least reading " " this book. That being so, you'll probably want to read other reviews than mine. This is in principle a good idea; but having just read all of them (147 at the time of writing) I should warn you that you'll need both considerable stamina and a strong stomach: there are indeed thoughtful and informative reviews, but they are islands in a sea of drivel. By "drivel" I mean the following:1) Reviews consisting entirely (or almost entirely) of expostulation rather than information ("racist garbage", "most important book of the 20th century")2) Asserting what the book doesn't deny and denying what it doesn't assert.3) Distortions of the book's content, and other disinformation, for instance: - "the panel criticized the authors for not explaining what intelligence is" (intelligence is defined on page 4 (!)). - "The Bell Curve ignores bad diet" (Nutrition is explicitly dealt with on pp. 391-3).And so on.Many of the critics appear not merely to have misunderstood the book, but not even to have read it; amusingly, this is actually admitted in one review ("Although Head has only browsed through the book, she has seen this kind of pseudo-science before"). Some appear to be basing their argument upon the Moralistic Fallacy: if different groups had different average IQs for even partially genetic reasons, it would be a Bad Thing, and therefore that cannot possibly be the case.

Readers who have not yet read this book will be surprised to learn that the main topic is not race, but how intelligence explains class structure. The authors argue that intelligence, not environment is the primary determinant of a variety of social behaviors, including class, socio-economic level, crime, educational achievement, welfare, and even parental styles. Hernstein and Murray back up these claims with some of the most persuasive data ever seen in the social sciences. The importance of a person's intelligence cannot be understated. It is the number one determinant in shaping one's life. Hernstein and Murray do not stop there however. They go on, arguing that the bottom 15 percent in intelligence are simply not capable of taking care of themselves, falling into poverty, drugs, alcoholism, etc. American society can no longer accept such conditions for lower cognitive class. They make concrete suggestions on how to change this condition. They also make striking claims about the danger of affirmative action programs in promoting people who are not qualified to do important tasks. And finally, they deal with the issue that makes this book so controversial: The lower tested intelligence of African-Americans. At no point do they claim the gap is only due to genetics. They suggest past environmental factors come into play. But their main point is that modern day racism cannot explain the gap, and programs designed to bridge that gap will fail, and putting underqualified individuals in important positions is not the answer. The authors really do not go into detail about why the gap exists, setting themselves up for criticism. But at least another scholar can research this topic and try and explain it.

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