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**ABSTRACT**

Cognitive deficits in black and other minority children have been assumed, described, and then explained. In direct and indirect ways, the "evidence," especially in the broad public domain has been mounting to suggest a genetic cause for discovered differences between racial groups on test of aptitude and achievement. It is the purpose of the paper to present an overview of this "conversation" and its implication, to discuss a sample of relevant but often overlooked research, to present a slightly extended set of additional references in the bibliography, and to suggest directions for future research. The primary focus will be on research pertaining directly to the black child and adolescent. However, the points which are developed are relevant to the treatment accorded to any racial, or ethnic minority or economically powerless group. There are too many examples of black growth, often in the face of overwhelming odds, for us to be satisfied any longer with a situation where national educational policy is overly influenced by excuse makers whose research is detached from significant reality and whose understanding of what it takes to help minority children grow is nil. There are people in this country who know how. It is from this group that educational policy recommendations should be sought. It is this group which should be made more visible to the profession so that the new professional talent can see that there are exciting, productive alternatives to the despair which is suggested by many who ought to know better. (Author/JM)

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**THE INTELLECTUAL STRENGTHS OF  
BLACK CHILDREN AND  
ADOLESCENTS:  
A CHALLENGE TO PSEUDO SCIENCE**

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Cognitive deficits in Black and other minority children have been assumed, described, and then explained. In direct and indirect ways, the "evidence," especially in the broad public domain has been mounting to suggest a genetic cause for discovered differences between racial groups on tests of aptitude and achievement. It is the purpose of this paper to present an overview of this "conversation," and its implication, to discuss a sample of relevant but often overlooked research, to present a slightly extended set of additional references in the bibliography, and to suggest directions for future research. The primary focus will be upon research pertaining directly to the Black child and adolescent. However, the points which are developed are relevant to the treatment accorded to any racial or ethnic minority or economically powerless group. This is not intended as a breastbeating ego trip. Rather, it is an attempt to illuminate the findings of competent researchers from a variety of ethnic and racial groups who have looked fairly at Black children and adolescents.

### Racism and Research

Research, like any other aspect of our lives reflects the prevailing cultural values. Myrdal (1969) has treated the problem of objectivity in social research in incisive fashion. From Myrdal's exposition on unavoidable subjectivity in social research to Levenson's (1972)

exposition on "the fallacy of understanding," one gets a better perspective on how uneven and erratic systematic inquiry in the social sciences can be and how "soft" factual "knowledge" can be starting right at the conceptual level. By the time the tools of research are applied, there is much room for the distortion and error which is often seen. When institutional or individual racism are present, there is then a problem of no mean magnitude.

This concern about racism could be attributed to paranoia or sore-headedness were it not for some clear examples in our history of science in the service of prejudice, bigotry and discrimination. Thomas and Sillen (1972) have documented some of this in the field of psychiatry, showing that even the notables in the field are often examples of gross racism. They cite the case of Dr. Samuel Cartwright, a physician of the ante-bellum South who gave the name "drapetomania" to the "illness" that made slaves run away from home. Drapetomania meant, "the flight from home madness." Thomas and Sillen refer to Dr. John Wilson of Georgia who discovered and apparently treated diseases which were, "peculiar to Negroes." Dr. Robert Bennett Bean, Professor of Anatomy at Johns Hopkins in 1906 found that, "the possibilities of developing the Negro are limited" because the "Black brain was smaller and had fewer nerve cell fibers." No less a figure than G. Stanley Hall, founder of the Journal of Psychology and first President of the American Psychological Association, believed that Africans, Indians and Chinese were members of primitive or "adolescent" races in a stage of incomplete growth. In the early 1900's Dr. Carl Gustav Jung, a renowned psychoanalyst and self proclaimed student of races, found that Blacks "had a whole historical layer less than the

White man," and that Black childishness was contagious. Thomas and Sillen cite Lewis Terman, the Stanford psychologist who interpreted his Binet as follows:

...a low level of intelligence was very, very common among Spanish-Indian and Mexican families of the South West and also among Negroes. Their dullness seems to be racial...the children of such persons are uneducable beyond the merest rudiments of training. No amount of school instruction will ever make them intelligent voters or capable citizens in the true sense of the word. Judged psychologically, they cannot be considered normal. (p. 35)

Apparently the usual scientific requirement of systematic observation and experimentation were seen as unnecessary, for one cannot find any of these notables working from a data base which could be considered valid and reliable.

From Arthur Jensen of the University of California, Berkeley, and Dr. William Shockley at Stanford, Thomas and Sillen (1972, p. 42) quote as follows:

A most frightening issue raised by Jensen is the ideology of eugenics applied to Black people. It is hard to believe--so soon after the Nazi nightmare--that proposals are again being advanced to restrict reproduction on a racial basis. Yet this is clearly the implication of Jensen's concern about the danger of a decline in "our national IQ" resulting from a higher birthrate among Blacks than Whites. He raises the specter of "dysgenic trends," which he links with "current welfare policies, unaided by eugenic foresight." The same fear has been expressed by physicist William Shockley, one of the most persistent agitators on the subject of Black genetic inferiority: "Can it be that our humanitarian welfare programs have already selectively emphasized high and irresponsible rates of reproduction to produce a socially realitively unadaptable human strain?"

Thomas and Sillen continue and point out that such thinking in the past has had drastic policy consequences. It was Psychiatrists in 1914 who succeeded in adding to an immigration bill a provision to exclude those who were considered to be "constitutionally psychopathically

inferior." Later state after state adopted sterilization laws which were often used selectively against Blacks. How is it that vast sums of public and private money continues to be available to such men to make pronouncements in areas far out of the range of their demonstrated expertise?

Today, with the "voluntary sterilization" reports coming from some of our states, experimentation on Black subjects in the South with syphilis, and the strange scholarship developing out of reputable institutions on the subject of I.Q. genetics, and school effectiveness relationships, one has to question all research, all researchers' motivation, all methods, all data, and all interpretations. It is known that some of the same cast of characters who develop poor and distorted research evolve policy positions such as Moynihan's recommendation of "benign neglect" for Blacks and other poor. We know for example, that Jencks (1972) set out to reassess the data from the Coleman Report. Curiously, however, a detailed appendix A departs from Coleman's thrust to present information on that same old haunting theme, "I.Q. and Heritability." Why here? As a sidelight, it is interesting to note that neither Jencks, Jensen, Shockley, nor Moynihan have established credentials as teachers who have had success at a level that commands attention. These "scholars" would be more credible if they worked with children. Unfortunately, a look at the financial support for public education seems to suggest that the "scholars" are making their point with policy makers.

Educational Research: Faulty Data, Inept Conceptualization, Impeccable Statistical Processes and then...National Policy

Why do intelligent consumers seem to be so easily satisfied with what passes for significant research on minority people? The classic example of efforts gone astray are found with the Coleman Report (1966) on Equality of Educational Opportunity, and the Jencks (1972) reassessment of that study. Approximately two million dollars was appropriated by Congress for the Coleman Study alone. Amid high Congressional expectations, and with the help of prestigious professionals from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the U.S. Office of Education, the Educational Testing Service, and outstanding Universities, a study was designed and conducted. Because of its origin and the calibre of researchers involved, the study has been widely received as valid on its face. Coleman's and Jencks' findings have already had a dramatic impact on public policy in education and public thinking in general. From what was "discovered" in these studies, this influence is clearly undeserved. Many writers have developed vital points in criticism of the work of these two men and their helpers. (Guthrie, 1973; Rivlin, 1973; and others) While space will not permit a detailed summary of significant criticism here, a few points should be made to illustrate why such studies are so dangerous.

Sample Bias Apart from the question of numbers which are required for a representative sample, several major cities chose not to cooperate. From what we know of the uniqueness of the problems in urban areas, a disproportionate representation here may well be the source of a biased estimate. Further, of those who participated in the study, many chose not to answer sensitive items. For example, Guthrie (1973) points

out that in a sample of about 300 elementary schools in the Northeast region, over one-third of the principals failed to answer one or more questions regarding their views about the racial composition of school faculties. What does the response of the remaining members of the group mean on this significant question? What does the non-response mean where the first group was concerned? Any valid inference requires first and foremost a representative sample. Here Coleman fails. What, then is Jencks reassessing?

Inaccurate Data When one looks at the variables which were measured it is clear to anyone who works closely with schools that certain data are not to be accepted at face value. As Guthrie properly points out district wide average figure on per-pupil expenditures masks the actual fact that there is generally a range of expenditures by school within most districts. Further, these differences within districts tend to favor those who are non-minority. This kind of averaging can explain why some differences that resources may make in the growth of students and their subsequent achievement were not discovered. Other examples are presented by Guthrie.

Irrelevant Variables. The most serious shortcoming of these studies of "school effectiveness" is that few if any of the important things about schools were measured. The study examined such things as the following.

1. access to certain classes
2. access to special school facilities such as laboratories
3. access to special personnel
4. teacher background variables such as training, professional standing and morale
5. type of curriculum
6. test score information
7. accreditation

It takes the "nose counting" variety of social researcher to settle for a study of school effectiveness that deals only with such superficial variables. It is very interesting that even Mosteller and Moynihan (1972) spotted the following key information.

As much as could be was also made of the finding that a child's sense of "control of his environment" correlated strongly with his educational achievement. Of all the variables measured in the survey, the EEOR reported, including measures of family background and all school variables, these attitudes showed the strongest relation to achievement... Negro students who had a strong sense of control of environment did better than White students with a weak sense.

(p. 25)

Where is the inquiry into what causes a student to "experience a sense of control over his environment?" It would seem that school effectiveness researchers would have designed a study to get at such interactions. Reassessors of Coleman data should be interested in what the data may suggest by way of explanation for this. People who understand schools would have anticipated the need to build appropriate inquiry techniques into the basic design of the study to explore this and similar phenomena. Charnofsky (1971), Friere (1972), Zahn (1969), Fanon (1967) and many others have not been silent on this concept. Instead of taking the power and learning relationship into account, we are treated to an examination of the "number of books in a library" or an inside peek at "salary schedules." The real resources of successful schools are virtually ignored. Therefore, along with sampling bias, the variables themselves are irrelevant. No "reassessment" can correct for these fundamental flaws. Then what does an elegant statistical treatment of data that has the value of garbage yield? Computer experts tell us that if one puts "garbage in", after processing

one gets "garbage out". They even have a word for it, "CICO."

It is clear to me that many of those who write about the aptitude and achievement of the "disadvantaged" usually are long on experimental method and statistics and short on experience with children, especially those who are classified as disadvantaged. There is seldom, if ever, any history of researchers having had success in promoting the growth of the minorities studied or even having attempted to do so. From where then do the hypotheses for research come? At best their hypotheses are naive guesses. Many of these "pseudo researchers" are like the man who looks for his quarter under the street light rather in the dark where he lost it, because the light is better under the lamp. It would seem to me that the proper study of growth might include a study of growth itself, not the archives of educational minutiae. There seem to be no studies of Blacks which attempt to look at the environmental impact on functioning which starts from a basic understanding of what the Black environment is. That research must be done. One can start by looking at the hundreds of thousands of Black children and other minorities whose outstanding progress cannot be explained by deficit projections from regression equations. A look at the following data will leave one with some nagging discrepancies to explain. If the Jensens and Shockleys are right, then how do we find children who function the way these do?

#### Unexplained Growth and Intellectual Strength

The following is a sampling of studies or projects which show how Blacks in certain environments have actually performed as we would expect them to in a facilitating environment. These studies represent

observed behaviors not theories. If the assumption of genetic differences between racial groups is postulated, how does this happen?

I.Q. Test differences between Blacks and Whites frequently are found and they usually favor Whites. We know now that language, motivation, and other variables affect scores on tests and are themselves affected by the condition of opportunity. What happens before these influences have a chance to act unevenly on racial groups? Bayley (1965, p. 408) found the following.

It would appear that the behaviors which are developing during the first 15 months of life, whether they are motor skills or the early perceptual and adaptive forms of mental abilities, are for the most part unrelated to sex, race, birth order, geographical location, or parental ability. The one possible difference is in motor development in which the Negro babies tend to be more advanced than the whites during the first 12 months. Although there is considerable overlap of scores among Whites and Negroes of the same age, a genetic factor may be operating. That is, Negroes may be inherently more precocious than Whites in their motor coordination.

Golden and Birns (1968) studied Black children at 12, 18 and 24 months from a group of parents who were 1/3 on welfare, 1/3 lower class, and 1/3 middle class or above. The tests involved Piagetian sensorimotor tasks. There were no social class differences in "object concept" development.

Wachs (1971) investigated "object concept" and "means ends" behavior in infants up to the age of 22 months. Half of the infants were lower class, mainly Blacks and half were middle class Whites. There were no essential differences between the groups on these measures.

Palmer (1970) found that up to 3 years, 8 months, low socio-economic urban Blacks are not different on tests of intellectual skills from middle class whites. Similarly, Gilliland (1951), Anastasi (1952), and

Passanick (1955) in different studies came to the same conclusion regarding the lack of differences on intellectual tasks between Blacks and White middleclass subjects during infancy.

What happens after infancy? Ginsburg (1972) summarizes the evidence. He indicates that after infancy, poor children receive lower I.Q. scores. Black poor receive still lower scores. This seems to suggest a connection between poverty and errors rather than race and intelligence.

Later on, I.Q. scores may change for Blacks in general, but there is strong evidence to support the notion that this is an artifact of cultural bias in measurement. For example, Templin (1957) found no differences in the production of sentences of various types between White lower and White upper class children when one accepts "functionally complete" but "structurally incomplete" sentences. It should be clear that structure is a cultural thing. Baratz (1970) was able to demonstrate the same thing in her study. Black children could communicate the sense of a standard English sentence when they were permitted to respond in non-standard English. The potential source of some of the errors of judgment which are made about Black children is illuminated by Baratz.

These are but a few of the many instances where Negro nonstandard sound usage differs from standard English. It is no wonder then that Cynthia Deutsch (1964) should find in her assessment of auditory discrimination that disadvantaged Black children did not "discriminate" as well as White children from middle-class linguistic environments. She administered a discrimination task that equated "correct responses" with judgments of equivalencies and differences in standard-English sound usage. Many of her stimuli, though different for the standard English speaker (e.g., pin-pen) are similar for the Negro nonstandard speaker. She attributed the difference in performance of disadvantaged children to such things as the constant blare of the television in their homes, and there being so much "noise" in their environment that the children tend to

"tune out". However, Black children make responses on the kind of language they consider appropriate. In the same way that cot (for sleeping), caught (for ensnared); or marry (to wed), and merry (to be happy) are not distinguished in the speech of many white people (so that they would say on an auditory discrimination test that cot and caught were the same), pin and pen are the same in the language of ghetto Blacks. The responses that the Black child makes are on the basis of the sound usage that he has learned in his social and geographical milieu, and do not reflect some difficulty in discriminating.

(pp. 14-15)

Language, while not a test of intelligence in the formal sense is definitely an integral component of intelligence. In that light it is important to consider the work of Labov (1970). In making the case that nonstandard English is equivalent in complexity to standard English, he indirectly supports the notion of the equivalence of aptitude between Blacks and others. Ideas of substance translate readily from one "language" to another.

Mercer (1972) in a study of children who were labeled mentally retarded (I.Q. below 70) found that Mexican-American and Blacks were less sub-normal than Anglo children who were so labeled. Further, the Mexican-American or Black child was likely to be so labeled when an I.Q. score was the only evidence. Of all who scored below 70 on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, but had "passing adaptive behavior," all were Black or Mexican-American. In further study, Mercer found that when social background factors were held constant, no differences between the measured intelligence of Mexican-American and Anglo or Black and Anglo were found.

Self concept One area in which there is much myth and little fact is in the area of Black self concept. Typically writers have assumed

that there was one Black experience and one Black response to it. In fact there is much to learn, as the following studies suggest, if we are to understand motivation and achievement.

Jones (1972) found that Black children rejected the label "culturally deprived" when referring to themselves. In another study of Black college students, he found the same thing. The idea of Black self hatred simply must be re-examined in light of this and findings that follow. There is simply not enough data here to understand the variability of results from one study to the next.

Powell (1973) with an interracial team of investigators used the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale on a Black and White sample of students in a Northern and Southern city. Powell, found that Black girls and boys in the Southern city had significantly higher self concepts than White students or Blacks in the Northern city. This is very different from previous studies on the same subject. However, Powell's description of the cities and the times during which the study was conducted helps to explain the change. Many Southern Blacks have known about the high self concepts which their children often have. Few if any studies have been designed to explore the reasons for this.

Trowbridge (1972) found similar results using the Comper-Smith Self Esteem Inventory. She found that low SES Black and White children from 8 to 14 years of age scored higher than middle SES children.

Thomas Hilliard (1972) studied Black college students in Chicago. He found activists among Black students to be more psychologically healthy than Black student non-activists. In light of some assessments

which are made of aggressive students by college administrators, this is an interesting finding indeed.

The importance of these and other studies in the area of self-concept is that self concept and achievement are positively related. If self concept is in fact high, the teachers and other helpers have a good base to begin to facilitate students' growth.

Achievement This discussion would be no better than those which I have criticized if there were no citin<sup>g</sup>s of studies beyond those dealing with potential. A look at the actual achievement of Black students is required. The same kind of evidence is available for any other ethnic group.

Judith Anderson (1971) reported on the Special Elementary Education for the Disadvantaged Project (SEED) in Oakland, California. Fourteen Black and one Oriental students from poverty areas in one fifth grade class demonstrated their knowledge of logarithms, lengthy equations, gamma signs and variables. Professor William Johnitz, a former mathematics teacher from Berkeley High School, also directed SEED nationwide. Studies of Project SEED students show that they score "precisely like middle-class White students on conceptual reasoning tests!" The children also improve in reading and regular arithmetic according to evaluations made by the Cal Tech Mathematics Department. Does good teaching make a difference?

Stephen Strickland (1973) reported on a special project involving slum children in Milwaukee. An interdisciplinary team from the University of Wisconsin selected an area of Milwaukee which, according to census data, had the lowest medial family income, the greatest population density per

housing unit, and the most dilapidated housing in the city. It yielded the highest rate of mental retardation among school children when compared to other areas of the city. For four years from 1966, a total of 40 mothers with I.Q.s of less than 70 have, with their new-born children, participated in the infant Education Center Project. All mothers who were asked if they wanted to participate in the program quickly accepted. Two-thirds of the babies were in an experimental group and one-third in a control group. Special parent education and education-stimulation programs for the children were conducted. After 42 months, children in the active stimulation group measured an average of 33 I.Q. points higher than children in the control group! Also the children in the experimental group were learning at a rate that is in excess of the norm for their age peers generally! I.Q. improvement was approximately 50% for most youngsters with some achieving I.Q.s as high as 135!

In Dade County, Florida, Black students scored above the national average in mathematics (Morganthau, 1973). These are not examples using special kids, only special teachers.

Brasfield, Hilliard et.al. (in Press) reported on the Behavioral Evolvement Through Achievement Management Project in San Francisco. A group of 80 plus Black students were selected from the student body of a low income neighborhood, a virtually all Black junior high school. For one year this group of seventh and eight grade students were given a special program in reading, counseling, and "cultural enrichment" by high school and college tutors. Most of the sample were bordering on failure in school, had marginal attendance, were reading nearly three or more

years below grade level, and were on probation with the juvenile courts. After 36 hours of reading instruction with other supporting activities, there was an average gain in reading scores of nearly three years, the attendance patterns for the group became higher than the school average, and the recidivism rate in delinquency dropped from the city's average, near 50%, to 4%. Teachers and counselors in the school indicated that they could tell B.E.A.M. students by their improved performance.

Cole and Gay (1971) have shown how Kpelle children in Liberia, when tested using the categories of thought growing out of their experience are able to perform on certain tests at levels superior to their U.S. counterparts. Levi-Strauss (1962) has developed extensive cross cultural data to demonstrate that intelligence is complex for all of the worlds people. People apply their complex intelligence to the unique experiences which their environment permits.

Putting aside the question of political ideology, it is interesting that Malcolm X had extreme difficulty in school and yet later proved to have a superior intellect. Ruchell McGee was diagnosed as mentally retarded and this was used as an argument to keep him from acting as his own attorney. Yet, he has been able, largely on the basis of self taught law, to confuse and at times immobilize court proceedings. Retarded they were not.

The examples could go on and on. There are many similar cases reported throughout the literature. However, one searches in vain to find where researchers have pulled such information together for systematic scrutiny. Rather, we have the Colemans, Jencks, Jensens, Moynihans, Shockleys and others who continue to receive financial support and who seem able only to

explain in esoteric jargon why minorities are unable to do succeed or achieve, or why schools can't seem to help, while at the same time many dedicated and skilled teachers in schools do seem to be able to help children realize their high potential. Under the circumstances the "reassessment" which should be conducted must focus on the credibility of the false prophets.

### Compelling Directions for Research

I have said that the needed research for solving the educational problems of minority children and adolescents must take some new and important directions. Among those are at least the following.

1. Identification of teachers, schools or programs which consistently produce dramatic growth in minority children. The programs should be analyzed and the information widely disseminated.
2. Identify teachers, schools, or programs which consistently produce negative results in minority children for the same reasons as indicated above.
3. Black and other minority perspectives must be represented at levels where research priorities are determined, where research proposals are evaluated, where research is conceptualized, where it is implemented and where the results are evaluated.
4. Further research must be conducted in the area of teacher behavior and student change. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), Beez (1969), and others should have their experiments replicated or extended. We know that teacher expectations, attitudes, emotional health, and other factors directly affect student growth. However, when

much of this research is presented, certain researchers seek the safety of arguing over minute errors of design or statistical analysis rather than designing and executing a proper study.

5. There is a critical need for in depth studies of minority people who have achieved at high levels in spite of severely oppressive conditions. This may provide some clues as to what can be salvaged from our present programs of help.

### Conclusion

There are too many examples of Black growth, often in the face of overwhelming odds, for us to be satisfied any longer with a situation where National educational policy is overly influenced by excuse makers whose research is detached from significant reality and whose understanding of what it takes to help minority children grow is nil. There are people in this country who know how! It is from this group that educational policy recommendations should be sought. It is this group that should receive full support of public and private funds. It is this group which should be made more visible to the profession so that our new professional talent can see that there are exciting, productive, alternatives to the despair which is suggested by many who ought to know better. The group to which I refer are those who have a track record of success with Black and other children. All of our children, minority or majority, have what it takes. They deserve the professionals who also have what it takes!

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