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# EQUAL POTENTIAL: A COLLECTIVE FRAUD

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*Linda S. Gottfredson*

Collective fraud is the systematic and knowing suppression of unwelcome truths by a set of experts who either shade the truth or acquiesce to such shading. As I described six years ago in these pages, it is tacit collusion in distorting or suppressing scientific evidence for the purpose of sustaining a major falsehood. Perhaps no one could be accused of fraud in the usual sense of the term, but the complicity of many experts in telling or tolerating many seemingly minor untruths yields a big lie. Tactics of intimidation help enforce the lie. Perhaps the most aggressively perpetrated collective fraud in the social sciences today is that which sustains the *egalitarian fiction*. This is the frequent but false assertion that intelligence is clustered equally across all human populations, that is, that there are, on average, no racial-ethnic disparities in developed mental competence.

*Reaching the Top*, the recent report commissioned by the College Board, illustrates collective fraud in service of this fiction. In some respects, the report is more honest than most on group differences in academic achievement but, ironically, this only makes its insistence on the larger lie all the more glaring. As we shall see, the Task Force acknowledges evidence that was once denied, but only to twist it into further support for the lie. The report then relies on its refurbished fiction to call for the most sweeping program of racial preferences in education ever proposed in the United States. Many contributors to the egalitarian fiction say privately, and a few publicly, that the egalitarian fiction is an indispensable lie in public life today. However, the fiction is neither useful nor harmless. Indeed, as I shall demonstrate, *Reaching the Top* wields it especially destructively.

The College Board charged the Task Force with addressing two problems: first, black, Hispanic, and

Native American students are severely underrepresented at the highest levels of academic achievement and, second, large racial-ethnic disparities in academic performance persist at all socioeconomic levels. The charge itself is refreshing because it puts the focus where it should be but too seldom has been—on the relatively low level of essential academic skills among Hispanic, Native American, and, especially, black students at all levels of education. As college admissions officers have long known, there are no longer any large untapped pools of highly capable minority students. The pools simply are not there, which is why so many colleges have turned to racial preferences in admitting students.

## **What's Right: The Focus on Academic Skills**

The College Board's charge to the Task Force is even more welcome because it points to a fact known since the 1960s, as the report notes, but only recently acknowledged: racial gaps in academic performance are large at *all* levels of social class. That fact is crucial for hopes of ameliorating racial-ethnic disparities in performance because it shows that much more is involved than socioeconomic disadvantage. The report lists the average reading scores for whites, blacks, and Hispanics on the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test. Blacks and Hispanics whose parents had graduated from college averaged 14 and 23 points higher, respectively, than did same-race peers whose parents were high school dropouts (on a scale where the standard deviation was 37). However, these advantaged blacks and Hispanics scored, respectively, 30 and 19 points lower than whites who also have college-graduate parents. Similar patterns have been found for other tests of academic fitness, including the SAT, and also when parental

*income* is the measure of family advantage: non-Asian minority students always perform notably worse, on the average, than do whites and Asians of the same social class.

The report's approach to these two problems is commendable in several ways. Most importantly, it emphasizes seeming evidence rather than rhetoric to make its case, and the racial rhetoric it does use is rather muted. So, for instance, there are no lurid claims that American schools are culturally "genocidal" for minority students. Or that a supposed "white hegemony" disregards the needs of minority students. Quite the opposite. The Task Force reports that much educational reform and social policy has been devoted in recent decades to assisting minority students.

The report does not invoke many of the egregious falsehoods that committees on race typically do. It does not, for instance, repeat the shibboleths that tests are biased, that minority schools are denied equal funding, or that many highly promising minority students fail to enter and graduate from top colleges for lack of financial support. Rather, it implicitly concedes that poor skill development is the major immediate barrier to the educational and occupational advancement of blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans. It also explicitly concedes that the skills gap problem has not abated much in recent decades despite considerable investment of social resources.

Consistent with its focus on skills, the report's recommendations focus on improving non-Asian minority skill levels at all levels of education, preschool through graduate school, and in all social classes, from the poorest to the richest. Its oft-repeated aim is racial-ethnic parity among all groups of students, rich or poor, so that equal proportions of all racial-ethnic groups "reach the top" of the social ladder. Parity at the top, the report says, is an economic, social, and moral imperative.

### **False Claims**

If the Task Force can be commended for omitting certain popular falsehoods, it must be criticized for omitting or distorting crucial truths. Most importantly, the Task Force's entire argument still rests on the false foundation of the egalitarian fiction. Although the report is seemingly temperate in tone, its moderation is illusory. The report uses the fiction to blame whites for low minority achievement and to justify an extensive new system of educational supports for "underrepresented" minorities but no others.

To begin with, the report is disingenuous in saying that the problem of poor minority skill develop-

ment has been "neglected" (p. 2). In reality, that truth—namely, that "few Black, Hispanic, and Native American students are reaching the highest levels of educational achievement"—was not neglected but suppressed until recently. The same parties who now decry its neglect suppressed it. Many of us who tried to call attention to the problem in years past were demonized for suggesting that the average non-Asian minority student tends to be much less qualified for college than the average white or Asian-American. Thus anything approaching parity in college admissions would require strong racial preferences. Colleges and universities used to deny, routinely and indignantly, that they ever used such preferences—or would even need to.

Only when the Center for Equal Opportunity in Washington, DC, began to use the Freedom of Information Act to extract the truth were some state universities finally forced to reveal, first, that they had relatively few well qualified non-Asian minority applicants and, second, that their solution to that shortage had been to use racial preferences. As the Task Force itself admits, it was only when the university systems in California, Texas, and Washington were prohibited from using the racial preferences—preferences which they had stoutly denied ever using—that low skill levels finally drew serious attention.

The threat to racial preferences has not only brought some affirmative action activists out into the open, but also led them to emphasize as unjust the very skills gaps they had earlier sought to deny. Thus the embarrassing "neglected" fact of racial gaps in academic performance at all levels of schooling has now become new proof of victimization. As the report illustrates, the goal remains the same (parity), as do the preferred means of reaching it (racial preferences). So, too, do the preferred explanations of the racial inequality remain unchanged: they are all external and they all are rooted in white prejudice.

The report emphasizes five external factors, which it labels "formidable obstacles" (p. 35): economic disadvantage, limited parental education, inadequate school resources, culture and peers, and prejudice and discrimination. The College Board's two-part charge poses a daunting challenge for anyone attempting to argue that racial disparities in educational performance originate entirely in factors external to the groups in question. To make a persuasive case, the Task Force must show not only how its five external factors produce *internal* deficits, but also how they do so in some minority groups but not others (Asian-Americans, who outperform whites). It must also show how these ex-

ternal factors greatly depress learning among non-Asian minority students at *all social class levels*, and especially at the *highest* levels of social class (where the racial-ethnic gaps are generally largest). The Task Force responds by producing a reconfigured but much vitiated version of the usual poverty-discrimination theory. It then attempts to use its new version to explain what is in a key respect the *opposite* of what the old version had been used to explain in the past—not why poor blacks learn less than richer whites, but, as we shall see, why *rich* blacks learn less than *poorer* whites. Not surprisingly, the attempt fails.

### Moribund Explanation

The report camouflages this failure, however, by muting or misrepresenting the differences it seeks to explain. First, although it notes that black, Hispanic, and Native-American deficits in academic performance are large at all social class levels, it never mentions a key fact available in its own presentation of data: highly advantaged blacks perform no better, on the average, than do *disadvantaged* whites. Specifically, black twelfth graders whose parents have graduated from college tend to have no better skills on the NAEP than do white twelfth graders whose parents are high school dropouts. Skill levels for Hispanic students fall midway between those for blacks and whites. This is not an isolated occurrence. The same social class inversion in scores is found year after year for the relation of family income to SAT, NAEP, and other test scores: black students from the richest stratum of families perform no better, on the average, than do whites from much poorer families. As the federal Adult Literacy Surveys have shown, family background can explain at most about 20% of the black-white reading gap among 21-25 year-olds, although somewhat more of the Hispanic-white gap.

The report reduces its explanatory burden further by failing to describe how patterns of performance and social circumstance differ greatly across its three target groups, blacks, Hispanics, and Native-Americans. This failure hides the well-known fact that the latter two groups generally perform considerably better on academic tests than do blacks despite *lower* parental income and education. Clearly, the reports' first two factors—economic disadvantage and limited parental education—cannot explain much of the racial deficits in educational performance, especially those of blacks. Not having laid out the full picture of racial disparities in performance, however, the Task Force avoids revealing

how feeble these first two factors are. We shall soon see other, greater shadings of the truth.

When the report describes its five explanatory factors, it never clearly specifies which of the two problems it is using them to explain—the low proportion of high-performing non-Asian minorities, or the within-class racial gaps that constitute the lion's share of the overall gaps. It is therefore not obvious to readers that the report's first two factors—poverty and parental education—have no bearing on what most needs explaining. The real explanation for the within-class skills gaps must fall to the report's last three factors: inadequate school resources, culture/peer influences, and white prejudice and discrimination. As with its first two factors, the Task Force never attempts to use its third—school resources—to explain the within-class gaps. The report mentions school reforms such as those in Tennessee only to point out that, although they may help raise *all* students' achievement levels, especially among the lowest performing, they do not accomplish what the report seeks, which is to erase the racial gaps in achievement. In short, three of its "formidable obstacles" are so impotent that the Task Force does not even try to use them to explain what is most vexing—the large and persistent within-class racial-ethnic differences.

The report's discussion of its fourth factor, culture, is ad hoc and misleading. In order to explain the awkward fact that Asian-Americans outperform whites, it suggests that three aspects of their culture enhance academic performance. They are that the culture emphasizes the importance of effort, it provides an extensive system of educational support outside the schools, and it encourages the use of academic study groups. The report stops short of suggesting that certain aspects of black, Hispanic, or Native-American culture might depress school performance. Rather, it says that external factors (white culture, basically) "alienate" even the most advantaged non-Asian minority students, make them fear "acting white," and discourage them from, in essence, behaving more like Asian-American students.

The "acting white" explanation fails, however, because the best test of that hypothesis fails to confirm it. That study was reported in Jencks and Phillips' *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, a book which the report cites. That book is the largest, most systematic recent attempt, by authors known to be liberals, to explain the black-white gap in test scores. The Task Force's main reason for mentioning the Asian-American self-help efforts was actually not to explain the racial gaps, but to later recommend that

educators, policy makers, and philanthropists develop a similar "supplementary" educational system for underrepresented groups. This system would operate outside of but parallel to the existing school system in order to enhance non-Asian minority performance within the system.

That leaves the weight of explanation for within-class racial differences to the report's fifth factor, prejudice and discrimination. This is, indeed, the factor that the report stresses most. It is "a powerful negative educational force," a "special burden" on non-Asian minority students that the report says it cannot quantify but which Task Force members believe is so negative that they nonetheless "remain fully committed to affirmative action" (p. 17). The report never actually discusses let alone provides any examples of discrimination, that is, of *actions* by individuals or institutions intended to impede the selection, development, or advancement of minority students. It focuses instead entirely on prejudice, that is, on beliefs. Even the prejudice it describes seems a weak reed on which to rest its case. The prejudice is not the hate or school segregation of yesteryear, but the belief by some whites that some minorities "may be intellectually inferior," racial-ethnic groups "general dislike" of each other, and some whites' "lack of hospitality" towards minority students in largely white colleges.

"Rumors of inferiority" are said to depress black performance by leading educators to have low expectations for non-Asian minority students and by also creating a "stereotype anxiety" among students that dampens their performance. The low-expectations hypothesis was tested recently and collapsed under scrutiny, by Ronald F. Ferguson, a contributor to *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. That research showed that teacher expectations are based on past school performance and deportment, not race. Teachers expected as much from black as white students who were performing at the same level.

As for stereotype anxiety, it is known that extreme anxiety can depress anyone's performance temporarily (a little bit of anxiety helps). No one, however, has ever seriously claimed (and certainly not the author of the concept) that such race-specific anxiety is pervasive, chronic, or capable of explaining the long-standing pattern of racial gaps in academic achievement across time, place, and grade level. Indeed, the concept was developed to explain only the apparent underachievement of black college students who are already committed to doing well in school and who get high SAT scores (scores, moreover, which are said *not* to be depressed by

stereotype anxiety). Accordingly, the little research done so far on stereotype anxiety has suggested only that black Stanford undergraduates can sometimes become more rattled and perform less well than white Stanford undergraduates who have roughly the same SAT scores when both are given an exceedingly difficult verbal test in which anxiety is increased further by putting the hardest items first, by giving too little time to answer most of them, and by also making race salient (See Steele & Aronson, in *The Black-White Test Score Gap*). Obscuring the limited nature of the research, the report leaves the false impression that there is "growing evidence" to support its claim that "corrosive" white beliefs are "taking a severe psychological toll" (p. 16) on underrepresented minorities that leaves even the most talented among them either unable or unwilling to use their talents.

As for "general dislike" and "lack of hospitality" toward non-Asian minority students, the report never claims that such attitudes actually close off any opportunities. It argues, instead, that the putatively cool embrace by white society alienates non-Asian minority students, makes their opportunities less "genuine," and depresses the effort these students put forth to take advantage of them. Thus enervated, the students fall short of their "full" potential. The report therefore treats non-Asian minority students as passively transforming the attenuated and amorphous prejudices of today's white society into strong internal brakes on their own intellectual growth—no matter how advantaged they otherwise are.

Racial gaps in average NAEP scores narrowed during the 1970s and 1980s, mostly because the lowest-performing students improved, but the narrowing stalled and perhaps even reversed during the 1990s. The black-white NAEP gaps have been fluctuating between .7 to .9 standard deviations. Because the achievement gaps remain large, we must also believe that students today are nearly as stifled mentally by "rumors," "general dislike," and lack of "hospitality" as were their elders by the virulent hate and active discrimination that so many of them faced growing up. The report does not confront this paradox. Nor does it explain how Asian-Americans escape the ravages of such pernicious prejudices to find the psychic wherewithal to mount special efforts to consistently outperform whites.

None of the report's prejudice-based explanations can explain two other particularly important facts that the report fails to mention but which are clearly laid out in *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. One is



that, as has long been known, the black-white gaps appear *prior* to school entry, indeed, as early as mental functioning can be reliably measured. The other is that the black-white gap in reading and math performance seems to remain fairly constant, in relative terms, across all grade levels—oscillating between .7 to .9 standard deviations of achievement in a large-scale analysis of both longitudinal and cross-sectional data from the last two decades. It would defy credulity to argue that either racial prejudice or anxiety is equally large and its effects equally destructive among sheltered four-year-olds as among 14- and 24-year-olds.

The report sidesteps the need to make such implausible claims by creating the false impression that racial-ethnic gaps in performance develop only after students enter school and then balloon quickly. It does so by stating that the gaps in grades and tests scores “emerge very early in the students’ school careers” and “develop rapidly during the first three years of school” (p. 7). What cumulate, however, are not racial gaps in competence, but the *consequences* of such preexisting gaps. Hispanic, Native American, and especially black students tend to learn at slower *rates* than do whites, who learn at a slower average rate than do Asian-Americans. The slower rate of acquiring knowledge and skills that creates a black-white knowledge gap of only one grade level by Grade 2 yields a knowledge gap of four grade levels by Grade 12 (among those still in school). The constant black-white difference in average rates of accumulating knowledge indicates that neither schools (for instance, teacher expectations) nor any other social institution to which school-age children are subject either creates or narrows the black-white disparities in academic competence. I know of no comparable data for other racial-ethnic comparisons, but the black-white data suffice to show that *Reaching the Top* leaves the wrong impression, one which is essential for its prejudice-based explanation to remain at all believable.

### Ignoring the Full Pattern

We are left, then, with five crucial facts about black-white achievement gaps, only the fourth of which the report ever mentions and attempts to explain: specifically, very large gaps in intellectual development (1) precede school entry, (2) remain consistent over the school years, (3) do not change much as school and social environments are transformed, (4) are substantial at all levels of social class, and (5) are so large that the most advantaged stratum of blacks performs no better, on the average,

than the least advantaged stratum of whites. There is less evidence for Hispanics and Native Americans, but their performance deficits are clearly smaller. As I have already argued, it is hard to imagine how white prejudice, which has changed so radically over the years, could have such a continuing and consistently large impact on blacks, regardless of age or social context, and such a consistently *different* effect on other racial-ethnic groups, some of whom perform better than whites.

It is precisely the consistent pattern of black-white achievement differences across age, place, time, and social class that led Jencks and Phillips to argue in *The Black-White Test-Score Gap* that most of the differences must emerge *prior* to schooling and be rooted largely in *non-economic* differences among families and communities. The “traditional explanations” for black-white differences in school performance “do not work very well” (p. 42), so Jencks and Phillips suggest looking into differences in how blacks and whites interact among themselves and in how they respond to the same classroom experiences. They resist the conclusion that I reach below, but they clearly acknowledge what *Reaching the Top* does not, namely, that the old saws about poverty and prejudice cannot explain most racial disparities in achievement.

The Task Force’s most telling omitted fact of all, however, is this: Most differences in achievement are not *between* social groups at all, but *within* them. In fact, most differences arise *within families*, that is, among siblings growing up in the very same household. As will be described later, white (and black) siblings differ as much among themselves in IQ, on the average, as blacks tend to differ from whites within the same social class—about .8 standard deviations. Now, the Task Force did not set out to explain within-race differences, but any explanation that it offers for *between-race* differences must comport with explanations for the former. They need not be entirely the same, but neither are the explanations likely to be completely different.

White prejudice is the *only* plausible explanation the report provides for the substantial racial-ethnic gaps in achievement that remain after controlling for social class. Yet this sole factor in explaining between-group differences cannot explain much, if any, of the enormous within-group variation in achievement. White prejudice against non-whites certainly cannot explain the average .8 SD difference among white siblings growing up in the very same household. It seems far fetched that it could nonetheless

explain much of the comparably large achievement differences among *black* siblings. Research indicates, in fact, that cognitive differences are produced in the same manner among blacks as among whites.

Clearly other factors must exist in order to account for the large differences among siblings, black or white. *Something* causes these differences, and that something is related to *neither* race nor class. To cling to an exclusively poverty-prejudice explanation for the cross-race disparities requires us to believe that what allows the typical white child to perform better than her typical black classmate has nothing to do with why either child outperforms her own siblings—and vice versa. This seems implausible. If *within*-race differences in school achievement cannot be blamed on prejudice, what causes them? Might those non-racial factors create *racial* differences too, thus explaining *both* within- and between-group differences at the same time?

### Omitted Explanation

The one potential explanation for between-group differences that the report actively removes from consideration is, in fact, the one that best explains both between-race and within-race differences in achievement. That factor is intelligence, more specifically, *g* (short for the general mental ability factor). Few deny that sibling differences in intelligence exist or produce differences in school achievement, but any discussion of intelligence becomes taboo when it threatens to cross racial lines.

The meaning of intelligence is often misunderstood. First, it is not the amount of knowledge and skills that people accumulate (their achievement), but rather their facility (aptitude) for acquiring it. It is most easily understood as *critical thinking skills* (specifically, fluid *g*), for example, reasoning, abstract thinking, problem solving, and speed of "catching on." For practical purposes, it can be conceptualized, interchangeably, as the ability to learn moderately complex information, to deal with cognitive complexity, and to *avoid* cognitive errors.

Second, it is important to understand that intelligence tests measure only developed or *phenotypic* intelligence, because that is all that any mental test can measure. There is no test of "genetic intelligence." By using the term "potential," the report blurs the distinction between genotype and phenotype, which allows it to insinuate that any discussion of intelligence rests on preconceived notions of "innate" differences.

The report only obliquely raises the issue of group disparities in intelligence, and then only to rule it

off-limits. It dismisses group disparities as a "corrosive belief" that helps *create* the underperformance of non-Asian minorities. The Task Force does not baldly assert the egalitarian fiction, perhaps because one of its co-chairs has long been familiar with the evidence for large, stable group disproportions in phenotypic intelligence. Rather, the report simply sidesteps the evidence altogether and cultivates the impression that all groups have equal average "potential." It speaks repeatedly of non-Asian minority students lacking "genuine" opportunities to reach their "full potential."

In fact, however, no test of key mental skills has ever shown different racial-ethnic groups to be equal in average potential, no matter how potential is defined—intelligence test scores, achievement tests, school grades, even simple computerized reaction time tests that gauge how quickly the brain processes exceedingly simple information (such as which of four lights has been illuminated). The tests that best predict later achievements are almost always the ones that measure intelligence (*g*) best. They are also the ones that tend to show the largest racial differences in mental ability. A century of evidence shows that these phenotypic differences are real, stable, and have practical importance outside as well as inside school settings.

There is no replicated evidence, on the other hand, that false beliefs about people's intelligence actually change or stunt one's intellectual potential. The so-called "Pygmalion Effect" has been disproved. It is the fact of racial disparities in intelligence, not any mere belief in them, which is responsible for most racial gaps in achievement. Nowhere has this been better established than in the educational realm. Conscientiousness and quality of instruction and assistance can greatly affect how much a child learns, but most variability in school performance in the United States has been traced to prior differences in *g*.

The origins of the racial differences in *g* are still unclear, but a 1987 survey revealed that a plurality of IQ experts believes that both environmental and genetic factors are involved. Environmental factors so far can explain at most a third of the black-white gap. Little research has been done yet to estimate what proportion of group differences in IQ or academic achievement is genetic. The reason is that few experts are willing to look into the question, and the few who are have typically been denied access to the requisite data or found it difficult if not impossible to publish their findings. One study that did make its way through an extraordinary gaunt-

let of reviews (See D.C. Rowe and H.H. Cleveland, H. H. (1996), "Academic achievement in African-Americans and Whites: Are the developmental processes similar?" *Intelligence*, 23, 205-228) estimated that about two-thirds of the black-white gap in reading and one-third the gap in math was genetic in a CNLSY sample of 9-11 year-olds. But genetic or not, the American black-white IQ gap has been stubborn. It remains little changed since it was first measured during World War I. That is the salient fact.

As noted, the Task Force's theory of prejudice cannot explain the broad pattern of achievement differences either between or within races. Differences in intelligence, however, can explain most differences in academic achievement, not only between racial-ethnic groups, but also within them. Perhaps most importantly, it can simultaneously explain differences in achievement among siblings, whether black or white. Biological siblings differ in IQ by an average of about 12 points, which happens also to be the average black-white difference when social class background is controlled. Those sibling differences are due mostly to the genetic differences among siblings, because their genotypes correlate only .5 on the average. The remaining IQ differences among biological siblings are due to *differences* in their environments within the same family. Large IQ differences among siblings in turn produce large differences among them in school achievement and life outcomes. Those differences, in fact, are almost as large as those found between strangers whose IQs differ to the same degree.

In other words, the Task Force asks us to ignore an exceedingly well-documented factor that explains most variation in academic achievement, within and between groups, in favor of one which it defines only vaguely, for which it offers no durable support, and which does not comport with trends in even the limited set of between-group differences to which the report restricts its attention. In fact, the Task Force simply declares mention of that well-documented intelligence factor morally repugnant so that no one else will dare entertain it. Comparing belief in the factor to de jure segregation, it states:

"The United States ... [has] ... a history of extremely damaging forms of racial and ethnic prejudice and discrimination ... such as legally enforced school segregation, but also a deeply ingrained belief among many members of the majority population that some minorities are less able to succeed in school for either innate or cultural reasons" (pp. 15-16).

True or not, the belief must be purged because it is "corrosive." Such tactics are typical of collective fraud. The stronger and more extensive the unwelcome evidence, the more peremptorily and righteously it is dismissed, and the thinner the new explanations become to hide the truth.

### Affirmative Development: A New "Solution"?

I should make it very clear that people at all IQ levels "can learn." Moreover, everyone can learn more than they typically do, whatever their IQ level. Few people "reach their full potential," as every teacher knows. Indeed, it is precisely the perception of massive student underachievement, especially relative to students in other countries, that spurs much educational reform in the United States today.

The question we are dealing with here, however, is whether any kind of educational intervention can *equalize* academic achievement among groups who, on average, differ substantially in its major determinant, intelligence. No one has yet developed any way to permanently raise intelligence. Whether the intervention involves schooling or adoption, early gains always wash out by mid- to late adolescence. I have seen no evidence otherwise. It is no help that intelligence test scores have been rising throughout the developed world, because they have risen in tandem for all racial-ethnic groups. The rises have preserved the gaps.

Other things besides intelligence can affect a child's achievement. But even if they were more important than intelligence in creating the academic achievement differences among us, which they currently are not in the United States, they would have to be *negatively* correlated with intelligence across groups in order to equalize achievement. For example, non-Asian minority students would consistently have to have *more* educational opportunities, more academic support, and more motivation than white and Asian-American students in order to equal the latter's performance, on the average. The slower a group's average rate of learning, the more support its members would need. Some minority individuals currently outperform more able whites, of course, just as some whites work hard, get help, and outperform their more able peers. However, racial parity would require that virtually *all* non-Asian minorities have compensatory advantages and that those advantages be substantial.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this seems to be just what the Task Force is advocating with its "affirmative development" proposal: from preschool to graduate school, society is to provide special op-



portunities and extensive support for non-Asian minority students. "[F]rom preschool through high school," such students should have "a parallel educational system to the schools" to support what they do inside the schools (p. 33). In college, they should have academic study groups, "an active system of personal support and advising," and "sufficient financial aid to devote full attention to their studies" (p. 31). These resources would be available to non-Asian minority students of all social class levels, that is, on the basis of race and not class. Where racial preferences are illegal, the report suggests that these special services be made available to some token white and Asians. That whites and Asians might advance too, as they recently have in college graduation rates, is seen by the report as an "obstacle" to racial parity (p. 5). Thus, no matter which aspect of the "extensive mix" of supports is considered, it would be developed "especially" for underrepresented minorities (e.g., p. 32).

All educational policies and practices would be judged, not by their ability to raise student performance levels, but to equalize them across groups. "A priority objective of local, state, and federal education leaders and policy makers should be equal representation of African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans among the most academically successful students, and policies would be evaluated against this goal" (p. 32). This is also to be a "funding priority" for private foundations and a "high priority" for federal research and development. Colleges and universities would not only form consortia to find and create "strategies for helping underrepresented minority students achieve at high levels," but also to "track achievement of all students [including within individual courses] and use this information to guide strategies focused on raising underrepresented minority achievement levels" (p. 31). In brief, racial parity would become the measure of what is good and right; all educational policy and practice would be bent toward it.

Federal, state, and local educational policy, as well as private philanthropy, would shift from helping the "disadvantaged" to helping the "underrepresented," whatever their economic circumstances. One reason for the suggested shift is that past efforts to help the most disadvantaged, although they narrowed the racial gaps somewhat during the 1980s, did little or nothing to increase the numbers of high-performing blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans. A second reason is that, although the non-Asian minority students already nearest "the top" tend to be socially advantaged, their representation also fades most nearest the top, which is the Task Force's special

concern. Because students already nearest the top have the best chance of reaching it, the report urges extensive support for advantaged minorities too. It repeatedly laments that educational programs for helping minority groups focus almost exclusively on their most disadvantaged members. Programs have neglected "the needs" of middle- and upper-class non-Asian minorities.

What the report does, in short, is to justify aid based on race and *not* class. In addition to encouraging race-based college admissions, the Task Force would provide an extensive system of race-based academic "support," both before and after being admitted to college. The report does not describe this massive "affirmative development" system as racial preferences, but that is clearly what it entails.

### **Magnitude of Race-Based Investment Required**

The Task Force repeatedly refers to how extensive its recommendations are but seems not to recognize their full magnitude, if taken seriously. A look at how capabilities shift along the IQ continuum reveals how extreme the report's "affirmative development" goals actually are. The "normal" range of IQ spans from IQ 70 (the threshold for mild mental retardation) to IQ 130 (the threshold for giftedness), and encompasses about 97% of whites and 90% of blacks. Whereas the white IQ bell curve is centered roughly on IQ 100, the black curve is centered one standard deviation (SD) below at about IQ 85.

If parity in school performance is to be attained without parity in intelligence (the latter not yet being feasible, if ever), virtually all black students would routinely need to perform at levels comparable to students who are one standard deviation smarter than they are. That is, they would need to leap frog over one-quarter the normal range of IQ, bypassing a large percentage of whites and Asian-Americans on the way. So, for instance, it would mean expecting most retarded black students to perform as well in school as do non-retarded low-IQ individuals, and, in musical chair fashion, asking all other black students (but no whites or Asian-Americans) to move up one full level in academic challenge and accomplishment. Blacks at the white 15th percentile (near IQ 85) would need to perform as well, on the average, as whites at the 50th; and blacks at the white 50th percentile (near IQ 100) would have to perform as well as whites near their 85th percentile (IQ 115). All blacks now in honors classes would need to start ranking consistently at the top of those classes. Hispanics and Native Americans would be

asked to move up less because their performance gaps are smaller.

Extended to the employment realm, blacks who now work alongside whites of comparable IQ would need to work alongside whites who might be no better educated than they but who would be one SD higher on the IQ continuum and thus *noticeably* smarter (train faster, learn faster from experience, spot and solve problems faster, and so on). Blacks would have to enter notably more complex jobs than they now tend to hold. They would have to move up the IQ ladder of jobs, for instance, from assembler (typical IQ 85-95) to bank teller (IQ 95-105), or teller to store manager (IQ 105-115), or manager to attorney (average above IQ 120). Because job performance correlates more strongly with both intelligence level and "criticality" of good performance at each higher job level, a 15-point black-white IQ gap within jobs would yield more glaring black-white differences in job competence at higher job levels.

Make no mistake. The differences in functional skill between each broad IQ level are large. People at the highest IQ levels are capable of self-training, whereas training at each successively lower IQ level requires increasingly concrete, direct, and structured instruction; more reliance on hands-on demonstrations and practice rather than on written materials; and a much narrower range of information to be learned. Nearing the threshold for mild mental retardation, individuals require one-on-one, detailed, and repetitive instruction and then close supervision in order to effectively use even simple tools. No jobs routinely recruit workers with such low training potential. IQ 85 is near the lower boundary of ready employability, and then only at the lowest occupational levels. Federal law forbids the military to induct anyone below the 10th percentile of ability (about IQ 80), and it currently accepts no one below the 16th percentile (about IQ 85).

Learning and thinking capabilities are very different at each of the four one-SD steps up the normal range of intelligence. Once one appreciates how large these mental steps are, the Task Force's blithe recommendations seem wholly unreasonable. They would commit us to moving one whole population (blacks) up a full standard deviation in academic performance, two others about half that (Hispanics, Native-Americans), all the while holding certain others (whites and Asian-Americans) in place. The problems in doing so are both technical and moral-political.

The technical problem is that, although most people can be taught highly specific skills and bits of information if they get enough practice and the tasks are not too complex, they cannot be taught how "to think" or "to learn" except in non-trivial ways. Stated another way, they can be taught individual skills at the next level up the IQ continuum, but these particular bits of information constitute only a small fraction of the vaster store of knowledge that people at the higher level routinely pick up on their own without dedicated instruction or practice. Slow learners rarely "get up to speed," and they are often unable to "go the distance" on complex tasks, even with unlimited time and help. Continued racial-ethnic disparities in ability to profit from instruction would mean that improved performance relative to whites and Asians would not be self-sustaining in the way the Task Force seems to imagine. Each gain would be a one-time competitive boost in specific skills and knowledge, one perhaps crucial for succeeding at the next higher stage of learning, but rarely if ever one that would erase the continued need for extra learning time and support in order to match the learning of brighter white and Asian-American students.

In other words, the current deficits in achievement, absent any equalization of intelligence, could be closed only if non-Asian minority students had unrealistically large and permanent compensating advantages. At the very least, virtually all non-Asian minority students, especially blacks, would need to devote much more time and effort to learning than do whites and Asians in order to learn as much on the average as the latter do, especially at higher levels of education ("the top"). They would also require extensive assistance, throughout all the school years (and beyond), to maintain heightened effort and more efficient learning. The extra time and assistance would become ever more critical in the higher grades and levels of education (and jobs) because the material to be learned becomes progressively more complex and thus confers an even bigger competitive advantage on bright students (and workers). It is by no means clear that the marginal gain in learning would typically be worth the ever increasing levels of effort and support it would necessitate. People have other things to do with their lives and institutions with their resources.

The moral-political problem is that the extra resources provided to non-Asian minority students would somehow have to be systematically *denied* to all others. This is absolutely essential for the plan

to work. Were others to have frequent access to the extra resources, the resulting improvements in their performance would become "obstacles" on the road to racial parity. It seems unlikely that the non-preferred groups would fail to notice or object to an "extensive" system of supports restricted to preferred minorities, from school entry to exit, both outside and inside school, and *especially* to the smartest and richest among them.

Ironically, the Task Force's "affirmative development" proposal is just what a *g* theorist might propose if his goal were racial parity in educational and material success at any cost, including to the dignity and self-determination of "affirmatively developed" groups—massive, life-long, race-targeted assistance in school, on the job, and in daily life. The Task Force does not recognize, however, that this sort of affirmative action—like all others—would have to be permanent if parity in outcomes is to endure despite large disparities in *g*. Nor does it recognize, as would our hypothetical *g* theorist, that the possibilities for parity in academic achievement are most remote and therefore most expensive, financially and politically, precisely where the Task Force seeks it most—"at the top"—because that is where the differences in bell curves create the most dramatic disparities in representation. A commitment to parity at the top, despite large gaps in *g*, is a commitment to a permanently and pervasively race-based regime. It is a mighty engine for preferences in perpetuity.

#### A Noble Lie?

While ignoring the special burdens on lower-IQ individuals, the egalitarian lie levies a heavy moral tax that no one escapes. Having removed intellect from the table, the lie leaves character as the sole explanation for racial inequalities: either minorities are weak or whites evil. So, either blacks are lazy or whites oppress them. Each race is forced to accuse the other of moral turpitude, of not upholding its part of the social contract to pursue one's own interests with vigor without interfering with like efforts by others. Because the gaps are large and stubborn, so too must be the moral deficits of the groups involved. We end up fighting each other rather than the real challenge. Each race becomes more con-

vinced of the culpability of the other as each new lie-based social program leaves in place the very inequalities it was meant to expunge.

The egalitarian lie and its ignoble pursuit long preceded the Task Force report. *Reaching the Top* is not just another repetition of that lie, however. Rather, it illustrates how contrary evidence fuels, not doubt, but daring among the lie's adherents. When one explanation fails (poverty or discrimination), they simply add others (white-induced alienation)—as if they had unearthed fresh new sources of unfairness and new sets of victims, which in turn require ever more recompense. Having already committed ourselves to aiding disadvantaged minority individuals, the report now exhorts us to do everything possible to uplift their most advantaged compatriots too. Justice demands this, rules the collective fraud, because the only acceptable explanation for minority "underperformance" is white enmity. To say otherwise is, in catch-22 fashion, only further proof of enmity.

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#### SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS

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