

turn to orality. The same point applies to a great many other new electronic instruments such as fax machines, copiers, word processors, and the like. In my admittedly limited experience, the introduction of the home computer has led to the output of more reading matter and more time spent on silent scanning than ever before.

Historians are well advised to avoid futurology. However, one need not be a prophet to notice that when the weather is variable, straws in the wind point in more than one direction: witness the paperback revolution of the 1960s, the building of Barnes and Noble superstores in the 1990s, and above all the relentless unceasing pressure on shelf space experienced by the custodians of our large libraries. Perhaps placing a question mark after "the end of the book" was not so misleading after all.

What Do We Know About Intelligence?

Linda S. Gottfredson's scholarly article "What Do We Know About Intelligence?" (*THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR*, Winter 1996) brings to mind a comment by Oliver Wendell Holmes:

"A man of very moderate ability may be a good physician, if he devotes himself faithfully to the work. More than this, a positively dull man, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, sometimes makes a safer practitioner than one who has, we will say, five percent. more brains than his average neighbor, but who thinks it is fifty percent. more."

JOHN D. GRIFFITH, M.D.
Houston, Texas

In her article on intelligence, Linda S. Gottfredson states a major premise on which her conclusions are based: "... as bias and social advantage are eliminated in American Society. ..."

If she takes this as a given, in what country does she reside?

She quotes "... more than fifty leading scholars of intelligence and allied fields published a statement last December (. . . in the *Wall Street Journal* . . .) [and] concluded [that] . . . [d]isparities among races and social classes are also real, can be measured without bias. . . ."

Without denigrating the peer review qualifications of the *Wall Street Journal* in this field, I must point out this constitutes a non sequitur, inasmuch as identification by "race" and "social class" are biases per se.

The gist of the article seems an attempt to extinguish biases by redefining them or to override them by denying their existence.

The noise-to-signal ratio in the study is overwhelming; the signal is still the persistence of racial and gender bias in America today, and the fact that social classes are diverging at the fastest rate in national history.

MEL RECHTMAN
Decatur, Georgia

LINDA S. GOTTFREDSON replies: Social classes in the United States do seem to be diverging, as Mr. Rechtman suggests. Our disagreement lies in the reasons why. Bias and social advantage still exist. My point was that their elimination would not produce an egalitarian utopia but, paradoxically, ensure its opposite—social hierarchy. Equal opportunity allows differences in talent and ambition to blossom. It gradually replaces the old hierarchies rooted in arbitrary family advantage with ones rooted in individual skill and ability. That is the democratic paradox. To the extent that one form of talent dominates all others in functional importance (as seems true of intelligence in the information age), that talent will increasingly shape the social order.

The democratic paradox remains unappreciated partly because many individuals accept the egalitarian fallacy: namely, that unequal outcomes (in education, income, and the like) must all be due to unequal opportunities (that is, to discrimination and unfair social advantage). However, individuals differ greatly in their talents, interests, and ambitions. The nation continues its effort to level the playing field for the development and expression of these talents (for example, school desegregation, free meals for poor students, state educational funding equalization plans, Head Start), but it has not succeeded in leveling the talents themselves.

As I said (but as Mr. Rechtman seems to have misread or misunderstood), "As inequalities owing to such factors as bias and social advantage are eliminated in American society, inequalities owing to genetic factors increasingly stand out." Democracies can cope with this predicament, but not via misdiagnosis or misplaced blame.

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