

# FORUM

## Race & Intelligence: To Bee or Not to Bee, That is the Answer!

I am compelled to respond to the Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray book, *The Bell Curve*. This hot new book is filled with barbs that "scientifically" demonstrate that intelligence and economic success are genetically determined. It stings a tender spot in American race relations. It takes a big bite out of Darwin's theory of evolution.

I decided to look at the book from two perspectives — the two warring sides of my mind.

First, I looked at it with my "white" mind, the part that comes from some twenty-five years I spend in various and sundry places where I read

well!

I also learned — not always in my classrooms — how groups with power used racist beliefs and doctrines to justify, explain, and preserve their privileged social positions throughout the ages. When I read Herrnstein and Murray's view that blacks are innately, that is, biologically, inferior, I was neither surprised by what they wrote, confused by why they wrote it, nor exasperated by the arguments.

Again and again, to justify exploitation of minority groups and native peoples, those in control have for centuries proclaimed the innate inferiority of the oppressed. The superiority of the

societies would have been abominable. My college teachers (all of whom were white) "few" right by this history. I couldn't say much about it. I was proving to them how intelligent I was.

So, I "know" what happened "in the curve of history"! I know that the variations in behavior between groups of people rests more on cultural and historical processes than biology. I know that the capacity for human potential is equal in all populations. I know that differences in performances between economic, social, and ethnic groups reflect different experiences and opportunities rather than genetic makeup.

That is how my "white educated" mind looks at *The Bell Curve*.

Then, I thought about this book from the "soul of a black person." That perspective, passed on to blacks primarily by our family and community elders, taught us how to survive by not internalizing what we "might" be taught in the schools about our inferiority! In fact, there was Old Grandmothers, reading from the Good Book: "God hath made of one blood all nations of people." Then there was Mother Wit and little folktales drummed into the souls of black folks.

These shielded the breasts and heads of most of us from any psychic damage that accompanies the constant assaults we were taught, to expect about questions of our equality with all people of the earth.

One such tale was about some "scientists," a group of brilliant aeronautical engineers, who were once studying the biological attributes of a bumblebee. When they looked at the large and relatively massive body weight of the bee in relation to its short wingspread, they concluded that it could not fly. No sooner than they announced their findings, the bee took off and multiplied! It couldn't read. Or at least it pretended it couldn't!

To bee or not to bee? That is the answer. Will African Americans allow themselves to be duped by this latest theory of their innate inferiority, which has been set forth by "scientists," who, after all, come from the favored stratum of society that has always sought to exclude them? I don't think so!

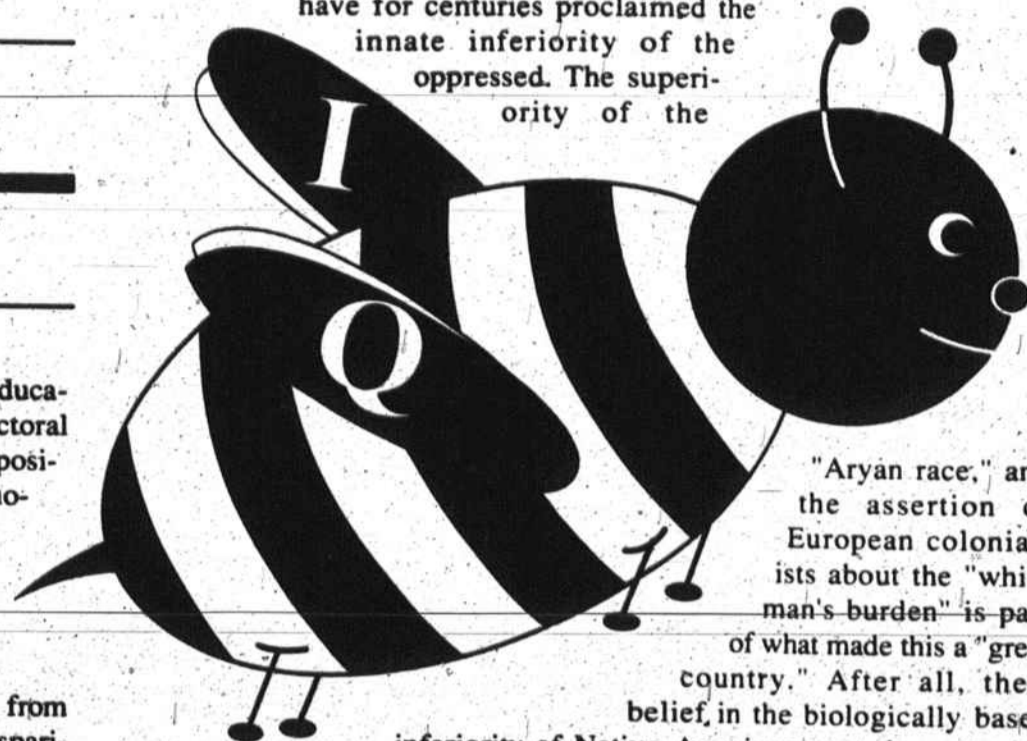
We know that IQ tests always reflect the experience of the people who devise them! Even our "illiterate" foreparents knew that such tests (like the literacy tests they were given before they were eligible to vote) were never free of class, ethnic, and cultural biases.

I can hear them snickering at *The Bell Curve*, saying among themselves, "We gon' bee alright, but they must think we bee crazy!"

(William Turner is a regular freelance columnist for the Chronicle.)

### LIFT EVERY VOICE

By WILLIAM H. TURNER



"Aryan race," and the assertion of European colonialists about the "white man's burden" is part of what made this a "great country." After all, their belief, in the biologically based inferiority of Native Americans was the argument for their slaughter, confinement and neglect.

I learned — again on the back channels — that when the ancestors of the authors of this book were in the Dark Ages, there were highly developed civilizations in West Africa and on the coast of East Africa. I knew that before the Industrial Revolution, there were white Americans, primarily in the South, living much more like precolonial Africans that like the current members of the American middle class. When Europeans were living as barbarians, their performance on "IQ test" administered by certain African

and wrote and spoke the common denominators of the American educational experience. Presumably, when Notre Dame handed me a doctoral degree in sociology and anthropology, — at age 25 — that was proof positive that I had sufficiently assimilated the cognitive and intellectual quotients of my society.

The authors of the book may be surprised to know that I did not find it difficult, trained as I am on the subject, to quickly grasp the gist of their work. In fact, it did not take a graduate degree to see that they were suggesting that differences between groups of people are constant, enduring and unchanging and passed from generation to generation. According to the argument put forth, the disparities and discrepancies between the haves and have-nots are based in biological rather than social and environmental factors. I am quite familiar with the Nazi doctrine on which *The Bell Curve* is based. It is very simple: white people are superior.

After all, what sophomore in high school has not been taught of the 1896 Plessey decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, which was the legal justification for segregation of the races. We also know that the system of apartheid in South Africa was based on the USA model. I learned that very

## African-American Youth and Students Should Organize a New SNCC

One of the most disturbing aspects of the current State of Emergency afflicting the Black Nation is the precarious plight of African American youth. To be young and African in American today is to confront conditions and dangers that are frightening to say the least. Never before have African American youth faced such an epidemic of drugs, crime, violence, incarceration and self-destruction. The brutality of generations of racist oppression and decades of blatant neglect seem to have conspired to place a large segment of this generations black youth at risk.

In the midst of some horrendous conditions, however, there are still some very hopeful signs. Though there is an understandable concern about gangsta rap and negative black music, a generation of rappers have also remerged with positive, revolutionary messages in their music in the finest

tradition of the Black Freedom Struggle. These rapactivist are challenging young people to become the vanguard of the black liberation movement. The resurgence of gangs with the attendant violent turf battles is also a terrifying phenomenon in black communities. On the positive side, however, the rebellion in South Central Los Angeles produced a truce between the Crips and Bloods that has spawned a nationwide Urban Peace and Social Justice Movement; a movement which has sponsored successful Gang Peace Summits in several cities across the country. Rites-of-passage programs for young African-American males and females are also spreading across the nation. After a lull in the late seventies and early eighties, black student organizations are alive again on college/university campuses and black student activism is on the rise. And, one of the most encouraging developments in recent times was the thousands of young people who flocked to the NAACP under the leadership of Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis.



### VANTAGE POINT

By RON DANIELS

As an extension of this development, it has also been inspiring to witness the young people at work on the Youth and Community Empowerment Committee of the National African American Leadership Summit. Of all of the Working Groups within the Summit process, the youth committee has been the most active and produced the most tangible proposals for action. The committee is working toward a National African American Youth Day, a National African American Youth Summit and A Liberation Summer Project.

I take note of these positive developments because the current crisis within the black community requires and demands that a new generation of leadership forge to the forefront of the black liberation struggle. Throughout the history of our struggle, from the sit-in movement which confronted southern segregation in the U.S. to the Soweto rebellion which rocked apartheid in South Africa, African youth have stepped forth at critical moments in the life and times of our people to give new vision, energy and vitality to the black freedom struggle. Indeed, within the U.S., it was the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee which became the cutting edge of the civil rights revolt and a key catalyst for the movement to Black Power, Black Nationalism and Pan-africanism.

As hundreds of youth and students prepare to converge on the forthcoming National State of the Race Conference (November 17-20 in Baltimore) to participate in the Youth and Student Work Sessions, my fervent hope is that they will resolve to give birth to the equivalent of a new SNCC for our time. There is an urgent need for African American youth to shape a meaningful agenda/program for the survival and development of the race into the 21st century.

There is also a need to launch and massive offensive against the racist system of oppression/exploitation in this country.

Among the crucial tasks which a new-SNCC type organization could undertake are the following: a major African centered community education campaign directed towards black youth with after school programs, Saturday schools and support for independent black educational institutions; harnessing black youth consumer power to force corporations to be accountable to the aspirations the black community (imagine youth led boycotts against the manufacturers of athletic apparel - sneakers, sweatshirts, jackets etc. which are so popular among black youth); youth economic development and entrepreneurial programs to build a economic powerbase to undergird youth and student led to movement work/initiatives; undertaking a no holds barred, "by any means necessary" campaign for reparations; registering, educating and mobilizing/organizing hundreds of thousands of African young people to participate in a youth and student led independent political party to advance a radical/progressive black agenda and fight for power!

It's time, past time for African American youth and students to emulate the example of their historical forebears and organize an renewed assault on the bastions of white supremacy. There are a lot of weary warriors from my generation who are anxious to share the torch and pass the torch. The struggle for the liberation of our people must continue.

This generation of African American youth must become the vital link in the continuous chain of the black freedom struggle. No struggle, no progress.

(Ron Daniels is a national syndicated columnist.)



Tracy Harding talks with some of the children he coaches in football recently, at Chicago's Cabrini-Green housing project. "These kids will listen to a game member selling drugs rather than something positive," said Harding, a Cabrini-Green resident who returned home after college to become a program coordinator for a youth foundation. "The negative catches on much quicker. . . . You do something bad to get respect. Then people are scared of you."

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