Week 2 Critical Thinking Assignment:

Social Darwinism

Questions to ask yourself, based on the extracts below and the notes for lecture 3:

How would science differ from pseudo-science in investigating the claim (made by Goddard) that immigrants arriving from Southeastern Europe before 1945 had, on average, low inborn intelligence as measured by IQ? In what sense is this claim part of a storyline central to the social construction of race? What were the obstacles that blocked researchers and the public from making an assessment of these claims based on evidence? How do we really know what is true?

Story lines: According to Bonilla-Silva (2010: 6), these are widespread, “fable-like” stories with a shared scheme and wording [note: fables convey morals]. They typically offer “impersonal generic arguments.” They are “ideological [that is, legitimating or self-serving] racial narratives” because the audience and the story tellers share underlying assumptions that make these stories believable, regardless of factual accuracy. It is possible for these stories to either challenge or support the “racial status quo” [white dominance, all-white social networks, etc.], depending whether the stories are percolated in a subordinate group or a dominant group.

Web source:

robinlea.com/pub/The_mismeasure_of_man.pdf


Excerpt from Epilogue:

The Bell Curve by Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray [1994] provides a superb and unusual opportunity for insight into the meaning of experiment as a method in science. Reduction of confusing variables is the primary desideratum in all experiments. We bring all the buzzing and blooming confusion of the external world into our laboratories and, holding all else constant in our artificial simplicity, try to vary just one potential factor at a time. Often, however, we cannot use such an experimental method, particularly for most social phenomena when importation into the laboratory destroys the subject of our investigation—and then we can only yearn for simplifying guides in nature. If the external world therefore obliges and holds some crucial factors constant for us, then we can only offer thanks for such a natural boost to understanding. When a book garners as much attention as The Bell Curve has received, we wish to know the causes. One might suspect content itself—a startling new idea, or an old suspicion now verified by persuasive data—but the reason might well be social acceptability, or just plain hype. The Bell Curve contains no new arguments and presents no compelling data to support its anachronistic social Darwinism. I must therefore conclude that its initial success in winning such attention must reflect the depressing temper of our time—a historical moment of unprecedented ungenerosity, when a mood for slashing social programs can be so abetted by an
argument that beneficiaries cannot be aided due to inborn cognitive limits expressed as low IQ scores. The Bell Curve rests upon two distinctly different but sequential arguments, which together encompass the classical corpus of biological determinism as a social philosophy. The first claim (Chapters 1 — 12) rehashes the tenets of social Darwinism as originally constituted. ("Social Darwinism" has often been used as a general term for any evolutionary argument about the biological basis of human differences, but the initial meaning referred to a specific theory of class stratification within industrial societies, particularly to the idea that a permanently poor underclass consisting of genetically inferior people had precipitated down into their inevitable fate.) This social Darwinian half of The Bell Curve arises from a paradox of egalitarianism. So long as people remain on top of the social heap by accident of a noble name or parental wealth, and so long as members of despised castes cannot rise whatever their talents, social stratification will not reflect intellectual merit, and brilliance will be distributed across all classes. But if true equality of opportunity can be attained, then smart people rise and the lower classes rigidify by retaining only the intellectually incompetent. This nineteenth-century argument has attracted a variety of twentieth-century champions, including Stanford psychologist Lewis M. Terman, who imported Binet's original test from France, developed the Stanford-Binet IQ test, and gave a hereditarian interpretation to the results (one that Binet had vigorously rejected in developing this style of test); Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, who tried to institute a eugenics program of rewarding well-educated women for higher birthrates; and Richard Herrnstein, coauthor of The Bell Curve and author of a 1971 Atlantic Monthly article that presented the same argument without documentation. The general claim is neither uninteresting nor illogical, but does require the validity of four shaky premises, all asserted (but hardly discussed or defended) by Herrnstein and Murray. Intelligence, in their formulation, must be depictable as a single number, capable of ranking people in linear order, genetically based, and effectively immutable. If any of these premises are false, the entire argument collapses. For example, if all are true except immutability, then programs for early intervention in education might work to boost IQ permanently, just as a pair of eyeglasses may correct a genetic defect in vision. The central argument of The Bell Curve fails because most of the premises are false.

The second claim (Chapters 13-22), the lightning rod for most commentary, extends the argument for innate cognitive stratification by social class to a claim for inherited racial differences in IQ—small for Asian superiority over Caucasian, but large for Caucasians over people of African descent. This argument is as old as the study of race. The last generation's discussion centered upon the sophisticated work of Arthur Jensen (far more elaborate and varied than anything presented in The Bell Curve, and therefore still a better source for grasping the argument and its fallacies) and the cranky advocacy of William Shockley. The central fallacy in using the substantial heritability of within-group IQ (among whites, for example) as an explanation for average differences between groups (whites vs. blacks, for example) is now well known and acknowledged by all, including Herrnstein and Murray, but deserves a restatement by example. Take a trait far more heritable than anyone has ever claimed for IQ, but politically uncontroversial—body height. Suppose that I measure adult male height in a poor Indian village beset with pervasive nutritional deprivation. Suppose the average height of adult males is 5 feet 6 inches, well below the current American mean of about 5 feet 9
inches. Heritability within the village will be high—meaning that tall fathers (they may average 5 feet 8 inches) tend to have tall sons, while short fathers (5 feet 4 inches on average) tend to have short sons. But high heritability within the village does not mean that better nutrition might not raise average height to 5 feet 10 inches (above the American mean) in a few generations. Similarly the well-documented 15-point average difference in IQ between blacks and whites in America, with substantial heritability of IQ in family lines within each group, permits no conclusion that truly equal opportunity might not raise the black average to equal or surpass the white mean.

Since Herrnstein and Murray know and acknowledge this critique, they must construct an admittedly circumstantial case for attributing most of the black-white mean difference to irrevocable genetics—while properly stressing that the average difference doesn't help at all in judging any particular person because so many individual blacks score above the white mean in IQ. Quite apart from the rhetorical dubriety of this old ploy in a shopworn genre—"some-of-my-best-friends-are-group-x"—Herrnstein and Murray violate fairness by converting a complex case that can only yield agnosticism into a biased brief for permanent and heritable difference. They impose this spin by turning every straw on their side into an oak, while mentioning but downplaying the strong circumstantial case for substantial malleability and little average genetic difference (impressive IQ gains for poor black children adopted into affluent and intellectual homes; average IQ increases in some nations since World War II equal to the entire 15-point difference now separating blacks and whites in America; failure to find any cognitive differences between two cohorts of children born out of wedlock to German women, and raised in Germany as Germans, but fathered by black and white American soldiers). Disturbing as I find the anachronism of The Bell Curve, I am even more distressed by its pervasive disingenuousness. The authors omit facts, misuse statistical methods, and seem unwilling to admit the consequences of their own words.

Excerpt from chapter Chapter 5:

H. H. Goddard and the menace of the feeble-minded Intelligence as a Mendelian gene

(Page 188)

The classification of mental deficiency aroused a healthy debate early in our century. Two categories of a tripartite arrangement won general acceptance: idiots could not develop full speech and had mental ages below three; imbeciles could not master written language and ranged from three to seven in mental age. (Both terms are now so entrenched in the vernacular of invectives that few people recognize their technical status in an older psychology.) Idiots and imbeciles could be categorized and separated to the satisfaction of most professionals, for their affliction was sufficiently severe to warrant a diagnosis of true pathology. They are not like us.

But consider the nebulous and more threatening realm of "high-grade defectives"—the people who could be trained to function in society, the ones who established a bridge between pathology and
normality and thereby threatened the taxonomic edifice. These people, with mental ages of eight to twelve, were called debile (or weak) by the French. Americans and Englishmen usually called them "feeble-minded," a term mired in hopeless ambiguity because other psychologists used feeble-minded as a generic term for all mental defectives, not just those of high grade.

Taxonomists often confuse the invention of a name with the solution of a problem. H. H. Goddard, the energetic and crusading director of research at the Vineland Training School for Feeble-Minded Girls and Boys in New Jersey, made this crucial error. He devised a name for “high-grade” defectives, a word that became (188)

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entrenched in our language through a series of jokes that rivaled the knock-knock or elephant jokes of other generations. The metaphorical whiskers on these jokes are now so long that most people would probably grant an ancient pedigree to the name. But Goddard invented the word in our century. He christened these people "morons," from a Greek word meaning foolish. Goddard was the first popularizer of the Binet scale in America. He translated Binet's articles into English, applied his tests, and agitated for their general use. He agreed with Binet that the tests worked best in identifying people just below the normal range—Goddard's newly christened morons. But the resemblance between Binet and Goddard ends there. Binet refused to define his scores as "intelligence," and wished to identify in order to help. Goddard regarded the scores as measures of a single, innate entity. He wished to identify in order to recognize limits, segregate, and curtail breeding to prevent further deterioration of an endangered American stock, threatened by immigration from without and by prolific reproduction of its feeble-minded within.

A UNILINEAR SCALE OF INTELLIGENCE

The attempt to establish a unilinear classification of mental deficiency, a rising scale from idiots to imbeciles to morons, embodies two common fallacies pervading most theories of biological determinism discussed in this book: the reification of intelligence as a single, measurable entity; and the assumption, extending back to Morton's skulls (pp. 82—101) and forward to Jensen's universal scaling of general intelligence (pp. 347-350), that evolution is a tale of unilinear progress, and that a single scale ascending from primitive to advanced represents the best way of ordering variation. The concept of progress is a deep prejudice with an ancient pedigree (Bury, 1920) and a subtle power, even over those who would deny it explicitly (Nisbet, 1980).

Can the plethora of causes and phenomena grouped under the rubric of mental deficiency possibly be ordered usefully on a single scale, with its implication that each person owes his rank to the relative amount of a single substance—and that mental deficiency means having less than most? Consider some phenomena mixed UP in the common numbers once assigned to defectives of high grade: general low-level mental retardation, specific learning disa-

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bilities caused by local neurological damage, environmental disadvantages, cultural differences, hostility to testers. Consider some of the potential causes: inherited patterns of function, genetic pathologies arising accidentally and not passed in family lines, congenital brain damage caused by maternal illness during pregnancy, birth traumas, poor nutrition of fetuses and babies, a variety of environmental
disadvantages in early and later life. Yet, to Goddard, all people with mental ages between eight and twelve were morons, all to be treated in roughly the same way: institutionalized or carefully regulated, made happy by catering to their limits, and, above all, prevented from breeding. Goddard may have been the most unsubtle hereditarian of all. He used his unilinear scale of mental deficiency to identify intelligence as a single entity, and he assumed that everything important about it was inborn and inherited in family lines. He wrote in 1920 (quoted in Tuddenham, 1962, p. 491):

Stated in its boldest form, our thesis is that the chief determiner of human conduct is a unitary mental process which we call intelligence: that this process is conditioned by a nervous mechanism which is inborn: that the degree of efficiency to be attained by that nervous mechanism and the consequent grade of intellectual or mental level for each individual is determined by the kind of chromosomes that come together with the union of the germ cells: that it is but little affected by any later influences except such serious accidents as may destroy part of the mechanism.

Goddard extended the range of social phenomena caused by differences in innate intelligence until it encompassed almost everything that concerns us about human behavior. Beginning with morons, and working up the scale, he attributed most undesirable behavior to inherited mental deficiency of the offenders. Their problems are caused not only by stupidity per se, but by the link between deficient intelligence and immorality.* High intelligence not only permits us to do our sums; it also engenders the good judgment that underlies all moral behavior.

The intelligence controls the emotions and the emotions are controlled in proportion to the degree of intelligence. ... It follows that if there is

*The link of morality to intelligence was a favorite eugenical theme. Thorndike (1940, pp. 264-265), refuting a popular impression that all monarchs are reprobates, cited a correlation coefficient of 0.56 for the estimated intelligence vs. the estimated morality of 269 male members of European royal families!

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Many criminals, most alcoholics and prostitutes, and even the "ne'er do wells" who simply don't fit in, are morons: "We know what feeble-mindedness is, and we have come to suspect all persons who are incapable of adapting themselves to their environment and living up to the conventions of society or acting sensibly, of being feeble-minded" (1914, p. 571). At the next level of the merely dull, we find the toiling masses, doing what comes naturally. "The people who are doing the drudgery," Goddard writes (1919, p. 246), "are, as a rule, in their proper places."

We must next learn that there are great groups of men, laborers, who are but little above the child, who must be told what to do and shown how to do it; and who, if we would avoid disaster, must not be put into positions where they will have to act upon their own initiative or their own judgment. . . . There are only a few leaders, most must be followers (1919, pp. 243-244).

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We now know that virtually every major feature of our body is built by the interaction of many genes with each other and with an external environment. But in these early days, many biologists naively assumed that all human traits would behave like the color, size, or wrinkling of Mendel's peas: they believed, in short, that even the most complex parts of a body might be built by single genes, and that
variation in anatomy or behavior would record the different dominant and recessive forms of these genes. Eugenicists seized upon this foolish notion with avidity, for it allowed them to assert that all undesirable traits might be traced to single genes and eliminated with proper strictures upon breeding. The early literature of eugenics is filled with speculations, and pedigrees laboriously compiled and fudged, about the gene for Wanderlust traced through the family lines of naval captains, or the gene for temperament that makes some of us placid and others domineering. We must not be misled by how silly such ideas seem today; they represented orthodox genetics for a brief time, and had a major social impact in America.

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A single gene for normal intelligence removed the potential contradiction between a unilinear scale that marked intelligence as a single, measurable entity, and a desire to separate and identify the mentally deficient as a category apart. Goddard had broken his scale into two sections at just the right place: morons carried a double dose of the bad recessive; dull laborers had at least one copy of the normal gene and could be set before their machines. Moreover, the scourge of feeble-mindedness might now be eliminated by schemes of breeding easily planned. One gene can be traced, located, and bred out. If one hundred genes regulate intelligence, eugenic breeding must fail or proceed with hopeless sloth.

THE PROPER CARE AND FEEDING (BUT NOT BREEDING) OF MORONS

If mental deficiency is the effect of a single gene, the path to its eventual elimination lies evidently before us: do not allow such people to bear children:

If both parents are feeble-minded all the children will be feeble-minded. It is obvious that such matings should not be allowed. It is perfectly clear that no feeble-minded person should ever be allowed to marry or to become a parent. It is obvious that if this rule is to be carried out the intelligent part of society must enforce it (1914, p. 561).

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They are not only lacking in control but they are lacking often in the perception of moral qualities; if they are not allowed to marry they are nevertheless not hindered from becoming parents. So that if we are absolutely to prevent a feeble-minded person from becoming a parent, some-thing must be done other than merely prohibiting the marrying. To this end there are two proposals: the first is colonization, the second is sterilization (1914, p. 566).

Goddard did not oppose sterilization, but he regarded it as impractical because traditional sensibilities of a society not yet wholly rational would prevent such widespread mayhem. Colonization in exemplary institutions like his own at Vineland, New Jersey, must be our preferred solution. Only here could the reproduction of morons be curtailed.

Inside these institutions, morons could operate in contentment at their biologically appointed level, denied only the basic biology of their own sexuality. Goddard ended his book on the causes of mental deficiency with this plea for the care of institutionalized morons: "Treat them as children according to their mental age, constantly encourage and praise, never discourage or scold; and keep them happy" (1919, p. 327).

Preventing the immigration and propagation of morons
Once Goddard had identified the cause of feeble-mindedness in a single gene, the cure seemed simple enough: don't allow native morons to breed and keep foreign ones out. As a contribution to the second step, Goddard and his associates visited Ellis Island in 1912 "to observe conditions and offer any suggestions as to what might be done to secure a more thorough examination of immigrants for the purpose of detecting mental defectives" (Goddard, 1917, p. 253). . . .[Later,] Goddard raised some funds for a more thorough study and, in the spring of 1913, sent two women to Ellis Island for two and a half months. They were instructed to pick out the feeble-minded by sight, a task that Goddard preferred to assign to women, to whom he granted innately superior intuition:

Goddard's women tested thirty-five Jews, twenty-two Hungarians, fifty Italians, and forty-five Russians. These groups could not be regarded as random samples because government officials had already "culled out those they recognized as defective." To balance this bias, Goddard and his associates "passed by the obviously normal. That left us the great mass of 'average immigrants.' " (1917, p. 244). (I am continually amazed by the unconscious statements of prejudice that slip into supposedly objective accounts. Note here that average immigrants are below normal, or at least not obviously normal—the proposition that Goddard was supposedly testing, not asserting a priori.)

Binet tests on the four groups led to an astounding result: 83 percent of the Jews, 80 percent of the Hungarians, 79 percent of the Italians, and 87 percent of the Russians were feeble-minded—that is, below age twelve on the Binet scale.

Permitting a charitable view of this failure, what but stupidity could explain an inability to state more than sixty words, any words, in one's own language during three minutes?

What shall we say of the fact that only 45 percent can give 60 words in three minutes, when normal children of 11 years sometimes give 200 words in that time! It is hard to find an explanation except lack of intelligence or lack of vocabulary, and such a lack of vocabulary in an adult would probably mean lack of intelligence. How could a person live even 15 years in any environment without learning hundreds of names of which he could certainly think of 60 in three minutes? (1917, p. 251)

Or ignorance of the date, or even the month or year?

Must we again conclude that the European peasant of the type that immigrates to America pays no attention to the passage of time? That the drudgery of life is so severe that he cares not whether it is January or July, whether it is 1912 or 1906? Is it possible that the person may be of considerable intelligence and yet, because of the peculiarity of his environment, not have acquired this ordinary bit of knowledge, even though the calendar is not in general use on the continent, or is somewhat complicated as in Russia? If so what an environment it must have been! (1917, p. 250)

Since environment, either European or immediate, could not explain such abject failure, Goddard stated: "We cannot escape the general conclusion that these immigrants were of surprisingly low
intelligence" (1917, p. 251). The high proportion of morons still bothered Goddard, but he finally attributed it to the changing character of immigration: "It should be noted that the immigration of recent years is of a decidedly different character from the early immigration. . . . We are now getting the poorest of each race" (1917, p. 266). "The intelligence of the average 'third class' immigrant is low, perhaps of moron grade" (1917, p. 243). Perhaps, Goddard hoped out loud, things were better on the upper decks, but he did not test these wealthier customers.

What then should be done? Should all these morons be shipped back, or prevented from starting out in the first place? Foreshadowing the restrictions that would be legislated within a decade, Goddard argued that his conclusions "furnish important considerations for future actions both scientific and social as well as legislative" (1917, p. 261).

Meanwhile, at home, the feeble-minded must be identified and kept from breeding. In several studies, Goddard exposed the menace of moronity by publishing pedigrees of hundreds of worthless souls, charges upon the state and community, who would never have been born had their feeble-minded forebears been debarred from reproduction. Goddard discovered a stock of paupers and ne'er-do-wells in the pine barrens of New Jersey and traced their ancestry back to the illicit union of an upstanding man with a supposedly feeble-minded tavern wench. The same man later married a worthy Quakeress and started another line composed wholly of upstanding citizens. Since the progenitor had fathered both a good and a bad line, Goddard combined the Greek words for beauty (kallos) and bad (kakos), and awarded him the pseudonym Martin Kallikak. Goddard's Kallikak family functioned as a primal myth of the eugenics movement for several decades.

Goddard's study is little more than guesswork rooted in conclusions set from the start. His method, as always, rested upon the training of intuitive women to recognize the feeble-minded by sight. Goddard did not administer Binet tests in pine-barren shacks. Goddard's faith in visual identification was virtually unbounded. In 1919 he analyzed Edwin Markham's poem "The Man With The Hoe":

Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans Upon his hoe and gazes at the ground, The emptiness of ages in his face And on his back the burden of the world. . . .

Markham's poem had been inspired by Millet's famous painting of the same name. The poem, Goddard complained (1919, p. 239), "seems to imply that the man Millet painted came to his condition as the result of social conditions which held him down and made him like the clods that he turned over." Nonsense, exclaimed Goddard; most poor peasants suffer only from their own feeble-mindedness, and Millet's painting proves it. Couldn't Markham see that the peasant is mentally deficient? "Millet's Man With The Hoe is a man of arrested mental development—the painting is a perfect picture of an imbecile" (1919, pp. 239-240). To Markham's searing question: "Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?" Goddard replied that mental fire had never been kindled.

Since Goddard could determine degrees of mental deficiency by examining a painting, he certainly anticipated no trouble with flesh and blood. He dispatched the redoubtable Ms. Kite, soon to see further service on Ellis Island, to the pine barrens and quickly produced the sad pedigree of the kakos line.
It may be a small item in the midst of such absurdity, but I discovered a bit of more conscious skulduggery. My colleague Steven Selden and I were examining his copy of Goddard’s volume of the Kallikaks. The frontispiece shows a member of the kakos line, saved from depravity by confinement in Goddard’s institution at Vineland. Deborah, as Goddard calls her, is a beautiful woman (Fig. 5.1). She sits calmly in a white dress, reading a book, a cat lying comfortably on her lap. Three other plates show members of the kakos line, living in poverty in their rural shacks. All have a depraved look about them (Fig. 5.2). Their mouths are sinister in appearance; their eyes are darkened slits. But Goddard’s books are nearly seventy years old, and the ink has faded. It is now clear that all the photos of noninstitutionalized kakos were altered by inserting heavy dark lines to give eyes and mouths their diabolical appearance. The three plates of Deborah are unretouched.

Selden took his book to Mr. James H. Wallace, Jr., director of Photographic Services at the Smithsonian Institution. Mr. Wallace reports (letter to Selden, 17 March 1980):

There can be no doubt that the photographs of the Kallikak family members have been retouched. Further, it appears that this retouching was limited to the facial features of the individuals involved—specifically eyes, eyebrows, mouths, nose and hair. By contemporary standards, this retouching is extremely crude and obvious. It should be remembered, however, that at the time of the original publication of the book, our society was far less visually sophisticated. The widespread use of photographs was limited, and casual viewers of the time would not have nearly the comparative ability possessed by even pre-teenage children today. . . . The harshness clearly gives the appearance of dark, staring features, sometimes evilness, and sometimes mental retardation. It would be difficult to understand why any of this retouching was done were it not to give the viewer a false impression of the characteristics of those depicted. I believe the fact that no other areas of the photographs, or the individuals have been retouched is significant in this regard also. . . . I find these photographs to be an extremely interesting variety of photographic manipulation. (201)