

they are engaged in, and must be prepared to defend it on that basis.

Racism is a political act, and scientific racism is simply the recruitment of the trappings of science in pursuit of its ignoble goals. If scientific racism has a place in science, it debases the entire enterprise.

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Would you wish the research undone?

SIR — Rose offers a piece of moral advice in his Commentary. To instruct humankind that they should not do something is a serious undertaking: it should be clear what is enjoined and the consequences acknowledged.

Rose seems to argue that, by about 1975, it should have been clear to everyone that the question of genetic causes behind the black/white IQ gap was unanswerable. From that date, there was no excuse for Arthur Jensen or anybody else to persist.

I invite everyone to search the social-science literature of the past 34 years and ask whether or not they really wish that everything on the subject, pro or con, was missing. I thought that the first replies published to rebut Jensen were pathetic, and still do. Others must judge the value of my subsequent book *Race, IQ and Jensen* (Routledge & Kegan Paul; 1980); the theory of intelligence that limits *g* — the ‘general intelligence factor’ — to explaining individual differences; the Dickens–Flynn model of the interaction of genes and environment; the analysis of the achievements of Chinese–Americans, and so forth. More distinguished contributions have been made than those that I have offered.

Imagine that IQ tests showed black American children having,

on average, a 15-point IQ advantage over white children. How many of us would denounce that finding as meaningless? Or would we be waving it like a banner, as evidence that only racists would attempt to dismiss? The scientifically respectable has a way of shifting, depending on how one thinks the debate is going.

As the philosopher John Stuart Mill points out, when you assert that a topic is not to be debated, you are foreclosing not some narrow statement of opinion on that topic, but the whole spiralling universe of discourse that it may inspire. Mill thought that only someone so self-deluded as to think his own judgement was infallible could wish to circumscribe an unpredictable future in this way.

Rose should be very certain he is correct. If not, and if he converts the rest of us, only Jensen and those of his persuasion will publish; and they will win the minds of students because the rest of us have all adopted a policy of unilateral disarmament.

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Measured intelligence is a product of social processes

SIR — ‘Eugenics’ is a word that most people believe has been consigned to history. The term makes us think of the horrors of Nazi Germany, or perhaps the sterilization of disabled people in places such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Sweden (see T. Shakespeare *et al.* *Genetic Politics: From Eugenics to Genome* New Clarion Press, 2002).

However, eugenic thinking also survives in contemporary education policy, in the belief that some children are simply ‘brighter’, ‘smarter’ or ‘more able’ than their contemporaries. In the US and UK systems, this assumption finds expression in schools’ use of ‘tracking’



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Do race and gender affect performance in the classroom?

and ‘setting by ability’, which separates children (from as early as the age of five in Britain) and sets them on very different paths.

Yet there is no way of measuring the limits of capability. Every test ever invented (whether an IQ test or a driving test) assesses only how well a person is currently able to perform certain tasks. Measured ‘intelligence’ is a product of social processes, not a determinant of them. The results often become self-perpetuating. Black children and their white peers from poor backgrounds are consistently over-represented in the lowest-ranked groups, where they cover less of the curriculum, are taught by less experienced teachers and make slower progress.

It is time that we were liberated from the racist and regressive ideas that have become so intrinsically bound up in the notion of intelligence. By finally having the courage to admit that contemporary patterns of class, race and gender inequity are wholly a product of our own policies and priorities, we might finally begin the urgent business of dismantling such injustice, rather than seeking to excuse it as an act of nature.

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Don’t fan the flames of a dead debate

SIR — Why study possible links between race, gender, genes and intelligence? In their Commentary, Ceci and Williams’s response seems to be that it provokes good scientists to sharpen their critique of the poor science of those who ask that question, and that this advances the field. I agree; when, in the late eighteenth century, rival proponents of phlogiston and oxygen battled it out to account for combustion, the controversy was illuminating. But it was decisively settled, and within a decade phlogiston was dead. So too with race, gender and IQ. We had the debates some 30 years ago and, as Ceci and Williams agree, those who argued for genetic explanations for group differences (phlogiston theorists) lost. So why reignite a dead debate, unless it is to serve some sociopolitical, not scientific, end?

Ceci and Williams list some of those who have continued to insist that the issue is not closed, and defend them against the criticisms, and in some cases hostility, they have generated. To make their point, they invoke the spectre of Trofim Lysenko. The comparison is illuminating. Lysenko falsified experimental