

# THE CHRONICLE of Higher Education

## ARCHIVES

# Debate Over Race and Intelligence

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✓ PREMIUM

To the Editor:

Professor Edward M. Miller has recently made several controversial statements regarding I.Q. and race ("An Economics Professor's Comments on Race and Intelligence Create a Furor," November 1). ... As professional biologists, we believe that some of his biological hypotheses and conclusions are wrong.

In his published papers and in a July letter to the *Gambit Weekly*, Miller cites evidence from the National Collaborative Perinatal Study to support his theory that blacks have smaller brains and, therefore, lower I.Q.'s. This study found a significant correlation between head size and I.Q. in children. ...

Statistical correlation does not prove causation. Even if the correlation between head size and I.Q. were real, it could be the result of both I.Q. and brain size being caused by a third factor such as nutritional state. The perinatal study found a significant correlation between body weight and I.Q., yet Miller has not suggested that obese people have superior intelligence. Further, the head-size difference between the two races was extremely small, about 1 per cent. Differences in neuron density, organization, or information-processing speed could be more important in determining intelligence than brain size.

Miller attempts to convince readers that most experts agree that much of the difference in mean I.Q. scores between blacks and whites is genetic by quoting a survey of psychologists conducted by Mark Snyderman and Stanley Rotheman. Miller did not mention that 24 per cent of the survey's respondents do not believe that there are sufficient data to support *any* reasonable opinion on this question. Most geneticists

would agree that there are insufficient data to support this conclusion. The American Society of Genetics has stated that "in our view there is no convincing evidence of a genetic difference in intelligence between races." ...

Miller's attempts to explain how these alleged racial differences in intelligence and behavior arose are also riddled with serious errors. Miller advances an idea called "paternal investment theory," which states that "in cold climates, males were selected for provisioning, rather than for mating success. In warm climates, where female gathering [of food] made male provisioning unessential, selection was for mating success." He later states that "men try to convince women that ... they have resources and will devote them to ... a particular woman and her children ... while women try to convince men that they will be sexually faithful to them." From this he deduces that there will be strong selection for high intelligence in order to recognize possible deception by the other sex. Finally, he concludes that "in northern climates where provisioning has the greatest impact on offspring survival, selection for intelligence will be greatest."

Even if we assume that his "paternal investment hypothesis" is plausible, it does not necessarily predict that selection for intelligence is stronger in cold climates. Identifying plants and animals that are suitable food, avoiding predators, and other social interactions may all require intelligence. It is unlikely that these factors are less important in warm climates.

His argument depends, in part, on the assumption that environments in cold climates are more variable and less predictable than tropical environments over a very long period of evolutionary time. Evidence from Paul Colinvaux of the Smithsonian Institution and many others has shown that tropical environments have been neither constant nor predictable in the past. Miller's argument requires small families to out-compete large ones, which is possible only under extremely restrictive conditions. It fails completely if offspring can help care for themselves or cooperate with relatives, as is typical for humans.

Several of Miller's papers are reviews wherein he interprets data collected, analyzed, and published by other researchers. Although Miller claims to be using his expertise in statistics, in several papers we have read, he appears not to be involved in the active

collection or the primary analysis of these data.

Pamela G. O'Neil

Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences

Candace Timpfe

Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences

James S. Rogers

Professor of Biological Sciences

Jerome J. Howard

Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences

University of New Orleans

New Orleans

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To the Editor:

I would like to comment on "An Economics Professor's Comments on Race and Intelligence Create a Furor," by Denise K. Magner.

First, the article, as written, belongs in the editorial/Point of View pages rather than in *The Chronicle's* news pages. The article presents a political position rather than depicting events.

Second, the first paragraph is an example of poor journalism. ... The paragraph reads: "An economics professor has caused a furor at the University of New Orleans by asserting there is a clear connection between brain size, race, and intelligence." What caused the "furor"? The fact that the professor teaches economics? Seems unlikely. Must be something else. To be accurate, the professor actually wrote that there was a "positive correlation between head size and intelligence." That Ms. Magner changed the technical "positive correlation," which is demonstrable, to "clear connection," which is subjective, evinces that the article belongs on the editorial page.

There *are* significant correlations between brain size and I.Q. The data are in the public domain. There *are* significant differences in brain size among blacks, whites, and (northeast) Asians. The data are in the public domain. ... What is the cause of the furor? Ms. Magner provides zero analysis of the question.

Let's look at the word Ms. Magner selected: "furor." A number of different definitions are available, per *The American Heritage Dictionary*:

1. "Violent anger; frenzy." Probably not the reality. Ms. Magner reported no violence.
2. "A state of intense excitement or ecstasy." Again, probably not the New Orleans case. Ms. Magner reported no ecstasy.
3. "A general commotion; public disorder or uproar." No evidence was given of this. One provost does not a public make.
4. "A fashion adopted enthusiastically by the public; fad." This definition does not seem aligned with the rest of the report.

I humbly request that *The Chronicle's* staff allocate news to the news section and opinion to the editorial section. ...

Wade C. Mackey

Bryan, Texas

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