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Their Own Self

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The Coming Storm

Maybe, Anyway

Thursday, April 29, 2003

The Bell Curve, an excellent book more maligned than read, pointed out a trend seldom noticed. The authors called it “cognitive stratification,” not a phrase Byron would have chosen but serviceable enough. It means the concentration of the intelligent.

In 1850 people of high intelligence were dispersed through the population. If the child of a cowboy had an IQ of 160, he would probably remain in the geographical region with cowboys. He might be more successful than most, and might choose as friends the quicker wits thereabouts. Yet he would be part of the community.

A cowboy could be intelligent, but didn't have to be. But then came the professions that required high intelligence. The dull-witted cannot work as programmers, chemists, engineers, doctors, or investment brokers. They can be decent and productive. They cannot write assembly code for a planetary probe.

In 1850 there were few jobs requiring the very bright. Today they abound. Universities began to scour the country for the highly intelligent. These, once found, met each other at elite universities or, later, in the places where the bright concentrated to work: Laboratories, software houses, hospitals, magazine journalism, and occasionally law firms. They married each other. Their children tended to be bright. The result has been that the bright tend to live, play, work, and sleep almost entirely with each other.

An opposite concentration occurs at the other end of the curve. In the cities the bright among the ghetto rise and leave for the suburbs. Who is left behind? If, generation after generation, the smartest take themselves out of the gene pool, the results will be just what we see. This is the underclass. It exists. It is larger than most people suspect. It is dangerous.

“Underclass” is not synonymous with “blacks.” There is a large and, I gather, growing black middle class. There is a substantial white component in the underclass. In the barrios of California one encounters Mexican unsalvageables. Whatever their color, they share low intelligence, little education, bastardy, and a tendency toward antisocial behavior. (Or, as we call it in English, “crime.”) They have no attachment to the standards that constitute civilization. They hate those above them.

Many of the insulated bright imagine themselves to be liberal (an arguable proposition), to care about “the people,” and to favor “diversity.” Few I’ll guess have had any contact with the underclass, or even with people who don’t have degrees. They have never been in South Central, never spent time in roadside stores in backcountry Kentucky or hung out with the crackers of Florida. They have never really met even normally intelligent rural people, whom they call “rednecks.” At their parties you do not see bus drivers or cops or factory hands.

If they knew “the people” they would not like them. The diversity they ideologically approve are people they viscerally detest. Down inside they must know this: It is why they avoid them. The diverso-elite alliance is a fragile one.

The elite do not understand, or perhaps more correctly refuse to admit, how very limited are the dull. They can’t concede that the course of managed improvement that they once believed in for the underclass, and try still to believe in, won’t work. Thus for example they call for programs to close the “cybergap,” and bring the internet to the downtrodden. They don’t understand that the downtrodden can’t use the internet, and aren’t interested.

The very bright assume without thinking that people can learn anything they choose. A woman who graduates from Yale in biochemistry takes for granted that if she wants to learn Italian, she can. It will take time and effort but she will have no doubt as to the outcome. New digital camera? She can figure out how to use it without the manual. She is used to gas chromatographs and gene sequencers. Learn PhotoShop? She just does it. After all, it’s only software. She assumes, unless she thinks carefully, that people know history, politics, literature, because she does and everyone she knows does.

It isn’t so. There are huge numbers of people who don’t read books, have never read a book, who can’t read. According to Newsweek,* forty-seven percent of Detroit is functionally illiterate. The illiterate live in a mental world beyond the

capacity of a biochemist to imagine. Try to erase from your mind everything that you have ever read. Then imagine regarding a camera as simply incomprehensible. Or a checkbook.

The cognitive elite tend to favor diversity and affirmative action. They say that they believe that all groups are equally intelligent, and furiously resist evidence to the contrary. Yet by now they have to know it isn't true. Believing what you know to be false, pretending to like people you naturally loathe, stresses the tectonic plates. A spring is being wound.

The potential for conflict is high. The underclass—the diversity—exact a price. It is responsible for crime, almost all crime, which carries with it the cost of the prisons, police forces, decay of the cities, welfare both open and hidden, and a decline in the tenor of life.

The need to make the merely dull-witted seem not to be, even though they are not necessarily of the underclass, degrades the schools. The beneficiaries of affirmative actions, though they are seldom of the underclass, are frequently of the same racial groups. This fuels a quiet anger, a racial anger, among the middle class, who among themselves no longer even pretend that things are not as they obviously are. It isn't quite reasonable that it should be racial, but it is.

The elite can buy their way into safe neighborhoods and better schools. The economic middle class cannot. They resent paying for welfare, resent taking up the slack for workers who don't, and have no ideological attachment to diversity. As the baby boomers retire, suggest some,** the cost of their maintenance to the working middle class will become so burdensome as to engender revolt.

Diversity as a spoils system just may be heading toward its end. It's curious: I don't know anyone who objects to hiring without regard to race, creed, or color. I know almost no one who isn't angry about affirmative action--and about the enstupidation of the schools for the benefit of the uninterested, and about unending crime.... If the dam finally breaks, what then?

* [Detroit](#)

** [John Derbyshire](#) the reason for reading *National Review*

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Which may or may not be a good thing. At any rate, there are other twisted, brain-fried wackos out there who have too much time on their hands and read this stuff, probably while cleaning their guns. But don't worry. This site wraps its IP packets in plain brown envelopes marked "Kinky Books" so your neighbors won't know. Anyway, to the extent that counters mean anything, which isn't much of an extent, this sucker gives the number of columns read, not counting subscribers, since Monday, October 8, 2002. Whoopee-do. More or less.

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