

Ding Dong

By Thomas W. Hazlett

Charles Murray fails to ring my bell.

WHEN CHARLES MURRAY'S *In Pursuit* came out in 1988, I wrote him a two-page letter extolling the work. Filled with fascinating insights, the book made the case for individual liberty in real, fleshy tones. It was a brilliant treatise, a fact not lost on *The Washington Post*'s William Raspberry, who made his book report a two-part editorial page series. Despite philosophical differences with Murray, he was profoundly challenged by the tome.

Having read Charles's last great book, I very much look forward to reading his next. But based on his recent attempt in *The New Republic* to summarize his current ballyhooed effort, *The Bell Curve* is not it.

To his credit, Murray looks the bull squarely in the eyes in the essay, focusing on the alleged relationship between IQ and race. The short story is that raw intelligence counts for a lot in life and that IQ doesn't change much for either individuals (at least after their potty-training years) or for groups. African Americans as a group are low on the IQ totem pole, Asians high, Europeans in the middle. So? The fact that *individuals* differ widely and that attitude also counts for a lot encompasses everything that is relevant about racial differences for public policy.

The most upbeat recommendation Charles can muster is for each group to celebrate its own relative qualities (even if intelligence ain't among 'em). If the Scots can celebrate thrift (because their clan is known to be so tight they squeak), then all of us can look to pronounced group attributes as handsome qualities, and rejoice in our genetically driven uniqueness. Thus, what Murray labels a conservative multiculturalism.

Is abject social failure to be offset by the counterclaim: "Where I'm from, people are desperately poor and stupid, but pride themselves on being outstanding at a wide range of Nintendo games"? This is offensiveness squared! Wasn't it *In Pursuit* that boldly explained how happiness is achieved via an individual's performance against *himself*—according to all the best scientific research. Not a lot about group performance there. Race norming, liberal or conservative, emits an odious scent, one which would make a devotee of *In Pursuit*'s glorification of the American Dream gag.

The thesis that good genes are terribly important is unassailable, but they are surely far less important than other environmental variables—such as *place of birth*. A smart person born in China will, on average, make far less than an intellectually challenged person born in California. When Murray claims that perhaps 60 percent of achievement can be attributed to IQ, the remainder to environmental factors, he has performed an interesting sleight of hand by delimiting the analysis to like cultural groupings.

Exploring the racial IQ theory across cultures would explode the myth of genetic determinism. Why are the Asian countries so desperately poor, on average, when their IQs are higher than Europeans? Why were the East Germans so failure prone compared to West Germans, using income as a proxy for success? And how have the Argentinians, once with a per capita income seventh highest in the world, fallen to the impoverished status of "less-developed country"?

When Murray says that IQ explains 60 percent of the outcome, he thinks he means that, in estimated regression equations, IQ variation will track 60 percent of the income differences. This itself, as noted, is something of a trick. But what

does the 60-percent claim mean, operationally? Does Michael Jordan just walk on the court and score 32 a game because he's got the right stuff, or does he practice every day of his life—and exude an awesome competitive spirit—to achieve greatness?

The obvious answer is the latter, which is not to say that genes that make you grow to 6'6" are not a factor. But if effort (shaped by our environment) is only 40 percent of the total, it is 100 percent of the component we may directly affect, personally or with social policy.

Murray does proclaim, "Heredity is not destiny." Nice try, Charles, but if that is so, why do you dwell on it insufferably? Why do you predict that we are not liable to change intelligence much, citing the failure of Head Start programs as proof? If government uplift debacles implied that real people could not achieve real results, then the very real failure of federal housing programs would prove the theoretical inability of modern societies to find shelter.

MURRAY USED TO UNDERSTAND THAT government was failing and that poor people were pretty much like us; now he believes that poor people are failing and the government is pretty much like us. The poor and unemployed just do not have the intellectual firepower to work hard, suffer through low wages and odd jobs while juggling school, career, and family, and send their kids off to a better life. Now the poor really are victims, and it really would be cruel to leave them to the harsh challenges of real life.

A decade ago, another great book by one Charles Murray bravely challenged conventional wisdom on welfare policy by considering the poor just plain folks: Given wrong incentives they will make

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