

Racism, Charles Murray, and Free Speech By Steven Jonas

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Charles Murray is best known as the co-author of a tract called *The Bell Curve*. It attempted to establish that "blacks" are intellectually inferior to "whites," because of their genetic make-up. It then went on to state that being the case, society as a whole (namely "white" society) shouldn't spend any money on trying to improve the lives of "blacks" in any way.

Murray frequently gets campus speaking engagements, usually arranged by rightist organizations like the American Enterprise Institute Club. Murray was recently invited to speak at Middlebury College, a liberal arts institution set in the verdant Green Mountains of Vermont. (As a child, I spent a bit of time there, for my mother, who later became a translator of Russian music books, was studying the language there in a summer program.) There was against his appearance a very strong demonstration by a large number of students, and he never did get to speak. We shall get to the "free speech" issue at the end of this column, but first let's consider what Murray is about.

In my book, *The 15% Solution: How the Republican Religious Right Took Control of the U.S., 1981-2022: A Futuristic Novel*, currently being serialized on OpEdNews and several other webmagazines, I wrote an extensive Appendix (No. VI) about Murray and his collaborator at the time, one Richard Herrnstein. This column consists in part of an abridged version of that Appendix.

In 1994 Murray and Herrnstein published *The Bell Curve* (New York: The Free Press). They attempted to prove that the lower "Intelligence Quotient" levels (IQ) found by some researchers among "blacks" as compared with "whites" were produced by genetic differences between the two groups (Browne, M.W., "What Is Intelligence, and Who Has It?" [a review of *The Bell Curve* along with two other racist books], *The New York Times Book Review*, October 16, 1994, (p.3).

Then, making the leap that IQ differentials established genetic differentials between various groups of people, they went on to argue that since "blacks" were genetically inferior to "whites," it didn't make any sense for the latter to spend any money trying to bring the former up to either educational or economic speed. Acknowledging the racist content of their analysis, they called it "scientific racism," as if that somehow would clean it up.

One detail always ignored by racists, whether of the scientific or non-scientific variety, was exactly how skin color can be used to define anyone into groups. First of all, it was a given that there was a very wide range of skin color in any of the "races" as the racists defined them. Some "blacks" have lighter skin tones than some "whites." But that makes no difference to the racists' group assignments. Furthermore, in any one individual whether "white" or "black," skin tone often changes over time in response to such factors as sun exposure, weathering, or ageing.

More importantly, however, is the fact that in the United States there are rarely any persons who are purely "black" in skin color, like native Africans are. Virtually all African-Americans are the product of, over the centuries, African women whose ancestors had been brought to North America as slaves, being impregnated by white men, most often involuntarily. This practice continued down through the Jim-Crow era. If African-Americans are indeed "intellectually inferior" due to their gene pool, this must mean that the countless white men who forcibly or otherwise impregnated formerly African women over the centuries were intellectually inferior too. However, this is a detail which seems to have slipped past the "intellectually superior" minds of Murray and Herrnstein as well as those of all the countless other U.S. racists down through the centuries, indeed to the present time. Indeed, as has so often been the case, such facts always fail to confuse the analysis of any dedicated racist, whether of the scientific or the non-scientific variety.

"Scientific" racism had a long history in the white Western world, linked with the names of such discredited "scientists" as Jensen and Shockley, Galton and Pearson, Osborn and Davenport. Its "scientific" base had been on more than one occasion shown to be patently false, as for example in the lengthy book by Allan Chase entitled *The Legacy of Malthus*:

The Social Costs of the New Scientific Racism (Knopf, 1977). Chase summarized the general theory of "scientific" racism well in the Preface to his book (p. xv):

'Scientific racism' is, essentially, the perversion of scientific and historical facts to create the myth of two distinct races of humankind. The first of these 'races' is, in all countries, a small elite whose members are healthy, wealthy (generally by inheritance), and educable. The other 'race' consists of the far larger populations of the world who are vulnerable, poor or non-wealthy, and allegedly uneducable by virtue of hereditarily inferior brains. In the teachings of scientific racism, most of the human race's physiological ailments, anatomical defects, behavioral disorders and -- above all else -- the complex of socio-economic afflictions called poverty are classified as being caused by the inferior hereditary or genetic endowments of people and races. Historically, these core pseudo-genetic myths ... have provided ... 'scientific' rationales for doing nothing or next to nothing about the prevention of scores of well-understood impediments to proper physical and mental development...Coupled, as it often is and has been, with much older forms of gut racism based on religious, racial, and ethnic bigotry, scientific racism invariably exacerbates the already agonizing traumas ... for all minorities from Auschwitz and Belfast to Boston and Birmingham (AL). Nevertheless, bigotry is not one of the functions of scientific racism; it is merely a later adjunct in the furtherance of the basic socioeconomic functions of scientific racism."

And, one might add, its political functions as well.

Jim Naureckas, editor of has put this matter of the Murray/Herrnstein book very well ("Racism Resurgent: How Media Let The Bell Curve's Pseudo Science Define the Agenda on Race," FAIR: EXTRA!, Jan./Feb. 1995, p. 12):

When The New Republic devoted almost an entire issue 10/31/94 [Author's Note: appropriately, Halloween], to a debate with the authors of The Bell Curve, editor Andrew Sullivan [note that, dear reader] justified the decision by writing: 'The notion that there might be resilient ethnic differences in intelligence is not, we believe, an inherently racist belief.' [oh really, Andrew?] In fact, the idea that some races are inherently inferior to others is the definition of racism. What The New Republic was saying -- along with other media outlets that prominently and respectfully considered the thesis ... is that racism is a respectable intellectual position, and had a legitimate place in the national debate on race..." However, Naureckas went on to point out, nearly all the "research" Murray and Herrnstein cited to support their claims on the relationship between race and IQ was paid for by the Pioneer Fund, characterized by the London Sunday Telegraph, hardly left-wing itself, as a "neo-Nazi organization closely integrated with the far right in American politics."

Presently, the Southern Poverty Law Center describes Murray (Seelye) as a "white nationalist" who uses "pseudoscience and misleading statistics to argue that social inequality is caused by the genetic inferiority of black [and now] Latino communities, women, and the poor [generally, I guess]. One does have to wonder how he would classify rich folks and become poor and poor folks who become rich. But, as some say, consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds. (Actually, that's only said by inconsistent folks who get caught, but that's another matter.)

Naureckas points out that Herrnstein and Murray, not wanting to be confused by facts, simply ignored the findings of social scientists like Jane Mercer that when IQ differences are found, they wash out if the data are adjusted for socioeconomic variables. Further, even back in 1994-5, there was 50 years of research in population genetics. A principal finding of the definitive work in the field, the book The History and Geography of Human Genes by Luca Cavalli-Sforza, Paolo Menozzi, and Alberto Piazza is that (Subramanian, S., "The Story in Our Genes," Time, January 16, 1995, p. 54):

Once genes for surface traits such as coloration and stature are discounted, the human races are remarkably alike under the skin. The variation among individuals is much greater than differences among groups. In fact, the diversity among individuals is so enormous that the whole concept of race becomes meaningless at the genetic level. The authors say there is 'no scientific basis' for theories touting the genetic superiority of any population over another."

Finally, the newspaper columnist Robert Reno commented on Herrnstein/Murray's use of psychometry (a now discarded field that was about as much a science as were alchemy and phrenology) ("Bell Curve' Just Gives Ammo to Garbage Carriers," Newsday, October 26, 1994):

(1.) The 'science' of psychometry -- the measurement of mental abilities -- has a lengthy and somewhat disreputable history. The ideas that even modern IQ tests have reached some state-of-the-art infallibility is ridiculous. The slop Murray has served up is not only unappetizing but warmed over. Proving the inferiority of races has for 100 years been the mischief of self-promoting scholars as credentialed as Murray and as squalid as the louts who churned out the 'science' behind Dr. Goebbels' loathsome ravings. Giving Murray an 'A' for originality -- or even guts -- is an offense to their infamy. There is a convincing body of scientific literature suggesting Murray is simply wrong, is practicing bad genetics, that interracial differences in IQ scores are really explained by such factors as pre- and post-natal experiences."

Nevertheless, there are some cooks who never get tired of serving up slop, and Murray is apparently among them. But the majority of students at Middlebury just didn't like the taste and never gave Murray the chance to offer it up.

But what about "free speech," then? An editorial on The New York Times on the subject was entitled "Smothering Speech at Middlebury" Oh really? Supposing that Murray was a well-known anti-Semite (and given Breitbart, etc., in certain circles anti-Semitism is being given a certain buffing. Further, anti-Semitic violence is now occurring on a regular basis, certainly without any national outrage greeting it). If he had indeed been invited (which he almost certainly wouldn't have been because although old-fashioned racism is OK for discussion in certain "liberal" circles, like the one inhabited by the President of Middlebury, one Laurie Patton) anti-Semitism almost certainly would not be. But wouldn't that be "silencing free speech?"

And then what about what happened to Milo Yiannopoulos at the recent annual Conservative Political Action Conference? At CPAC, for years, racism, Islamophobia, homophobia, and etc. have all been OK, indeed promoted by some attendees and speakers. Yiannopoulos, a gay man himself, has been particularly big on the first two. But when it came out that he had in the past condoned pederasty and spoke positively of sexual experiences with Catholic priests he had growing up, well, that earned him a dis-invitation. Of course, rightists like Bill Kristol and the Fox "News" Channel's (or should I say the Republican Party Propaganda Channel's) Brit Hume went absolutely nuts about what happened to Murray at Middlebury. Somehow, they failed to notice that CPAC did the same thing to Yiannopoulos. But "limiting free speech" is really all relative, as this whole episode shows.

Racism was not OK at Middlebury. Pederasty was not OK at CPAC. So far, anti-Semitism would be not OK at either. But if students "smother free speech" over racism, why is not CPAC's action "smothering free speech as well?" And since in certain quarters Breitbart is considered to be anti-Semitic, when will the prevention of anti-Semitic speeches at universities and similar venues be considered "smothering of free speech" too? One does not have to go back to the McCarthy Era to realize that "free speech" is indeed a relative term, whether a majority of U.S. like to think of it that way or not.

