

## **INSTITUTIONALIZED LEGACIES, LEGITIMATION, AND THE ENDURING LINK BETWEEN RACISM AND TRACKING**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examines enduring links between tracking and racism in the United States historically, tracing the virulent racism of the nineteenth century to Progressive Era educational reforms. After the Civil War, the South implemented Jim Crow laws, enforcing inequality based on Negro inferiority<sup>1</sup>. School reforms culminated in the industrial model of differentiated curriculum tracks and manual training; students were ranked and separated via standardized, norm-referenced tests (IQ and related). Social Darwinist beliefs (ability as purely genetic, poor and Negroes mentally deficient) justified these practices. To help explain why ability grouping and tracking remain prominent today, despite abatement of the more extreme racism and genetic views of the 1800s, the authors introduce historically-based institutionalized legacies (the counterpart of cultural lag). Implications include reforming/eliminating tracking that isolates at-risk groups from high-level curricular content, and increased awareness in teacher education regarding the legacy of racism vis-a-vis the origins/continued implicit practices of ability grouping.*

**Keywords:** Racism, Historical Perspectives, Tracking, Testing, Legitimation , Achievement Gap

### **1. Introduction**

The persistence of achievement gaps looms today as perhaps the greatest challenge facing American schooling.<sup>2</sup> Understanding and ameliorating these inequities, particularly for Blacks and Whites, is a driving force in current educational research and policy (cf. Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Portes, 2005). In fact, the emphasis on reducing achievement gaps has been formalized in educational policy in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and in many of the state school reform packages that have been adopted over the last couple of decades (Linn, 2005).

Complicating this issue are tacit convictions that connect achievement outcomes to individual differences in ability. A century ago, genetic explanations were pervasive and virtually unquestioned. Today most analysts and educators assert that school performance is *both* environmentally *and* genetically linked. (For superb discussions on race, deficit, and difference theories of individual ability and achievement, see Nisbett, 1998 and Persell, 1977.) Yet many Americans still believe strongly that genetic differences between the social classes and racial minorities (read African Americans) are the primary influence on the stratification system, as evidenced by the widespread popularity of *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). That work makes racism blatantly explicit, a position more openly espoused by conservatives (cf. Fraser, 1995). But it is likely that many educators also harbor these hereditarian views, albeit less candidly in admitting what has today become a politically incorrect taboo. Guskey (1981) and Smith (1989) provide evidence on the deep-seated genetic values and beliefs that underlie educational practice. And many are the professors of education who can point to frank incidents of White teachers revealing their true feelings about race and intelligence in unguarded moments.

## 2. Purpose

This paper explores historical linkages among these taken-for-granted beliefs about intelligence, race, ability grouping, and their effects on American schools. In particular, why does the practice of tracking remain so ubiquitous in American schooling today? During the Progressive Era, an extreme Social Darwinism held sway, positing that all individual differences were genetic, linked to race and social class. Those beliefs were an important factor in the development of separate tracks for students of different background who were destined for vastly divergent work/futures, justified by the new “science” of IQ testing (see S. K. Miller, 1985).

Today’s Social Darwinist beliefs are far less virulent and more moderate in degree (although they have certainly not disappeared), yet practices associated with ability grouping and tracking remain virtually unchanged, a hallmark of American schooling (cf. Kelly, 2008; Oakes, 1985, 1986; Spring, 1976).<sup>3</sup> Thus if the extremist genetic beliefs that contributed to the development of differentiated curriculum tracking as an organizational response to student differences *are no longer dominant*, why does the practice continue unchanged, as if there were no lessening of the radical views that originally justified those old arrangements?

### 2.1. Accommodating Student Differences

Schools have essentially two options for accommodating differences in student aptitude and readiness: (a) individualize instruction so that each student is taught a common curriculum at his/her own level, or (b) differentiate the curriculum so that pupils at different levels are grouped together and taught separate content at different rates of progress (Burns, 1987; Fenstermacher & Goodlad, 1983). Virtually all research on instructional improvement represents some variation of these two strategies. What is most remarkable about this ongoing debate is the extent to which the latter approach, developed and institutionalized during the decades-long reforms of the Progressive Era (Cremin, 1961) has remained dominant despite widespread debate/critique about the success of such practices (Borg, 1966; Schafer & Olexa, 1971; Slavin, 1990; Watanabe, 2008).

Clearly the schools’ institutional responsibility for batch processing large numbers of young people--in-locus control, the immediate demands of content coverage, pressures for accountability, and students who have vastly different levels of readiness for and aptitude/interest in learning (cf. the classic discussion by Bidwell, 1965)--accounts for some of this response. In that regard, differentiating content and pacing via distinct ability levels and tracking is easier to handle organizationally than implementing individualized and/or whole group strategies of instruction that meet the needs of each student. Easier, but not necessarily better.

Critiques of ability grouping/tracking have consistently noted the inequitable outcomes for students from at-risk backgrounds, with both race and class singled out for attention (e.g., Murphy & Hallinger, 1989; Rosenbaum, 1976). Ironically, even one of the most ardent modern champions of the position that individual differences are primarily genetic, not environmental (Jensen, 1969), has pointed out that ability grouping disadvantages the lower level students and exacerbates whatever differences exist in the first place (Jensen, 1980). (The more that individual differences are based on genotype, a substrate of gene-deep differences, the more justifiable a system of differentiated curricular ability levels; conversely the more that individual differences are phenotypic, the effects of environmental conditions interacting with genetic variation--a problem disproportionately affecting at-risk populations negatively, the more harm that separating learners according to their current functional level does.) In effect leveling (grouping) denies exposure to the high-level instructional quality/challenging content that those with under-estimated potential need to bridge their environmentally imposed deficits and realize their latent abilities.

In the remainder of this work, a brief historical sketch of the origins of testing, racist creeds, post Civil War schooling, and the influence of Jim Crow laws is recounted, followed by a description of the industrial model of schooling developed during the Progressive Era. How ability grouping/tracking came to be the dominant organizational structure of these schools is related to the debates over the value of classic liberal education for all versus pragmatic “industrial training” and efficiency for the masses. This historical account is related to the notion of legitimation, how society justifies the extant mechanisms for maintaining the stratification system during any given era. Finally, the authors introduce the concept *institutionalized legacies*, essentially the counterpart of cultural lag, to help explain why certain practices, dependent on attitudes/beliefs long since debunked, appear to be structurally immutable, as if the original values were still viable.

The scope of this paper is necessarily limited. The fields of testing, tracking, and racism are voluminous; citations for these and other issues are merely illustrative, necessary to sketch connections hypothesized in this work. Exhaustive treatment of these scholarly fields is not possible given time and space. This is particularly relevant for the concept of institutionalized legacy that is introduced here; a full conceptual analysis must await further development.

### **3. Testing and Stratification in Historical Perspective**

References to testing date to Biblical times (Judges, n.d., Chapter 7), where Gideon instructed the faint in heart to return home. From the original army of 32,000, only 10,000 remained. Gideon implemented God's test to find the most valorous soldiers. Those who drank leisurely at the waterside were deemed too self-centered, not prepared to sacrifice their own needs for the good of the nation. Gideon eliminated individuals until the army stood at a mere 300. In Plato's, *The Republic*, Socrates recommends the separation of individuals into three categories: rulers, auxiliaries, and craftsmen. Unlike Gideon who sorted by fitness and motivation for combat, Plato recommended separation according to social class. To convince the populace to accept their proscribed position, Plato instructed rulers to inculcate a "noble lie," that the gods had fitted people for a particular role, that these arrangements were static, and that only occasional mobility between classes could be expected (cf. Waldman, 1982). Selection for Plato was intended for social management and premised on maintaining the class structure.

Modern testing dates back to the early 1800s in Europe, originating out of displeasure over limited mobility (Woolridge, 1994). Leadership and responsibilities were inherited, but royalty frequently employed gifted non-royals to manage their affairs. Frustrated with this arrangement, the middle class pushed to replace the rigid class system with mobility through merit. Reformers and education leaders sought to develop talent early, regardless of origin. Tests that could measure this aptitude had the potential to improve both individual advancement and social efficiency. The essay had long been the preferred method of evaluation, but standardized norm-referenced assessments quickly became the dominant tool for allocation and selection in the U.S. in the early 1900s. The IQ, purportedly capable of measuring intelligence scientifically, represented both the essence and the ideological rationale for the testing movement (Marks, 1980).

Woolridge (1994) argues that the men who developed intelligence tests revered characteristics prevalent in their own lives and structured the testing to be advantageous for children who were convergent in their thinking and conforming in their personalities: "[M]en tend to admire qualities which they themselves exemplify; . . . [it's] possible that these psychologists loaded their tests, albeit unconsciously, in favor of children with personalities like their own" (p. 216). Intelligence tests were normed on individuals who reflected upper middle class, White Eurocentric values, attended elite schools, and frequently received personal tutoring. Despite this extreme bias in the selection of norming groups, differences in backgrounds were ignored. Genes, not environment, were believed to produce differentiated outcomes on these new assessments, both individually and between groups. Put bluntly, the lower classes and racial minorities, particularly Blacks, were perceived as having limited intelligence (cf. Marks, 1980).

#### **3.1. Justifying Stratification**

There is an underlying economic thread (cf. Harris, 1979) in all of these historical perspectives on testing: how to convince a restless public that the existing stratification system is just and fair (see Della Fave, 1980). Coincident with the closing of the western frontier in the United States in the latter stages of the nineteenth century, opportunities for mobility were significantly reduced. At the same time large numbers of unskilled laborers found themselves stuck in menial urbanized manufacturing jobs that were physically demanding, repetitious, and often dangerous, while promising no prospects for mobility. Questions were being raised about whether the American Dream really was open to everyone, wherein individual initiative and opportunity ("go west, young man") were the keys to "making it." (Other fields, e.g., class conflict and Neo-Marxist models--cf. Bowles & Gintis, 1977; Collins, 1971--also question the validity of America as a meritocracy based on talent, but are beyond the purview of this work.)

Norm-referenced testing in the schools and the military represented a major change in the legitimization of the highly stratified American society. American beliefs in equality evolved *from* equality of opportunity (EO) *to* equality of educational opportunity (EEO).

With this redefining of the American Dream (see Marks, 1980; S. K. Miller, 1985), the explanation for mobility had now shifted, from initiative and effort in agrarian America (EO) to vast differences in intelligence and concomitant success in school for a newly urbanized and industrialized United States (EEO). Thus had the American system of stratification been re-legitimized, i.e., beliefs in social mobility historically and still today depend not just on an efficient mechanism for allocation and selection, but one that is widely accepted as non-discriminatory and impartial by the larger populace, particularly those in the lower strata who must be convinced that their lack of status is their just dessert (cf. Della Fave, 1980; L. S. Miller, 1995; S. K. Miller; Persell, 1977). Similar arguments could be made regarding the other historical cases noted above (e.g., S. K. Miller, 1980).

#### **4. Historical Trends on Black Inferiority and Schooling**

If today's racist beliefs have become politically incorrect and taboo, no such strictures existed in the nineteenth century. Biddiss (1970) examines the work of Arthur Gobineau (1853-1855/1970), known as the "Father of Racism" for his theoretical treatise, *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*. Gobineau gave a patina of academic respectability to widespread racist convictions, arguing that the difference between races was innate and permanent. By the end of the century, Herbert Spencer's views on race, class, and intelligence had become prevalent in the form of Social Darwinism: the poor and minorities occupied their low status in life because they were simply less intelligent (cf. Hofstadter, 1944). More bluntly, the Negro was often depicted as an animal (see Carroll's 1900 book, *The Negro: A Beast or in the Image of God*). Pre Civil War, public education was established in Washington, DC in 1804 for Whites. A few free Negroes were educated in private schools that emphasized reading, writing, and arithmetic. This was illustrated by the Resolute Beneficial Society School, opening in 1818 and sponsored by a group of free colored men: "An improvement of the intellect and morals of colored youth being the object of this institution, the patronage of benevolent ladies and gentlemen, by donation or subscription, is humbly solicited in aid of the fund..." (cited in Dabney, 1949, p. 20).

Despite these few success stories, most slaves were denied access to education. Given the strict authority prevailing in most Negro homes, children learned very little about how to reason. One slave recounted her home life: "They never would ask you what you liked, they would just fix it and give it to you, and you had to eat it 'cause you were children" (Egypt, Masukoka, & Johnson, 1945, p. iv). Both authoritarian parenting and the limits on education constituted poor preparation for life outside slavery. Debate on the Blair Bill in the Alabama Senate reflected this reality. Senator Morgan noted that slavery taught and enforced family disorganization and general dependency on the part of the Negroes; James Pugh, another senator indicated "...they were kept in a state of utter ignorance to make them efficient as property" (cited in Bond, 1939, p. 20).

##### **4.1. Post Civil War Schooling**

By the end of the Civil War, both North and South were entrenched in the battle over universal education and its relationship to the Negro. Particularly in the South during the 1800s, secondary education, where the classic liberal education prevailed, belonged to the higher social classes (Cremin, 1961; Oakes, 1985; Ravitch, 2000). Affluent Whites along with a few working class Whites and African Americans attended private schools--first Latin-grammar schools, and then private academies that added more practical math and science classes. The first public high school did not appear until the 1870s, in Michigan (Cremin, 1961), based primarily on what would today be considered a college preparatory curriculum. For the vast majority of Americans, schooling consisted of and ended after the Common School, the grade 1-8 public schools that had a common curriculum (the three Rs with a decidedly moralistic tenor), common (taxpayer) funding, and common attendance areas--although it is safe to say that many children never completed even this level of schooling (cf. Nasaw, 1979).

##### **4.2. Jim Crow and Schooling in the South**

The reconstruction of the South required reworking the social contract, particularly the institutionalized strictures by which elites managed subordination of class and race, justified by an ideology of racial inferiority. Before the war, states governed the Negro via naked force: slavery, segregation policies, and the Black Codes. During reconstruction, the ostensible "freedom" of the Negroes required a more subtle, legalized form of control. As questions arose regarding the Negro and his place in society, the specter of oppression loosed its influence in the guise of Jim Crow laws (DuBois, 1903; Sherer, 1977). The historian Samuel Eliot Morison (1972) described Jim Crow as a "blackfaced character in a popular minstrel show of the 1830's who did a song-and-dance routine" (p. 108).

The theme was somewhat derogatory: “Jump, Jim Crow! After the Civil War Jim’s name began to be used, like ‘darkey,’ as a slightly less insulting term than ‘nigger’” (p. 108). Later the expression became associated with laws mandating segregation. Educational policy makers viewed schooling as the key to social efficiency and hence a solution to the question, “what should be done with the Negro?” The voracious labor needs of the agricultural South required a special form of training for the Negro: preparation for a subordinate place in society. More bluntly, the Planters in the South clearly did not promote an education movement that prepared a society of “coloreds” to think (Woodson, 1933).

Central to this larger debate was the appropriate type of schooling and educational content for the different classes and races. Differentiated schooling with different curriculum and purpose for different groups became increasingly popular (Sherer, 1977). Supporters of manual labor argued that traditional liberal education, providing access to the wisdom of departed civilizations (government, leadership, literature, and the arts), was relevant only as preparation of elite students for college—a destiny not in the future of poor or Negro youth. By 1886, the classic focus had changed to include a curriculum of drawing, design, and tool usage. The evolving rationale for the developing system of vocational tracks was social efficiency (Glass, 2008; Ravitch, 2000).

### ***5. Differentiated Schooling--The Industrial Model***

Not everyone agreed with this push toward manual training for the masses. In the Chair’s report to the National Education Association Committee of Ten in 1894, Charles Eliot (1894) argued that education for the many should follow the same pattern as that given to the social elite. He called for the mental disciplining of all minds, for the betterment of society.

Nevertheless, Eliot’s position was clearly not dominant. Common wisdom held that most immigrant children lacked the mental capacity for academic studies (Ravitch, 2000). The influx of newcomers from Southern and Eastern Europe created a strong push for “Americanizing” these foreigners, noticeably different in looks, language, and culture compared to the northern and Anglicized Europeans who preceded them. Educators, responding to these pressures and the need for a compliant industrial labor force, centralized controls over the schools. The primary vehicle was a highly differentiated curriculum; general and vocational tracks prepared students for factory jobs with a manual orientation. Order, following rules, punctuality, and obedience to authority were keys to this “socialization,” a value orientation prescribed alike for new European immigrants and poor farmers seeking urban employment. Widely touted that the public schools would ameliorate social unrest and provide equal educational opportunity for all, the industrial model schools that emerged from the Progressive Era reforms became highly efficient sorting machines for the new manufacturing economy (see Cremin, 1961; Glass, 2008; Spring, 1976).

It is hardly surprising that educators targeted this same low level of intellectual training for the Negro. If anything, Negroes in that period suffered even greater isolation from the college preparatory curriculum reserved for elites. Negroes were denied exposure to the cognitive discipline critical to later achievement, measured by the new “science” of standardized mental testing. Hegemonic beliefs in the inferiority of the Negro reflected the Social Darwinism of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century (Cremin, 1961; Gould, 1996; Hofstadter, 1944). Individual differences were widely believed to be vast, innate (genetic), and immutable (Marks, 1980). These convictions purportedly explained the condition of the poor (not enough brainpower to function adequately). With the Negro considered to be a lesser species (cf. Carroll, 1900), the justification for a separate curriculum for the lower class was even more rigidly held with respect to race.

Pervasive violence against the Negro was an important contextual reality in this debate. Booker T. Washington (1901) advocated that Negroes accept their social place in exchange for a lessening of political and social agitation (i.e., fewer lynchings and other attacks by Whites). Washington encouraged his race to embrace manual training for social efficiency. However, DuBois (1903) argued that under this arrangement, the Negro was denied access to the development of critical thought processes and the concomitant cognitive abilities that were necessary for social and academic advancement.

#### **5.1. The Soul of Progressive Education**

Manual education dominated the socialization of both Blacks and poor Whites (Ravitch, 2000). Introduced to Massachusetts Institute of Technology from Russia, industrial training was designed to bridge the gap between abstract theory and pragmatic action, ideally extending understanding of difficult concepts.

Manual training, it was argued, merged practice with mental experience, not excluding one over the other. But theory aside, instruction in vocational tracks emphasized training and complaisance. Cognitive understanding was reserved for the college bound. Education to develop the abstract thinking skills so critical to achievement as measured by standardized tests was simply denied the Negro and lower class Whites. The Committee of Ten's recommendation for a liberal education was derailed by the manual training movement. Discussions on education have historically been polarized (Cremin, 1961; Glass, 2008; Ravitch, 2000). Herbert Spencer, the father of Social Darwinism, promoted education for utility while Lester Frank Ward defended education for general intelligence. Spencer argued against the liberal arts, stating that education has no intrinsic value other than utility and self-preservation. Ultimately Spencer's utilitarian views were embraced by progressive educators (Ravitch).

In contrast, Ward viewed education from the egalitarian perspective. The main purpose of education was to equalize social status through access to schooling. Ward believed that the lower class and the Negro were the equal of the upper classes, that the observed discrepancies were not due to intellectual potential. Rather, unequal access to knowledge and power stemmed from a stratified society; the differentiated curriculum reflected these economic disparities. Thus were the debate lines drawn: liberal education for all versus practical training and subordinate tracks for the lower classes and minorities (Cremin, 1961; Ravitch, 2000).

At the center of this clash were Charles W. Eliot, then president of Harvard University, and William Torrey Harris, U.S. Commissioner of Education in the 1890s. While Eliot and Harris both recommended rigorous academic coursework for all students, Eliot was chiefly concerned with the power to reason, observe, and describe. Eliot (1894, p. 215) argued, "An education which does not produce in the pupil the power of applying theory, or putting acquisitions into practice, and of personally using for productive ends his disciplined faculties, is an education which has missed its main end." No matter the subject, it is important that students learn to think critically. Harris, in contrast, was concerned about curriculum: cognitive frameworks or models best articulated as the accumulated wisdom of the human race. Harris believed that intellect grows not from manual labor, but from active engagement with language, literature, science, mathematics, and history. Manual training lacked applicability to education, Harris argued, because it did not truly connect the labor market to the broader goals of schooling (cf. Ravitch, 2000).

While Eliot and Harris disagreed on the best curriculum to accomplish their ends, they shared a belief that the purpose of education is to produce students who think critically and abstractly, the skills that any educated citizen needed to confront an increasingly complex industrial world. Manual training was simply too narrowly constructed to have any real transfer value for life's many challenges. But an increasingly powerful array of reformers opposed the ideas of Eliot and Harris, arguing that the limited intellectual capabilities of the masses (read the poor, immigrants, and minorities) fitted them only for the most narrow training for manual labor, increasingly the purview of the rapidly expanding factory jobs (Glass, 2008; Ravitch, 2000).

Despite the efforts of such worthy defenders as Eliot and Harris, those advocating for an intellectually demanding education for everyone were routed by the arguments for manual or industrial education. Educational experts such as Nicholas Murray Butler, the President of Columbia University, and Elwood Cubberley, Dean of the College of Education at Stanford University, believed that the general population lacked either the aptitude and/or interest necessary for intellectual rigor. James Hoyner, Superintendent of Schools of North Carolina, noted that 90 percent of the people in the U.S. earned their income through labor. These and other leaders concluded that the masses needed training for practical work. Most educators likewise came down on the side of vocational preparation (Cremin, 1961; Nasaw, 1979; Ravitch, 2000).

Comprehensive high schools reflected the final compromise among these discordant views (Cremin, 1961). Some, like John Dewey, believed that even future manual workers should be educated for life as an active citizen in a democracy. In contrast, more extreme advocates of manual training argued that students with different occupational destinies should attend trade schools separate from the high schools for elites (Glass, 2008). The culmination of the Progressive Era saw these two positions melded into comprehensive secondary schools where everyone would receive the same education for citizenship, with placement in a curricular track matched to presumed differences in the students' occupational potential (Cremin). This "compromise" turned out to be a hollow victory for those who favored cognitive excellence for all. The vocational or manual concentration defined the school experiences for the lower tracks, where intellectual expectations were extremely limited. Only the college preparatory courses provided the cognitive challenges of the liberal arts tradition.

Again, not surprisingly, among all the different groups of students, Blacks were overwhelmingly shunted to the manual training course of study rather than the rigorous curriculum for elites. Even in today's larger comprehensive schools, the quality of education continues to be determined primarily by the track placement of students (cf. Gamoran, 1986; Page, 1987; Rosenbaum, 1976; Watanabe, 2008).

## **6. Discussion**

Contrary to the high minded platitudes of the Progressive Era reformers--supposed equality of educational opportunity for all based on the new science of IQ and standardized testing--the historical record suggests that the real purpose of the industrial model educational reforms was to preserve the extant class system, for both poor Whites and Negroes, by giving them training for physical labor. The manual training movement that dominated the wider reforms of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century was the centerpiece of the newly differentiated curriculum tracks that prepared students according to perceived ability and future destiny. What was *not* evident was equality of opportunity. Clearly the poor, not the wealthy, received the manual training in the lower tracks. True for Whites, this pattern was even more pronounced for the Negro (cf. Cremin, 1961; Ravitch, 2000; Woodson, 1933). The historical record reveals that manual training, despite rhetoric on combining abstract thought with practical application, worked to control the masses, particularly Negroes, by preparing them for their ascribed status as unskilled workers. Social mobility through academic competition was limited by denying access to high status knowledge. This non-democratic result was justified by Social Darwinist doctrines regarding the intelligence of the poor and minorities.

### **6.1. Manual Training and Tracking Today**

During the Progressive Era, fairness had become an important consideration in America. Mobility was supposedly dependent on an individualistic philosophy driven by ability and effort, not the preordained status of one's parents as in the older European tradition (see Marks, 1980). Yet current trends in schooling appear to be reversing the compromise of the Progressive Era wherein separate schools for vocational and college prep students were avoided by instituting comprehensive secondary schools. Purportedly providing common civic education for all, students from different backgrounds, destined for different adult pathways, took separate coursework--justified (legitimated) by the new scientific tests, evidence for the rightness of unequal results.

Vocational schooling from the 1950s through the 1970s (Benavot, 1983; Egginton, 1978) illustrates recent iterations of worker training. No matter the differences in emphasis, from vocational/technical skills to career education, the staples of advanced, college prep, general, and vocational levels still dominated most secondary schools, with generally negative impact on those at risk and minorities (Haycock, 2001). Top tracks provided high quality, challenging education to the affluent and gifted while the bottom tracks received lower quality instruction and curriculum.

Today, separate vocational schools are becoming more common, justified by many trades requiring specialized training, highly technical tools, and lengthy skill acquisition, too expensive to duplicate. Such vocational centers often serve larger districts, or several smaller districts may share jurisdiction and funding. For example, Kentucky has an entire statewide network of Career and Technical Education Centers funded as service centers for clusters of districts. Like most previous arrangements, these schools are intended to address academic needs and prepare students for college as well as careers (personal communication, principal Lee Ann Wall, August 24, 2011). Empirical evidence is needed to determine whether these separate schools actually accomplish this lofty goal. Skeptics would note the historical record for manual training: the consistently low quality academic work provided these at-risk, lower income students.

Whatever the current reincarnation of vocational training, today's schools have not changed all that much. The accountability movement may have lessened the overt calls for separate vocational tracks, but the career education centers that are increasingly popular indicate that the movement has simply adapted to the current environment. Regardless of how vocationalism is treated, the same wider system of ability grouping and tracking relegates "those" students (the disadvantaged and minorities) to the lowest tracks and provides them the lowest quality instruction (cf. Murphy & Hallinger, 1989; Oakes, 1985; Page, 1987; Watanabe, 2008). Current scholarship confirms these same conclusions regarding the role of tracking in America (see Gamoran, 2008; Weis, 2008, for macro analyses; Kelly, 2008, for tracking within schools). More specifically, how has the age of accountability influenced the structure and practice of tracking?

The assessment of academic achievement has contributed to the detracking movement, with notable results (cf. Burris, Wiley, & Murphy, 2008). But recent work (see Watanabe, 2008) suggests that, overall, attempts to restructure tracking have produced little change, with the negative effects of ability grouping still evident, particularly for class and race.

## 6.2. Tracking as Institutionalized Legacy

Social scientists frequently cite cultural lag, where values associated with technological or organizational conditions long since obsolescent still exert their influence (see Ogburn, 1923). The beliefs/attitudes persist even though the customs and social structures to which the cultural values corresponded have disappeared, replaced by new traditions, technology, or modes of functioning that render the older practices obsolete. Old values, no longer relevant, live on by reattaching to the new procedures. In the United States, widespread acceptance of the necessity of summer school vacation--originally because children had to work on the farm, no longer relevant in urbanized America--is often cited as an example of cultural lag. The reverse can also hold, but receives essentially no recognition: institutional arrangements, developed to support pervasive beliefs and attitudes during a given era, remain in place despite more modern, enlightened views on the dispositions in question. These institutionalized legacies are germane to the enduring link between tracking and racism.

To the authors' knowledge, the term, *institutionalized legacy*, has not previously been conceptualized; it is used here to indicate the converse of cultural lag. Institutionalized legacies represent organizational structures, procedures, operations, and policies that were developed and established as a means of putting into practice specific beliefs and attitudes that were prominent in a past era. These value-based practices persist despite the demise or considerable attenuation of the hoary beliefs that originally justified their introduction. Institutionalized legacies typically function at a taken-for-granted, unexamined level: behavioral regularities (Sarason, 1982) and institutional practices continue unquestioned, with professionals who employ them today generally unaware of either the original beliefs or how they have changed.

Most observers today would suggest that the depth of the raw, virulent racist and class-based ideologies of the nineteenth century regarding intelligence have diminished, though not disappeared. The influence of *The Bell Curve* (Herrstein & Murray, 1994) in policy circles and debates (Fraser, 1995) indicates the pervasiveness of these beliefs. Recent investigations of race and racial attitudes confirm the staying power of such thinking even in post-modern times (e.g., Hunt & Wilson, 2011; Welch & Sigelman, 2011). Illustrating this, Lane and Jost (2011) note the role of racism in the 2008 presidential election: "findings from the social sciences (especially experimental psychology) [demonstrate] ... the existence of robust and pervasive racial bias at an implicit (i.e., relatively unconscious and uncontrollable) level of awareness" (p. 48).

Yet few would claim that these modern views approach the vitriol expounded in the 1800s (cf. Carroll, 1900; Gobineau, 1853-1855/1970). Despite this, the system of tracking in U.S. secondary schools remains firmly entrenched, an institutionalized legacy of the widespread Social Darwinism of those former times. For both ability grouping and curriculum tracking, the lower ability levels and vocational training are still reserved predominantly for the same disadvantaged students who were the target of the industrial model of stratified social efficiency. A legacy of the Progressive Era, tracking today still produces the same concomitant inequalities. Perhaps educators and policy makers need to make *explicit* what vision of America they posit: a highly differentiated workforce and citizenry that is supported by the ubiquitous and hegemonic practice of ability grouping/tracking, where destiny is essentially controlled by access (or denial) to quality of education based on race and class, *versus* an America of true equal opportunity wherein all children have access to a high quality, rigorous curriculum that is cognitively challenging, regardless of students' background or status.

In the current media savvy world, politicians and power brokers are typically loathe to reveal their private agendas, often in direct contrast to the stated goals and effects of their policies. Whatever one may think about the racism and Social Darwinism that dominated the Progressive Era, the reformers who advocated for ability grouping and tracking as a means to social efficiency were honest about their goals. In contrast, those who continue these same practices in today's schools (with essentially the same results) would deny any such underlying beliefs, generally ignoring the entire issue of latent Social Darwinism or racism. All too often, in true Machiavellian fashion, those who extol such policies, however cloaked in public rhetoric, claim that race and class are anathema to any type of public discussion.



Yet they are quick to paint as racist (or as utilizing class warfare) anyone who objects to or raises concerns about the inequitable outcomes inherent in matters as varied as tax cuts for the rich, or, in this instance, differentiated schooling. Substantial progress in reducing achievement gaps is not likely until this outmoded system of differentiated curriculum has been significantly reformed. Both cognitive knowledge (Gamoran, 1986) and critical thinking (Murphy & Hallinger, 1989; Page, 1987) are affected by tracking and grouping, a result of the lower quality instruction and less challenging, rote-based curriculum that lower level students experience. But to the extent that ability grouping functions as an *unrecognized, taken-for-granted institutionalized legacy*, serious consideration of tracking's intellectual roots--the values and beliefs of blatant Social Darwinism--are precluded. Indeed, the point of identifying an institutionalized legacy is to begin discussion about unconscious/unaware values that underlie a routine practice, particularly *when those values are no longer acceptable*. Here teacher educators must be proactive, to ensure that today's teachers understand the explicit historical and implicit continuing links between racism and the structures that dictate which students receive what information, i.e., ability grouping/tracking, the ubiquitous, all-encompassing response to student diversity in American schooling. Let the discussion begin.

## 7. Notes

<sup>1</sup>The terms *Negro* and *colored* and the notion of Negro inferiority are used in historical context.

<sup>2</sup>Achievement gaps exist on several dimensions, the most prominent being race, social class, gender, giftedness and special education (both in contrast to regular classes, albeit in opposite directions), and English language learners. In each case, the marginalized group lags behind the dominant, higher status grouping in the larger society.

<sup>3</sup>Many of the references on tracking are dated 1960s-1980s. These works specifically analyze ability grouping from historical-sociological macro perspectives, supplemented by historical citations from the 1800s and early 1900s. More recent scholarship (see the paragraph immediately preceding the section, **Tracking as Institutionalized Legacy**, above) demonstrates these analyses still hold. Current literature on accountability focuses on micro and middle-range structures (Persell, 1977) of school improvement (e.g., Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005) or policy-relevant outcomes (see McDermott, 2007) rather than stratification-related outcomes.

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