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[Review of the book Inequality: A reassessment of the effect of family and schooling in America, by Christopher Jencks (London: Basic Books, 1972)]

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INEQUALITY

Christopher Jencks et al. Basic Books.

When Arthur Jensen of Chicago advanced fresh evidence of the Negro's lower intellectual potential in comparison with that of the white American and argued that 80 per cent of the variance in IQ scores could be explained genetically a flare-up ensued that was as much emotional as it was academic. The Liberal Establishment, which had been largely responsible for such educational projects as **Headstart,** saw in the Jensen statement an assault on the basic assumptions that justified the expenditure of many millions of dollars, quite apart from an attack on the philosophical principles that under-strutted their social strategy. Oddly enough, the most effective counter arguments came from South Africa. Those who knew of his previous work in the field were, perhaps, not surprised to find that Dr. Simon Biesheuvel refuted many of Jensen's assumptions and implications. Author of **African Intelligence,** Biesheuvel had been responsible some thirty years earlier for the demolition of a similar — though less sophisticated — thesis. Biesheuvel's reply to Jensen, published in **Psychologica Africana,** was further developed by Philip Tobias, Professor of Anatomy at the University of the Witwatersrand, who examined the genetic basis for theories of inequality. The publication of **Inequality,** which represents the thinking of a team led by Christopher Jencks of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, was therefore timely; and particularly so since the field was wide open for a competent and unprejudiced examination of contemporary findings. Far too much that had been written had been assertive and persuasive rather than empirical.

Enviromental variations that are independent of the individual genotype seem to explain something like 35 per cent of the variation in people's test score, say the authors. But of this, not more than 20 per cent is probably due to family influence — some studies suggest as little as 10 per cent. "Our best guess," say the authors, "is that family influence accounts for 15 per cent of the IQ score."

One of the problems of studying "family background" is the fuzziness of the idea. The influence of the economic status of the family correlates with the child's test score at 0,35 Class difference, they comment usefully, seems to have the greatest influence on the child's verbal ability and general information.

In America the average white child scores about 15 points higher on standardised tests than the average black child. The average black child is one year behind the average 6 year old white child at school and by the time he is 12, the average black child is scoring at the same level as the average white 10 year old child.

In terms of the debate as to whether these differences can be ascribed to **environmental** or **hereditary** factors, the authors agree that both might account for the facts available. There are many studies that show how scores rise as children come into contact with better schools and a more lively and chanllenging social "set-up". As the authors conclude, "The importance of genetic differences between races is political rather than scientific. "Noam Chomsky has already shown that the tedious work required to determine a relationship between genes controlling learning and genes controlling skin colour is eventually no more rewarding than to establish a relationship between genes controlling height and genes that control test scores. And indeed, the idea that test scores are synonomous with intelligence and that success depends on intelligence is a happy myth that is little supported in contemporary folklore or in empirical research. Moving towards everyday school problems, what happens when a society decides to "desegregate" its schools, as America did? Do the black children benefit from working with white children? Do white children "lose out on the deal"? All sorts of outcomes have been asserted, usually on slender evidence. The Jencks team reports that many surveys show that blacks in desegregated schools do in fact score higher than blacks in unsegregated schools. Some research suggested that this was true only if the blacks attended **middle class** (rather than working class) white schools. Race mix had more effect in primary than in secondary schools. But the gain was not altogether impressive — 2 or 3 points on standardised test scores. Summing up, the authors suggest that

- one can accept that desegregation provides a small gain for black students
- black students in white schools which did not provide meaningful social integration might gain nothing at all (in fact might lose) and the same applied if the blacks formed a small minority.
- blacks from "good" black schools often lost with degregation.

But, say the authors, taken in isolation, none of these studies proves very much. The gains are small and depend on factors we do not fully understand. The weight of evidence supports the assumption that the poor white students benefit academically from desegregation at the elementary, but not at the secondary level. But the problem as to whether whites gain or lose by desegregation is still unresolved, despite suggestive studies. The EEOS investigation, for instance, claimed a slight gain for whites, whereas Wilson's California study found that whites in desegregated schools did worse academically than whites in all-white schools. At the high school level almost all investigators agree that neither racial nor economic compositions of a school have much effect on student scores.

The teaching profession may feel somewhat deflated when Jencks comments: "Most differences in adult scores are due to factors that schools do not control". For those readers who may be interested, there is useful material on the influence of **sets** and **expectations** on operational intelligence, and a detailed study of how experts are thinking about intelligence, its meanning and determination.

Because it presents **evidence** and examines it without bias, this book is timely and exceptionally helpful. Whilst the general thesis is of interest in any part of the world, American experience is of concern wherever the school systems have to cope with minorities. In an area often given to hysterics, this calm, careful work deserves high approbation.

BRIAN ROSE.