



## The Bell Curve Wars: Race, Intelligence, and the Future of America (New Republic Book)

By Steven Fraser

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The *Bell Curve* by Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray has generated a firestorm of debate, confirming for some their secret belief in the innate inferiority of certain "races" or ethnic groups, angering many who view the book as an ill-concealed racist manifesto, and worrying untold others who fear the further racial polarization of American society. In *The Bell Curve Wars*, a group of our country's most distinguished intellectuals dismantles the alleged scientific foundations and criticizes the alarming public policy conclusions of this incendiary book. Anyone who has wondered about the connection among genes, race, and intelligence, all those anxious about racial antagonisms in our nation, those who question the efficacy of social welfare programs, all those troubled but unconvinced by Herrnstein and Murray's book, will want to read *The Bell Curve Wars*.

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

This collection of articles by 19 journalists and academics represents a mostly effective counterattack against Richard Herrnstein's and Charles Murray's controversial bestseller, *The Bell Curve*. Stephen Jay Gould leads off by refuting the earlier book's central argument: that racial differences in IQ are due mostly to genes. Howard Gardner adds that East Asian examples show that culture, not genetics, is key. Alan Wolfe even doubts that an "economic class structure has been replaced by a cognitive" one. Some contributors offer useful context: Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes that *The Bell Curve* appeared in a time of diminished liberalism, Randall Kennedy observes that its prominence stems from problems in our market-driven intellectual culture and Jacqueline Jones tartly scores its authors' "wide-eyed, romantic view of the past." Several authors?including Mickey Kaus, Martin Peretz and Leon Wieseltier?reprise pieces from a New Republic issue devoted to *The Bell Curve*. This collection, unfortunately, has the flaws of a rush job: the contributors, notably the conservative Thomas Sowell, do not respond to each other. (Sowell criticizes the genetics argument but believes that Herrnstein and Murray demolished double standards regarding college admissions and "race norming" on employment tests.) Moreover, this book could have used a solid postmortem on the press coverage and hype surrounding *The Bell Curve*'s publication.

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#### From Library Journal

Fraser, the vice president and executive editor of Basic Books, has gathered individual pieces from some 20 contributors, well-known professionals ranging, alphabetically, from Howard Gardner to Alan Wolfe. In his introduction, Fraser avers that "taken together [these essays] comprise a powerful antidote to a work [Richard Hernstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve*, Free Pr., 1994] of dubious premises and socially alarming predictions." Joint essayists Jeffrey Rosen and Charles Lane's representative position is that "The Bell Curve deserves critical attention, not public smearing and uncritical private acceptance." The critical attention as expressed throughout this collection is stimulating, reasoned, lively, and challenging. An excellent and thoughtful compendium; highly recommended for an academic and general audience. [An interview with Steven Fraser appears on p. 103.]?Suzanne W. Wood, SUNY Coll. of Technology Lib., Alfred.

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#### From Booklist

Editor Fraser has collected 19 essays that seek to refute all or part of Herrnstein and Murray's recent best-seller about intelligence and race, *The Bell Curve*. In his introduction, Fraser writes that *The Bell Curve* possesses large doses of "profound fatalism and austere elitism," and most of the essays in his book argue against those attitudes. Stephen Jay Gould takes Herrnstein and Murray to task for their use of statistics. Scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. sees the their argument as one that perpetuates the tradition of victimizers and onlookers blaming the victim. But not every contributor disagrees with all the points present in *The Bell Curve*. Generally, the more politically conservative the writer, the more that writer accepts the book's central arguments, though the writer will still have some disagreements. In total, a thorough and readable critique of a controversial work. *Brian McCombie*

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