IQ Tests As Instruments of Oppression—From Immigration Quotas to Welfare

A Talk by DR. LEON KAMIN

Reprinted by the International Committee Against Racism (CAR)

On March 23, the Southern Regional Council sponsored a one-day symposium on the history of intelligence testing and its public policy implications. The principal speaker was Dr. Leon Kamin, chairman of the Department of Psychology at Princeton University.

During the morning session, Dr. Kamin presented findings of his extensive research into the origins of IQ testing, which showed that some American social scientists have biased writings on the mental ability of the working class.

Dr. Kamin concluded that there is no valid evidence at all to support the heredity assumption. A transcript of this portion of his presentation was published in the May-June issue of SOUTH TODAY.

The following transcript is Dr. Kamin’s afternoon presentation on the history of the use of testing in the United States to support repressive public policy.

The pioneers of the intelligence testing movement, the Stanford-Binet were three men who, around 1910, imported from France and translated the first so-called intelligence test.

This test had been developed by the French psychologist Alfred Binet, interesting enough, for the purpose of detecting learning disabilities among school children, and measuring a person’s fixed intelligence quotient.

The three American pioneers were Lewis Terman at Stanford, Hilgard at Princeton, and Robert Yerkes at Harvard.

These men had some pretty well defined ideas about the society and the family. Whether or not these ideas influenced their interpretation of intelligence test scores I will leave for you to decide. I’d like to read a few quotations from their writings.

Terman, in his book published in 1916 which presented the famous Stanford-Binet test, describes the difficulties of a couple of Portuguese children and then wrote the following: “The dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family, and seems to have been passed on to the next generation.”

The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans and Negroes suggests the possibility of hereditary differences in mental traits which have to be taken up anew and by experimental methods.”

However, the question of whether or not these ideas influenced their interpretation of intelligence test scores I will leave for you to decide. I’d like to read a few quotations from their writings.

Terman, in his book published in 1916 which presented the famous Stanford-Binet test, describes the difficulties of a couple of Portuguese children and then wrote the following: “The dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family, and seems to have been passed on to the next generation.”

The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans and Negroes suggests the possibility of hereditary differences in mental traits which have to be taken up anew and by experimental methods.”

However, the question of whether or not these ideas influenced their interpretation of intelligence test scores I will leave for you to decide. I’d like to read a few quotations from their writings.

Terman, in his book published in 1916 which presented the famous Stanford-Binet test, describes the difficulties of a couple of Portuguese children and then wrote the following: “The dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family, and seems to have been passed on to the next generation.”

The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans and Negroes suggests the possibility of hereditary differences in mental traits which have to be taken up anew and by experimental methods.”

However, the question of whether or not these ideas influenced their interpretation of intelligence test scores I will leave for you to decide. I’d like to read a few quotations from their writings.

Terman, in his book published in 1916 which presented the famous Stanford-Binet test, describes the difficulties of a couple of Portuguese children and then wrote the following: “The dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family, and seems to have been passed on to the next generation.”

The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans and Negroes suggests the possibility of hereditary differences in mental traits which have to be taken up anew and by experimental methods.”

However, the question of whether or not these ideas influenced their interpretation of intelligence test scores I will leave for you to decide. I’d like to read a few quotations from their writings.

Terman, in his book published in 1916 which presented the famous Stanford-Binet test, describes the difficulties of a couple of Portuguese children and then wrote the following: “The dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family, and seems to have been passed on to the next generation.”

The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans and Negroes suggests the possibility of hereditary differences in mental traits which have to be taken up anew and by experimental methods.”

However, the question of whether or not these ideas influenced their interpretation of intelligence test scores I will leave for you to decide. I’d like to read a few quotations from their writings.

Terman, in his book published in 1916 which presented the famous Stanford-Binet test, describes the difficulties of a couple of Portuguese children and then wrote the following: “The dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family, and seems to have been passed on to the next generation.”

The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans and Negroes suggests the possibility of hereditary differences in mental traits which have to be taken up anew and by experimental methods.”

However, the question of whether or not these ideas influenced their interpretation of intelligence test scores I will leave for you to decide. I’d like to read a few quotations from their writings.

Terman, in his book published in 1916 which presented the famous Stanford-Binet test, describes the difficulties of a couple of Portuguese children and then wrote the following: “The dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family, and seems to have been passed on to the next generation.”

The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans and Negroes suggests the possibility of hereditary differences in mental traits which have to be taken up anew and by experimental methods.”

However, the question of whether or not these ideas influenced their interpretation of intelligence test scores I will leave for you to decide. I’d like to read a few quotations from their writings.

Terman, in his book published in 1916 which presented the famous Stanford-Binet test, describes the difficulties of a couple of Portuguese children and then wrote the following: “The dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family, and seems to have been passed on to the next generation.”

The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans and Negroes suggests the possibility of hereditary differences in mental traits which have to be taken up anew and by experimental methods.”

However, the question of whether or not these ideas influenced their interpretation of intelligence test scores I will leave for you to decide. I’d like to read a few quotations from their writings.

Terman, in his book published in 1916 which presented the famous Stanford-Binet test, describes the difficulties of a couple of Portuguese children and then wrote the following: “The dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family, and seems to have been passed on to the next generation.”

The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans and Negroes suggests the possibility of hereditary differences in mental traits which have to be taken up anew and by experimental methods.”

However, the question of whether or not these ideas influenced their interpretation of intelligence test scores I will leave for you to decide. I’d like to read a few quotations from their writings.
The U.S. Army test scores could be classified in terms of A, B, C, D, E. If you are really stupid you are E. What that shows is that the average intelligence of the white race is significantly above that of the other different European countries. It turns out that immigrants coming from England, Holland, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria are the brightest. The Russians, the Italians and the Poles are all just plain stupid. The Poles did not score higher than the blacks. Now in order to understand the increasing data, the writer used the value-free statement, "The Slavic and Latin countries stand low."

"The Passing of the Great Race"  
Madison Grant, president of the Galton Society had published a very influential racist book entitled, "The Passing of the Great Race," in which he divided all of Europe into Mediterranean, Alpine and Nordic stocks. The Nordic stock is a chiselled arrangement of other Aryan and Eastern authorities. In any event, Grant had made the observation that all that was good, beautiful and true in culture and civilization had come to us from the Nordics and nothing from the Latin and Slavic countries. Here we see proof that the intelligence of the Slavs and Slavs is indeed vastly dual.

In 1922, Col. Yearke had a civilian job in the National Research Council in Washington. The National Research Council under his leadership set up a special commission of scientists called the Commission for the Scientific Study of Problems of Human Migration. The National Research Council began to support research relevant to problems of human migration. The first research it supported was that of Prof. Carl Brigham, at that time an assistant professor at Princeton University in psychology department. The Princeton University Press published Brigham's work entitled, "A Study of American Intelligence: What Brigham did was take the Army intelligence test and see how many immigrants were in the United States, the higher was his IQ.

We must assume that he assumed the test measured native intelligence. The psychologists had built it to measure native intelligence. How can it be that immigrants that have been in the country a long time are so much brighter than immigrants who haven't been in this country a long time? Prof. Brigham concluded that the problem of intelligence came from the English language or knowing American culture—no. The immigrants, during the early 1900s, had come from western Europe, full of Nordic blood, whereas the immigrants who arrived from 1913 to 1918 were from southeastern Europe, including Poles, Italians, Russians, Jews, etc., immigrants with very little Nordic blood.

From this Prof. Brigham concluded that the intelligence of Nordic blood and the intelligence of the immigrants. That left a certain policy recommendation. Let me read to you to part of one of Brigham's book. The foreword in this book was written by Col. Yearke. Brigham says, "We must face a possibility of racial admixture here that is infinitely worse than that faced by any European country today. For we are incorporating the Negro into our racial stock, while all of Europe is comparatively free from this infestation."

The idea was that the lower classes breed too much and the upper classes don't breed enough. So, since intelligence is distributed evenly across the average intelligence is going to sink and sink until eventually it gets below zero. Here in the U.S. it's going to be worse, because the White race is interacting with the immigrants, but we have stupid blacks as well.

Brigham wrote, "With the decline of American intelligence will be more rapid and more complete, the decline of intelligence, the more European national groups, owing to the presence here of a Negro. The steps that should be taken must be of course be decided by science and not by political experience. Immigration should only be restricted but highly selective. And the revision of the immigration and naturalization laws will only, in the long run, bring relief from our present difficulties. The really important steps are those looking toward the continued propagation of the defective strains in the present population."

For those of you who missed the point, Prof. Brigham advocating the compulsory sterilization of the "defective." For those who think what it would do to Prof. Brigham, he went on to a job as secretary to the Immigration Examination Board. Also the Scholastic Aptitude Test was devised by Prof. Brigham. His book was not without influence.

Congressional Hearings

In 1923, the Eugenics Research Association elected as its chairman a non-scientist. That same year was the Hon. Albert Johnson, chairman of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization. The committee began to hear the Congressional Record and hear testimony in some detail. I'll just read a couple of excerpts. Dr. Arthur Sweeney testifying before the committee in 1923, said, "We have no means of determining who are the unifit. We have had no adequate means of determining who are the unfit. We can only in an objective way describe the qualifications of the immigrants who have not had any yardstick with which to perform an accurate estimate of the intellectual value. Psychological tests in the Army have furnished us with the necessary yardstick. Immigration from eastern and southern Europe is most undesirable. We can gauge the destructiveness of immigration by the relative proportion of those in the A and B classes. We strenuously object to the immigration from Italy, Russia, Poland, Greece, and Turkey. The Slavic and Latin countries show a marked contrast in intelligence with the western and northern European group. From this source the stream of intelligent citizenship will presumably cease to flow."

Dr. Felix Kinnicutt, testifying before a Senate Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in 1923, said, "The large proportion of this immigration from southern Europe is Japanese, Polish or from Russia. The immigration from the last two countries consists largely of the Hebrew element. Some of their labor unions are among the most radical in the whole country. The recent Army tests show that all three of these classes ranked far below the average in intelligence as measured by Brigham's book, a Study of American Intelligence. Col. Yearke also vouches for Brigham's book and speaks in the highest terms to the assistant professor of psychology at Princeton University.

Many of these hearings were signed by Col. Yearke. Col. Yearke said, "The decline of the white race at large has been greatly impressed by the results of the Army intelligence tests, carefully analyzed by Yearke and Brigham who have heard the statistics and who have tested the tests believe that the tests give as accurate a way of measuring intelligence as is possible at the present time. The questions were selected with a view to measuring innate ability. Experts have told us that we must not destroy our operation and let up million Americans now living in this country, free to become the fathers and mothers of future Americans, who never before have been." New Restrictive Immigration Laws

In 1921, as the result of an intense national debate, temporary legislation limiting immigration was passed by Congress to last one year. The new law, the Emergency Quota Act, was signed into law in 1921, with a ceiling on immigration of 3 percent of the number of people from each country already residing in the U.S. This Act was signed into law, that each country an immigration quota based on three percent of its population residing in the U.S. Even though the temporary law passed in 1921, the population statistics were based on the 1910 Census. Just so that you don't miss the point, the permanent law which was passed in 1921 represented the percentage of the resident European population to two percent, based not on the 1920 census, certain not on the 19200 census, certain not on 1900 census. When a member of the immigrant blood, if one reads the congressional debates, nobody talked about this. The census of 1980 was explicitly stated to be an exclusionary racist policy—to keep the inferior blood from southern Europe out of the United States. It was a racist policy that was possible for northwestern Europeans to immigrate. This was largely rationalized on the basis of the tests of innate capacity, because data from the test showed clearly demonstrated, in studies after studies, that Italians, Poles, Russians, and Jews scored 25 or 30 points lower than the Nordic group as measured by Brigham.

You can't appreciate the full flavor of the "scientific findings" without reading the literature. Prof. Hirsch conducted a study in 1929, was held by the National Research Council, and published in the professional journal, Genetic Psychology Monographs, that raised the question of the intelligence of children of northeastern European immigrants whose children had been top of the heap in schools in this country. If the stupidly is really genetic, then the children of Polish, Russian and Italian immigrants should be stupid as well.

Needless to say, Prof. Hirsch discovered that indeed the children of Russian, Polish, and Italian background were not stupid. Let me read to you from his study. Remember this is in a professional, psychological journal. "The immigration statistics are in some one's most hopeful signs. That part of the law which has to do with non-quota immigrants should be modified." (You see, there was no immigration from Canada or Mexico and other countries that were filled with them. The average intelligence of the French Canadian group in our data approaches the level of the average intelligence of the Portuguese and Negro children in this study. Yet Mexicans are flowing into the country, and we are getting the less intelligent, working-class people. The increase in the number of non-Canadians is alarming. Whole New England towns are filled with them. Immigration officials report vast trouble in extricating the facts from certain brunele nationalities.)

I think what happened is fairly summarized in the presidential address of Frank Bobbett of the Eugenics Research Association in 1927. By that time the battle was over and the national origins quota system was in place. Speaking to the biologists and psychologists in the Association, Bobbett said the following: "Eugenics has made its strongest appeal to me by its influence on the immigration law. This is an indirect result of eugenics, but it comes as a natural development of research on the part of people like myself. As the result of the construction of immigration would have come without the aid of our society, but I doubt it would have come so soon or so permanently.

Today's Doa—"Absurd"

The major domestic issue facing the country in the early 1920s was the issue of immigration. It involved profound economic conflicts and profound racism. The major issue facing the country today, our politicians tell us, is "the great immigration problem." There is little or no major economic conflict and profound racism. There was no shortage of scientific and psychological evidence in 1921, that showed 20 percent of the immigrants were illiterate.

The data which such teachers are now presenting to policymakers, I think, is no more valid than the data presented of the immigrants of 1920, on the differences in innate intelligence among the racial stocks of Europe. That data, as we would agree today, was not reliable, but it had nothing to do with "innate intelligence." In my opinion, today's data will look just as absurd in 50 years.

The Committee Against Racism is active in opposing racism in schools, colleges, and communities in the U.S. and Canada. For more copies of this article or more information about CAR, please write to CAR, P.O. Box 904, Brooklyn, New York 11202.