Racial Intelligence Testing and the Mexican People Gilbert G. Gonzalez

In the 1920s and 1930s the Mexican school age population increasingly participated in the educational system of the U.S. Meanwhile, many first experiences of these children with the state came in the form of educational research. The intelligence testing movement had a brief history before then, one which was gathering much momentum and greatly encouraged by corporate foundations and the cooperation of university administrations. The rapid immigration in the 1920s and settlement of Mexicans into colonias of the Southwest coincided with the rise of academic research and publications on racial intelligence, as well as with the combination of mass compulsory education and intelligence testing, tracking, and curriculum differentation. Many academic scholars, trained in the modern schools of psychology, contributed research for the construction of a pedagogy of social orderliness and economic efficiency through developing a "scientific" theory of racial intelligence. This study demonstrates how the labor process and social stability was of greater importance to scientific racists than the issue of race itself; furthermore, this study shows how intelligence research and 10 testing in schools were principally methods for ideologically and socially reproducing labor power for a capitalist economy.

Between 1922 and 1934, at least eighteen intelligence studies of Mexicans were published in various professional and scholarly journals. They formed a portion of some one hundred such studies carried out on blacks, Africans, Asians, Latin Americans, and Europeans by social scientists, primarily psychologists. The latter studies were carried out between 1890 and 1930, and formed a part of a larger mass of "scientific" evidence on racial differences. In terms of theory and methods the various studies were parallel. One can interchange subjects without changing the essence of the studies: whether Mexicans, Indians, "halfbreeds," blacks or Italians, the studies were seemingly uniformly conceived and written. Their conclusions did vary, but only according to average IQ or behavioral trait under study. Thus, a range rather than identical IQs or traits were found to be the case for each particular racial group studied. However, one factor alone united the investigators: science had determined a racial inferiority among poor whites, Southern Europeans, and "non-white" nationalities and races.

Scholars such as E.A. Ross, Lewis Terman, E.L. Thorndike and Robert Yerkes, who had formed part of the vanguard of progressivism, were active in promoting scientific racism. Each supported and was active in campaigns for the forced sterilization of "social deviants." Their activities in eugenics were one aspect of their particular resolution to potential threats to the social order. Since, they claimed, the nature of the social order was a sum total of inherited characteristics, a basis for

order in society would be a form of birth control through forced sterilization. By 1907 fifteen states had passed sterilization laws, and by 1928 at least 8,500 people were sterilized through the enforcement of these laws.¹

This was one extreme aspect of the progessive racism; the more popular form, and one which appears most often in the literature, was the simple indentification of economically, socially, culturally, and physically distinct peoples as biologically inferior. This positive identification was supported through the findings of hundreds of research studies into the intelligence of racial and national minorities.

Scientific racism functioned quite well within the general goal of the popular functionalist sociological concept, the organic society. Racism was essentially an ideological explanation for the social structure, and did not affect the distribution of property, but rationalized that distribution. Progressivism renounced the classical bourgeois theory of classes as a socioeconomic concept, yet poverty and wealth remained. The resolution of the contradiction rested with the nature of the individual, but not a random selection of individuals. Scientific racism postulated that the social structure was determined by the inherited nature of racial or national groups. The inherited characteristic was none other, and need be no other, than intelligence.

Through explaining the social order based upon intelligence and genes, scientific racism could simultaneously dissolve social discontent by socializing the racial and minority groups to the burden of poverty upon themselves. Furthermore, by artificially separating workers from each other outwardly on the basis of culture, race, or nationality, the working class would be segmented within itself. The first effect would be to place the explanation for the distribution of wealth upon the intelligence of racial groups. The second effect was to prevent the development of a political class consciousness within the working class.

Scientific racism, however, was only a temporary aspect of the testing movement and was not intrinsic to intelligence testing itself. The most important function of IQ testing was that of providing an ideology within the educational institution for purposes of training. The argument that Mexicans as a group were less intelligent was not necessary for tests to continue categorizing Mexicans as less "intelligent." The instrument was not intended to construct a racial hierarchy in society; its fundamental purpose was the realization of a politically and economically stable society and as such would reinforce working class children for commensurate socialization and skill training. Thus, scientific racism and intelligence testing continued to serve an identical function: sifting out the "likes and

unlikes" in the process of education.

In the incorporation of racism into acceptable scholarship, the academicians made race respectable as an explanation for the existence of the poverty they saw at the lower quarters of society. In their quest for social relevancy they accepted racism and went about formulating racist theories dedicated to the preservation of the social order. The result was that, as the university became increasingly important as a shaper of public policy, the prescriptions based upon academic research were given a stamp of legitimacy within educational practices. Research carried out through the auspices of the university and the progressive education movement were closely related phenomena, for it was really the university which simultaneously produced racist research and provided much of the context for progressive expression and reform in educational practice. In major universities throughout the nation, the notion that the scholar's role was social and thus not only intellectual meant vast changes in the role of the university in the modern era.

Scholars investigating racial differences were products of an unequal society, a society that distributed wealth in terms of classes. They could not infer inferiority among the wealthy, or superiority among the poor, or even equality between them. The social scientists inadvertently assumed that one's objective socioeconomic condition was the result of individual and not social causes. They accepted the contradiction between poverty and wealth in that the structure of society was viewed as a permanent and unalterable object which had as its basis the genetic inheritance of peoples. In seeking explanations of the social and economic organization, the scholars were also apologists for that organization because, a priori, the poor were poor for reasons that were not rooted in the manner in which society was organized. Society, for the social scientists, was structured upon individual and inherent human factors. Thus, the social structure of society was conveniently explained by the nature of the peculiar biological condition of each individual. This conclusion, based upon classic bourgeois individualism, formed the foundation for the scientific racism of the twentieth century.

Theories of racial differences ran the gamut from the hardnosed racism of Madison Grant to the "softer" versions of Otto Klineberg, who thought that racial differences in intelligence and behavior were possible, but needed to be verified. The importance of the theories is that they became an integral part of the philosophies and programs of public and private social agencies across the United States. Many of these "scientists" proposed that society base its well-being upon the "scientific theories" of racial differences and that through such an approach the social problems of society would be greatly reduced, if

not solved. However, classical bourgeois democracy was no longer viable. Lewis Terman concluded that the U.S. must reform its philosophy of equality among men, that it was mere sentimentalism which only served to endanger the progress of civilization and the "white race."

Not surprising, and due in large measure to the efforts of the academic world, the "scientific theories" became commonly held ideas. And it must always be borne in mind that a racial theory of society appeared useful only because it served to reinforce the continuation of the social order. In the case of the social scientists who investigated racial differences, they were highly conscious of the need to preserve the social order from the apparent potential for political radicalism manifested through labor conflict, urban poverty, immigration, and other social problems. They became a vanguard defense of the social order by virtue of having rationalized its existence upon pseudo-scientific race theories.

Testing the Mexican People

Under the tutelage of Lewis Terman at Stanford University, Kimball Young wrote a Ph.D. dissertation in 1919 entitled *Immigrant Groups in California*, which was later published by University of Oregon Publications (1922). It is an important study, not only because it characterizes the methods and conclusions of the racial studies of the period but also because of the proposals put forth for solution of the "immigrant problem." Young's proposals were not romantic or impractical; in fact, they had already become a significant part of the educational program in many cities across the United States—tracking and IQ testing.

Young made a comparative study of Mexicans, Italians, Portuguese, and white Americans. His subjects were eighty-eight pupils of the San Jose school system in grades four through eight. Young was a practical social scientist and he was therefore concerned with the practical educational question of non-American children. However, being a mainstream social scientist of the time, he accepted without much question the political charge that foreigners posed a potential danger to the continuation of the U.S. unless brought into a system of state sponsored social control. He wrote that

... there are two assumptions fundamental to our purpose: the first regarding general intelligence bears upon the experimental method and the interpretation of the results for educational ends; the second bears by implication, at least, upon the interpretation of the results for wider problems of immigration, racial mixture and future cultural progress.⁴

Again, it should be underscored that the principal characteristic to be studied and analyzed for the purposes of educational, social, and racial control was intelligence. The development of the concept intelligence by such scholars as James, Dewey, and Lewis Terman was easily accommodated to the specifications of racial research. In essence, the development of the concept intelligence was the theoretical break-through necessary for scientific racism to function. Consequently, the heart of racial theories of the period and of the twentieth century has been based upon the concept of intelligence.⁵

The method employed by the researchers was basically the intelligence test invented by Binet and Simon in France and further refined by Stern and Terman at Stanford. In nearly all educational studies on Mexicans, intelligence was the measurable factor. Not one researcher questioned the reliability of the testing device. Their university training taught them that it did measure and quantify intelligence and could thereby measure whether some races were less intelligent than others. Since intelligence could not be defined in scientific terms, tests incorporated a subjective set of criteria which defined what intelligence was supposed to be. The researchers were united in their premises that by nature certain people were inherently more intelligent than others, and were therefore superior.

The social problems which Young identified were manifested in immigration and urban settlement and the incorporation of immigrant children in schools. He showed, for example,

... the Italians and to a lesser degree the Portuguese and Spanish Americans have encircled San Jose, absorbing entire sections until in the districts comprising two-thirds of thecity's boundaries are found large and populous neighborhoods occupied almost without exception by the Italian families. This dislocation of the population of these neighborhoods, which has been so typical in all American cities facing a similar situation, had profound and serious effects upon the public schools.

William H. Sheldon and Don T. Delmet each published studies using similar arguments. Sheldon's words closely resemble those of Young:

In school systems having a large admixture of foreign children it is essential that the intelligence of the foreigners be known as accurately as possible, and that every effort be put forth to use such knowledge to the best advantage.⁷

Delmet further developed the "foreigner as a problem" thesis: "The Mexican child has always been a problem in the public schools and will continue to be one of the problems that our schools must face. Many schools consider Mexican children a liability . . ." Scholars were similar in their conscious racial ideology; they investigated for

racial intellectual differences because they believed them to exist. Koch and Simmons's "A Study of Test Performance of American, Mexican and Negro Children" was aimed solely at defining racial distinctions, i.e., "The aim of the investigation is . . . twofold: first to make inter-racial and inter-national comparisons; and secondly to compare the city and rural-school populations for each race and nationality studied."

Not one scholar defined intelligence scientifically, yet they were measuring intelligence. One study, "A Study of Causes of Retardation Among Mexican Children in a Small Public School System in Arizona,"10 assumed an a priori mental inferiority among Mexicans. According to O.K. Garretson, the author, "These factors are: (1) irregular school attendance, (2) transientness of the Mexican family, (3) native capacity, or intelligence of the Mexican people" Garretson, oblivious to reality as were many of his contemporaries, assumed a priori factors inherent within Mexicans which caused their demise. Even though the nature of agricultural production demanded a migratory population, one that moved from one area of production to another, Garretson disregarded that reality. He disregarded the manner in which workers were moved from place to place by deliberately set low wages. Garretson covered his eyes to labor contractors and employers' agents who traveled about seeking out available labor to transport to distant fields. 12 Garretson's causal theory can be interpreted as an ideologically sound interpretation of the class formation, because it corresponded with the fundamental ideological framework stressing individual responsibility. Mexicans were not rewarded through material gain nor could they be as long as cheap labor was demanded by the owners of farms or industries. To the apologists of the social structure, and of capitalism, Mexicans were identified as the cause of their failure, and in part, for the persistence of poverty in the society as a whole.

Thomas R. Garth, undaunted by the economic need for Mexican labor, in a study of the "industrial psychology of Mexicans" and focusing on symptoms of Mexican integration into the economy, wrote that Mexicans brought with them "sickness and diseases of contagious sort, poverty and . . . a tendency to get into problems of the law." A corollary opinion held that Mexican children were "problems" within the educational system. One contemporary researcher wrote that the prevailing opinion among school officials concerning Mexican children was that they were "liabilities rather than assets." Had the steady development of mass compulsory education not occurred, the research and assessment of Mexican children might never have been carried out. Mexican children attended school only in relationship to the development of capitalism

itself, which Mexican labor, ironically, helped to develop. In all of the intelligence research upon Mexicans, that poverty which formed the immediate living environment of the subjects was considered to be a product of their own making, and further correlated with their intelligence.

Mexicans were recruited by large employers primarily as unskilled workers and thus it was only to be expected that they would form communities in areas where their wages permitted them to live. The distribution of the Mexican community into the poorer sections was a socioeconomic process characteristic of working class immigrants throughout the U.S.

Every intelligence study of Mexicans was carried out, in effect, upon the members of the very poorest of the working class. The economic burdens that the unskilled work force faced were large enough, but in addition to their inferior and ostracized social standing Mexicans found themselves penalized for their culture. Psychological testing was carried out in English and seldom took into account another language. In only one study did the researcher acknowledge that language was a factor which possibly lowered scores.¹⁴

"It is unusual for a Mexican child to be able to speak English when he enters kindergarten or first grade," acknowledged one researcher. Yet even though this was the case, only five of the eighteen studies mention language as a factor at all. And in only one was language thought to be a handicap. The remaining four dealt with language in differing manners. Garretson ignored his own statement that Mexican children in the first grades rarely spoke English and administered the test, nonetheless. According to Garretson, language should be acquired by the third grade by "normal children" and even though language was a factor in grades one and two, it was not a factor in grades three through eight. How he arrived at this conclusion was never described, but he added to his analysis by saying that "regardless of the method of accounting" the same results would inevitably obtain. ¹⁵ So much for the scientific method.

In studies by Paschal and Sullivan, Haught, and Goodenough, definite methods were devised in order to cancel out language as a factor. They administered non-lanuage tests, considered to be "completely independent of language." Paschal and Sullivan designed a "test or scale that can be applied by an American to the Mexican child or adult and despite his limited use of English obtain results as free from personal error as the theory of mental tests demands." However, these scientists were not all willing to make such an adjustment in their method. In their studies they accused Mexicans of not adapting themselves "to our form of life" and further

that Mexicans refused to "use English or encourage their children to use it."18 Nevertheless, they administered their "non-language" mental tests in the most unscientific of methods. For example, in one test composed of a battery of six, individual children were asked to arrange numbered blocks into their proper sequence after they were scrambled by the examiner. "The child was given no other instruction than 'Put these back as quickly as you can,' which was accompanied by motions indicating the task so that in case the words were not understood the child would nevertheless understand what she wanted."19 Three trials were given and each rearrangement of blocks varied. "It was customary to warn the child to go faster on the second trial, but no additional instruction or encouragement was given except to call 'pronto' before each trial got well under way."20 One can imagine what the "pronto" sounded like to the Mexican child; moreover, the emphasis on speed on all six of the tests must have been an unnerving situation for the children. One can only speculate what those 410 children felt as they were subjected to such a hostile examination or what the many hundreds of other children felt as subjects of the social sciences.

Haught was even more hostile toward the children in his study since the fundamental purpose for his research was to dispel the notion that language was a factor:

When intelligence tests are administered to both groups, the children of Spanish descent fall considerably below the standards obtained by those of Anglo descent. There is an inclination to assume that this does not mean an inferiority but a language difficulty encountered in taking tests.²¹

Haught's inclination was consequently to assume that language was not a factor and that Mexicans were therefore truly innately inferior. He used this argument to support his conclusions: "Since the older children are handicapped as much as the younger there seems to be no justification for assigning the difficulty to inability to use or understand English . . ."²² Thus, like Paschal and Sullivan, Haught was upset because the subjects were not "assimilating" quickly enough. He concluded that their intelligence was a barrier to learning English; non-use of English was sufficient reason for Haught to assume that language was not a cause of low intelligence! Consequently, the objective standard for intelligence was knowledge of English and even though he had stated that his investigation was to clarify the importance of language in psychological tests, he concluded that the command of the English language was as much the indicator of intelligence as the intelligence test itself.

Florence L. Goodenough also sought to define the role of language in

intelligence tests through developing a non-verbal examination. Her whole purpose was to prove that verbal tests were reliable and corresponded to non-verbal tests. Goodenough, who worked as psychologist for the Institute of Child Welfare at the University of Minnesota, tested 2,457 school children in 1928, of whom 367 were Mexican children from Los Angeles. Her results coincided with those of her colleagues who administered verbal tests. The non-language scale test, wrote Goodenough, "is completely independent of language" and that furthermore "the rank order of the various nationality groups corresponds very closely to that found by means of other intelligence tests."23 The data were overwhelming and converged from a number of separate points. Every possible instrument at the disposal of psychology to measure and quantify mental quality obtained similar results. Mexican children, indeed the Mexican people, were below average in intelligence, and were not deserving of the same educational opportunities as those of higher intelligence.

Conclusions and Proposals of The Racist Scholars

"Extensive studies in the Southwest show that this condition, serious retardation, is a common one among Mexican children," according to one investigation. The research concluded that the average Mexican child was not normal in intelligence and that the educational "treatment" of Mexicans was to be adjusted to meet their particular level of intelligence. Haught found in 1931 that the "average Spanish child has an intelligence quotient of .79 compared with 1.00 for the average Anglo child." However, the liberal side of Haught was quick to advise the reader that "there are some Spanish children as bright as the very superior children." Garretson found that "retardation of the Mexican child... is from three to eight times as great as that of the American child...." Delmet concluded "that the Mexican children studied show, on the whole, greater school retardation and less acceleration, and are on the whole much older for a given grade than are white children." 28

Gamble's study found "the average intelligence quotient for the Mexican was 78.75." Furthermore, he stated, "This quotient is... approximately the same as that found by Garth."²⁹

Koch and Simmons, Sheldon, Young, McAnulty, Paschal and Sullivan, Goodenough and Garretson reached similar if not identical conclusions. Mexican children were inferior to "American" children on the most scientific of instruments, and were still as inferior when the language factor varied. These "facts" were not abstract theoretical conclusions, for it was always the intention of the

investigators that their conclusions have practical application in the socialization programs of the educational institutions.

Kimball Young's study is the classic practical scientific investigation, for his whole purpose in research was to solve practical social problems. After Young concluded that "Latins" were inferior to "Americans" he then suggested a reorganization within the educational system which would recognize this range of mental (and thus social) superiority and inferiority. He proposed that students be segregated on the basis of intelligence since "the problem of teaching the American children in terms of ability is far easier than with Latins who in no case can rise but a few points above the standard average intelligence Young questioned whether the difficulty of non-English speaking students was "one of language ... alone," or "one of differences of cultural heredity or does the principal cause lie in roots in which the environment has little play?" However, the question of the cause was not of concern to the immediate educational problems presented by "foreign" children. Young believed that the large number of average children were "clogging the school machinery" and that the teaching objectives of the schools become insurmountable by the presence of large numbers of "failures." He further contended that the real problem was not language, or the migratory type of laboring family characteristic of immigrants in the San Jose area, but "one of mental capacity, or general intelligence." Since Young's major interest, like that of other investigators, was not principally for making racial comparisons (although he certainly did make them) but in educational progress, he focused upon the "changes in the educational program" necessary to cope with the "facts" of lower intelligence among Latins. Educators, warned Young, "must take into account the mental abilities of the children who come from these racial groups." He was, however, satisfied that in "many school systems" a reorganization and "revamping of the curriculum" was taking place precisely on the basis of mental abilities of racial groups.

Young proposed that schools "educate" them to their capacity. Toward this end he recommended four basic reforms to be carried out involving (1) school policy, (2) administrative and supervisional changes, (3) curriculum changes accompanied by changes in teaching practice, and (4) "A public conscience of cooperation with the schools."

Under "school policy" Young suggested that a "new policy must grow from a careful sociological-educational survey of the localities, the economic life of the inhabitants, what the children of the present will be doing in later life in industry and agriculture or in business." Young seemed to be borrowing from current educational thinking, specifically E.A. Ross's liberal progressive ideal of having the school become a center of social stability. Young further added that "the

general levels of intelligence in the school population that are to be instructed must be given highest priority in developing this new school policy." In essence, if this suggestion were to be carried out, each school would develop and adjust according to the immediate community's level of intelligence.

Secondly, Young suggested changes in school administration and supervision, which he described as the application of "standardized intelligence tests which should be applied throughout the elementary schools." This was "only suggested from the side of the schools predominantly foreign because it is there that the largest number of the backward are found."

Thirdly, after testing, Young proposed that a reorganization of teaching units must be made that took into account "at least for three classes of pupils, the mentally retarded, the normal, and the superior." Finally, Young urged that a program in Americanization with English classes as the central core of instruction be instituted in each city with significant enrollment of foreign children.

The practical effect of such proposals was to completely alter the depth of education, for what would result would be a state institution with enormous power over individual lives. As far reaching as these proposals appear, they are only significant when linked with the curriculum Young proposed; it was developed upon the following grounds: "Given the range of abilities measuring from those represented by the lowest twenty-five percent of the Latins to those found in the upper twenty-five percent of the non-Latins, what must be done to make the content of education more commensurate with the abilities of these pupils?"32 Young's curriculum would be along the lines of (1) "Training for occupational efficiency," (2) "Habits and attitudes for social cooperation," and (3) "training for appreciation... of the arts and sciences for satisfaction and happiness." Each curriculum guide would have special meaning for the social classes of society; the poor, "less intelligent," would be trained for a "commensurate task in society; . . . for those who do not possess the capacities of the average school child, the curriculum must provide vocational training, and skills which will allow their best abilities to express themselves." Not only would those of "backward mentality" be trained to fill a manual vocation, they would also be given courses in science, literature, art and music, for there was always the possibility of "considerable appreciation of these cultural forms."

Ultimately, a paternalistic education system, given near absolute power over the destiny of the individual, was for Young (as for Ross, Terman and Thorndike) a necessary form of governmental intervention in order that the "American system" be saved through identification and training of the "innately" more intelligent section of the population: "Let our segregation be along the lines of ability, never race as such, and with the proper opportunities for all, especially for those capable of leadership, the future of culture itself is secured."³³

Conclusions

By the 1930s, programs identical to Young's proposals were generally incorporated into the educational system of major cities across the U.S. A federally sponsored study published in 1933 reported that vocational courses were the commonly applied curriculum program for Mexican school children throughout the Southwest.34 In the program of the Los Angeles educational system, schools with large Mexican populations, Young's proposals were identical to the practices of that school system.35 The massive attack upon the public education system by minorities in the 1960s was not surprising given the genesis of the educational programs for working class children. The system of education, as interpreted by progressives, was not a method for social mobility for the majority, but the maintaining of privileges for a select few. Simultaneously, schools would create stability, orderliness, and constant reproduction of a functional social and political consciousness. This effect was insured through the application of the intelligence tests and scientific racism.

The benefits to the existing social order were clear. If working class children could be taught to think of themselves as inferior, they would then be a consciously functional cell within the division of labor. A class society cannot have an entire population thinking of itself as totally "equal" and depending upon one's socioeconomic class, schools reinforced a consciousness of assuming responsibility for being in a particular socioeconomic "level." This psychological conditioning was fashioned for the working class by the intelligentsia who plied their trade in the interests of capital.

Young, as did other psychologists, went through a torturous route to arrive at the same conclusion that John Dewey had spoken of some years earlier. Dewey urged that children be given an education at the community's socioeconomic level, proposing vocational education for working class children. Young followed Dewey's theoretical construction, unconsciously perhaps, but the similarity of their conclusions are nevertheless clear. The historical roots of unequal education, however, go back much further than Dewey. The classical political theorists of the bourgeoisie had long before understood that each class by virtue of its role in production could never be given an equal opportunity to education. The dispensing of learning under capitalism, like the distribution of wealth, was logically unequal. The

premises of educational theory and practice, founded upon the need to preserve the social relations of production, insured an unequal education for the children of Mexican workers in the United States.

NOTES

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- 25 Haught, 95.
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- ²⁸Delmet, 278.
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