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Created Equal

Entry 1:

By William Saletan | Posted Sunday, Nov. 18, 2007, at 7:57 AM ET

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights ...

—Declaration of Independence

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Last month, James Watson, the legendary biologist, was condemned and forced into [retirement](#) after claiming that African intelligence wasn't "the same as ours." "Racist, vicious and [unsupported by science](#)," said the Federation of American Scientists. "Utterly [unsupported by scientific evidence](#)," declared the U.S. government's supervisor of genetic research. The *New York Times* told readers that when Watson implied "that black Africans are

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less intelligent than whites, he [hadn't a scientific leg to stand on](#)."

I wish these assurances were true. [They aren't](#). Tests do show an IQ deficit, not just for Africans relative to Europeans, but for Europeans relative to Asians. Economic and cultural theories have failed to explain most of the pattern, and there's strong preliminary evidence that part of it is genetic. It's time to prepare for the possibility that equality of intelligence, in the sense of racial averages on tests, will turn out not to be true.

If this suggestion makes you angry—if you find the idea of genetic racial advantages outrageous, socially corrosive, and unthinkable—you're not the first to feel that way. Many Christians are going through a similar struggle over evolution. Their faith in human dignity rests on a literal belief in Genesis. To them, evolution isn't just another fact; it's a threat to their whole value system. As William Jennings Bryan [put it](#) during the Scopes trial, evolution meant elevating "supposedly superior intellects," "eliminating the weak," "paralyzing the hope of reform," jeopardizing "the doctrine of brotherhood," and undermining "the sympathetic activities of a civilized society."

The same values—equality, hope, and brotherhood—are under scientific threat today. But this time, the threat is racial genetics, and the people struggling with it are liberals.

Evolution forced Christians to bend or break. They could insist on the Bible's literal truth and deny the facts, as Bryan did. Or they could seek a subtler account of creation and human dignity. Today, the dilemma is yours. You can try to reconcile evidence of racial differences with a more sophisticated understanding of equality and opportunity. Or you can fight the evidence and hope it doesn't break your faith.

I'm for reconciliation. Later this week, I'll make that case. But if you choose to fight the



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evidence, [here's what you're up against](#). Among white Americans, the average IQ, as of a decade or so ago, was 103. Among Asian-Americans, it was 106. Among Jewish Americans, it was 113. Among Latino Americans, it was 89. Among African-Americans, it was 85. Around the world, studies find the same general pattern: whites 100, East Asians 106, sub-Saharan Africans 70. One IQ table shows 113 in Hong Kong, 110 in Japan, and 100 in Britain. White populations in Australia, Canada, Europe, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States score closer to one another than to the worldwide black average. It's been that way for at least a century.

Remember, these are averages, and all groups overlap. You can't deduce an individual's intelligence from her ethnicity. The only thing you can reasonably infer is that anyone who presumes to rate your IQ based on the color of your skin is probably dumber than you are.

So, what should we make of the difference in averages?

We don't like to think IQ is mostly inherited. But we've all known families who are smarter than others. Twin and sibling studies, which can sort genetic from environmental factors, suggest more than half the variation in IQ scores is genetic. A task force report from the [American Psychological Association](#) indicates it might be even higher. The report doesn't conclude that genes explain racial gaps in IQ. But the tests on which racial gaps are biggest happen to be the tests on which genes, as measured by comparative sibling performance, exert the biggest influence.

How could genes cause an IQ advantage? The simplest pathway is head size. I thought head measurement had been discredited as Eurocentric pseudoscience. I was wrong. In fact, it's been [bolstered by MRI](#). On average, Asian-American kids have bigger brains than white American kids, who in turn have bigger brains than black American kids. This is true even though the order of body size and weight runs in the other direction. The pattern holds true throughout the world and persists at death, as measured by brain weight.

According to twin studies, 50 percent to 90 percent of variation in head size and brain volume is genetic. And when it comes to IQ, size matters. The old science of head measurements found a 20 percent correlation of head size with IQ. The new science of MRI finds at least a 40 percent correlation of brain size with IQ. One analysis calculates that brain size could easily account for five points of the black-white IQ gap.

I know, it sounds crazy. But if you approach the data from other directions, you get the same results. The more black and white scores differ on a test, the more performance on that test correlates with head size and "g," a measure of the test's emphasis on general intelligence. You can debate the reality of g, but you can't debate the reality of head size. And when you compare black and white kids who score the same on IQ tests, their average difference in head circumference is zero.

Scientists have already [identified genes](#) that influence brain size and vary by continent. Whether these play a role in racial IQ gaps, [nobody knows](#). But we should [welcome](#) this research, because any genetic hypothesis about intelligence ought to be clarified and tested.

Critics think IQ tests are relative—i.e., they measure fitness for success in our society, not in other societies. "In a hunter-gatherer society, IQ will still be important, but if a hunter cannot shoot straight, IQ will not bring food to the table," [argues](#) psychologist [Robert Sternberg](#). "In a warrior society ... physical prowess may be equally necessary to stay alive." It's a good point, but it bolsters the case for a genetic theory. Nature isn't stupid. If Africans, Asians, and Europeans evolved different genes, the reason is that their respective genes were suited to their respective environments.

In fact, there's a mountain of evidence that differential evolution has left each population with a balance of traits that could be advantageous or disadvantageous, depending on circumstances. The [list of differences](#) is long and intricate. On average, compared with whites, blacks mature more quickly in the womb, are born earlier, and develop teeth, strength, and dexterity earlier. They sit, crawl, walk, and dress themselves earlier. They reach sexual maturity faster, and they have better eyesight. On each of these measures, East Asians lag whites and blacks. In exchange, East Asians get longer lives and bigger brains.

How this happened isn't clear. Everyone agrees that the three populations separated 40,000 to 100,000 years ago. Even [critics](#) of racial IQ genetics accept the idea that through natural

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selection, environmental differences may have caused abilities such as distance running to become more common in some populations than in others. Possibly, genes for cognitive complexity became so crucial in some places that nature favored them over genes for developmental speed and vision. If so, fitness for today's world is mostly dumb luck. If we lived in a savannah, kids programmed to mature slowly and grow big brains would be toast. Instead, we live in a world of zoos, supermarkets, pediatricians, pharmaceuticals, and information technology. Genetic advantages, in other words, are culturally created.

Not that that's much consolation if you're stuck in the 21st century with a low IQ. Tomorrow we'll look at some of the arguments against the genetic theory.

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Will Saletan covers science, technology, and politics for Slate and says a lot of things that get him in trouble.

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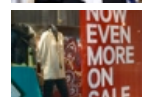
rohit

Coming from India, I have a different take on these things because our tradition of respect for animals is very old and very deep. There are dramatic instances of this in the life of the Buddha



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Sex on the Brain

Are boys' brains different from girls' brains? Scientists debate the question.

William Saletan | November 17, 2011

(as well as the life of prince Siddhartha). You can find cows, goats, pigs, monkeys and peacocks roaming the streets of small towns all over India and they seem to feel safe enough.

But our respect for the lives of animals does not imply that we pretend that they have the same IQ as humans. They have rights because they are living beings who share our planet.

So to my mind, it is not problematic if different groups have different amounts of intelligence, or much more likely, different KINDS of intelligence. For instance if you look at the Nobel prizes won by women, you see immediately that these prizes are not distributed evenly. If you thought in terms of discrimination then you would expect all numbers to be very low, But in fact female Nobel prizes are more common in Peace, Medicine and Literature.

Some of the big guns of English literature in the 19th century were women, at a time when women were not supposed to push themselves forward, and Mary Ann Evans wrote under the name of George Eliot.

Why is it sexist to suggest that women have greater strength in literature than they have in say Math? Of course there are women mathematicians like Emmy Noether, but they seem to be few at least at the top. Whereas in writing we see so many female geniuses.

Why do we shut our eyes to something which stares us in the face? People who suggest that there are differences are not suggesting that we start discriminating against some groups. They may be merely suggesting that we take advantage of the differences that exist.

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vanwash

I bet every dime I have, and the history of science will back me on this, that this question is far from settled. Note that people far smarter than Rushton and Jensen (Newton, Einstein etc.) and who had a much easier field to study (consistent laws of the universe vs statistical manipulation of data from people) were wrong. Space and time are not universal and God does play dice.

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Richard Pinder

I think everyone is Racist, otherwise you would not notice that there where any racial differences. I think Racial hatred or those who pretend that they are Racially blind are the problem.

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i believe that no matter how racist a point is, it should be looked into. I am not a racist by no means, yet I still believe that he was onto something big. Our genetics are not the same, since our skin colors are different. So since our genetics aren't the same, couldn't that reach the intelligence part of our brain also. I'm just saying that if someone has a point, let them prove it before forcing them into retirement.

4 Months Ago from slate.com · [Reply](#)



Christian Storay

William, I've now read your later articles and it appears you answered my question years ago. I may not agree with you that literal equality is a lie... but I do believe that every man should be judged by what he is capable of, not by a stereotype. At least with that, we agree.

For others who might stumble across this article - before you judge this man read:

"The Case for Colour-blindness in The Age of Genetics" <http://www.slate.com/id/2217681>

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Jon Bea

The IQ of blacks and whites is clearly genetic. Watson is totally right whether anyone likes it or not. I studied psychology and have gone to college with blacks and it is evident that they have a hard time in college due to their IQ. Some blacks took the Anatomy and Physiology class over and over because of their IQ.

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rohit

I remember watching the debate between McCain and Obama and remarked that it was interesting that in this case, it was the black man who was smart and it was the white man who was brave. McCain's bravery cannot be denied, for few of us would have survived the years in Vietnamese captivity. And whatever Obama's shortcomings, lack of intelligence is definitely not one of them.

But I think if we look at the statistics, it is hard to escape the conclusion that in



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William Saletan | November 15, 2011

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general blacks are more courageous than whites, and whites are, ahem, smarter.

In general, I said, and it does not apply to every case as we see with Obama and McCain.

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bshound

Where are you finding these statistics on "courageousness"?

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Write reply here...



robert elmasian

William Saletan would have been pilloried on most college campuses in the 1970's or 1980's. His willingness to consider that different IQ scores might result from different gene pools, let alone different cultures, is not politically correct. Nevertheless, in Darwinian reality it is hard to expect anything else whatever test might be used to measure IQ. Different gene pools develop diverging characteristics. The wonder is that that sometimes, and usually rarely, they sometimes can converge.

Kudos to Saletan for the courage to state in print what should be obvious, despite political needs and desires. What is politically important is that a person in any group not be pre-judged and pigeonholed, either high or low; that individual opportunity not be restricted by group membership. The rights of individuals should be the equivalent, and these equivalent rights should not depend on individuals or the groups to which they belong being the same as everyone else.

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M

You should notice in the first article in the series, people are being pilloried on college campuses for stating these things now - there is no need to look back to the 1970's or 1980's. Eg most currently Summers at Harvard and now Watson in many places. The Bell Curve debate was the 90's version of this. 1980's was when this cycle of academic self-censorship really started taking off - generating the backlash book "Closing of the American Mind". In the 1970's I think the censorship was mainly among students/counter-culture, less institutional.

3 Months Ago from slate.com

Write reply here...



Ruth White

IQ scores measure only how well one performs in IQ tests. This is not an absolute measure of intelligence, just how good you are at doing the tests.

It is a fallacy to assume the scores actually measure intelligence, they do not.

James Watson is possibly right in claiming that different racial groups think differently as how are brains are wired are not just dependent upon environmental conditions but our genes.

it is wrong therefore to claim that one racial group is more intelligent than another. The intelligence is different, not less.

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