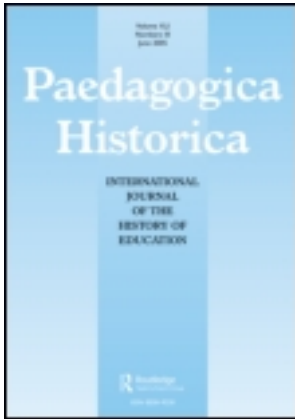


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“Young Rebels Flee Psychology”: individual intelligence, race and foster children in Cleveland, Ohio between the world wars

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This study examines foster child case records to understand how intelligence testing was used by guidance counsellors and social workers to negotiate welfare resources with poor youths in the early twentieth century. Psychological testing justified racial hierarchy in a scientific language suited for a rational professional bureaucracy. Yet, it was also a technique for individual analysis that allowed poor children and youths to observe themselves and to speak about themselves in ways that countered biological determinism. The clinical reports and case notes suggest that foster youths often figured themselves as social actors resisting the unfavourable assessments presented by the professionals. The practice of making bio-social predictions about fostered youths, ironically, cleared space for an opposing figure to take shape in the recorded words of the youths: the agentive, political youth demanding recognition and resources. This article opens a rare window upon the “governmentality” of childhood by allowing us to consider the ways in which structures of assessment allowed the subject to view the self as an object.

Keywords: childhood; discursive practices; governmentality; welfare; foster care; intelligence; IQ; testing; race

Introduction

Preserved in the case records of foster children in Cleveland, Ohio is a newspaper clipping dated 4 December 1927. The headline reads, “3 Young Rebels Flee Psychology: boys 9, follow girl 7, skip from Child Welfare Clinic”. The “Rebels” were foster children being subjected to a psychological study. After escaping the clinic, they purchased food with a five-dollar bill found on a park bench. This money lasted a few days, but when they got hungry the boys surrendered. The girl held out a few days longer. A doctor at the clinic explained their disobedience as a result of a “runaway complex” spreading among the children and producing a series of disorderly actions. If running away was a symptom of maladjustment, so the psychiatrist reasoned, then all the more reason to bring them into custody for examination and treatment.

The reporter offered an alternative explanation. The children did not wish the doctors to “probe into their subconscious minds” and thus they fled and were now

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“sought by police as rebels from modern psychiatry”.¹ By calling the children “rebels” and evoking the image of police pursuit, while also drawing upon the psychiatric language of pathological development used by the clinicians, the newspaper story deployed one of the most important generative tensions shaping the landscape of modern childhood: the opposition between the competent agent (the political child) and the healthy, well-developed organism (the developing child).²

The reporting of this single episode of rebellious, impoverished children exposes a well-known opposition between the sciences of the individual (psychiatry and psychology) and the politics of individual resistance and liberation. This article will argue that this larger tension structured not only a particular telling of acts taken by foster children, it also served as the definitive discursive feature of the set of foster case records where the single clipping was preserved.³ As a whole, the records offer a unique vantage point for examining the contested terrain, not only between groups (professionals and the poor, adults and youths, whites and blacks), but upon which two competing figures of childhood (the developing child and the political child) met and mutually framed each other. Thousands of pages of notes, memos, letters, reports and orders where these two competition figures of childhood clashed served as mechanisms for organised professional action within a network where foster-youth treatment was negotiated, resisted, justified and communicated.

There is much in this study to confirm Nikolas Rose’s contention that, during the twentieth century, through the “gaze of the psychologist”, childhood came under a set of disciplinary techniques that made it, “the most intensively governed sector of personal existence”.⁴ The construction of the inward-looking science of childhood, and specifically the ability of the clinic, vocational counselling and testing to incorporate the subjectivity of children into a new regime of truth, cleared room and provided materials for children to rework the self and to provide counter-truths. In response to these techniques, to echo Linda Gordon, this article suggests that

¹“Family Files”, box 2, 18th folder, correspondence, “3 Young Rebels Flee Psychology”, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 4 December 1927, 6A. The use of county and state juvenile wards in medical and psychological research was common. See Susan E. Lederer, “Orphans as guinea pigs: American children and medical experimenters, 1890–1930”, in Roger Cooter, ed. *In the Name of the Child: Health and Welfare, 1880–1940* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 96–123.

²The terms “political child” and “developing child” are defined as part of a larger landscape of modern childhood in Patrick J. Ryan, “How new is the ‘new’ social studies of childhood? The myth of a paradigm shift”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38 (2008): 553–576.

³The data were drawn from all known surviving foster care records prior to 1945 from the Cuyahoga County Child Welfare Bureau. The whereabouts or even the size of the entire population of the original case records was unknown. Very recently, the foster child case records were moved from the county archives to a storage facility of the Cuyahoga County Children’s and Family Services. As a result, additional records were uncovered and made accessible. Research on these records is underway. The initial investigation, as reported here, included a complete reading and detailed analysis of all the documentation on the earliest 108 foster children from 49 families. These records are extraordinarily lengthy, and include medical, psychological and vocational guidance reports, interagency correspondence, family histories, occasional letters and photos from clients, in addition to daily or weekly notes made by case workers.

⁴Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*, 2nd ed. (New York: Free Association Books, 1999), 123.

foster youths viewed themselves as “heroes of their own lives”, and this altered the meanings associated with evaluation and guidance.⁵ This interpretation attempts to reconcile Rose’s shadow of governmentality with Gordon’s celebration of individual agency by arguing that the opposition between foster children and the professionals existed upon a common cultural terrain. This common landscape defined nothing less than modern childhood itself, and has been theorised in previous writing.⁶ Here it is only necessary to posit that the landscape of modern childhood emerged in part through technologies for examining and classifying children as objects under controlled conditions. In turn, such techniques opened spaces for children and youths themselves to demand to be treated as subjects who participate in their own representation. To put it another way, the devices of normalisation helped produce the conditions for a more self-conscious articulation of agency and subjectivity.⁷

In the first half of the twentieth century new psychological technologies, especially intelligence tests, became extremely important in the negotiation of resources between poor youths and professional social workers. The tests were implicated in the fact that the types of training, work placements, schooling and custody arrangements that were afforded to juvenile wards were gendered by middle-class domestic ideals, and racially stratified. But, it is important to understand that the structure of the new psychological and eugenic knowledge was incommensurate with older notions of noble obligation or God’s providence; and, therefore, this new knowledge altered the discursive terrain upon which old inequities could be advanced and resisted.⁸ As many historians have argued, psychological assessment provided a liberal, modern, professional legitimacy for an imagined hierarchy of racial and class difference and loaded this with profound institutional consequences. Testing helped justify, signify and transmit inequity within a language of competent individualism.

The political uses of testing should not be seen simply as old wine in new wine skins. The idea of IQ was not and is not merely an ideological veneer.⁹ The intellectual commitment required to categorise youths bureaucratically into groups based on individual intelligence opened the possibility for poor youths to resist unfavourable categorisations with arguments about their own individual distinctiveness, their own aspirations and desires, their own right to be given opportunities for

⁵Linda Gordon’s, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence: Boston, 1880–1960* (New York: Viking, 1988).

⁶See note 2 above.

⁷One of the most extensive studies demonstrating the first half of my point is Andre Turmel, *A Historical Sociology of Childhood: Developmental Thinking, Categorization, and Graphic Visualization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁸The literature on intelligence testing and eugenics is complex, but the places to begin for the points made here are John Carson, *The Measure of Merit: Talents, Intelligence, and Inequality in the French and American Republics, 1750–1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 111–194; James W. Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 155–166; Daniel J. Kevels, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985): 45–108.

⁹Debunking IQ or early-century eugenics as “bad science”, or setting it conveniently aside as a “race science”, threatens to reduce our treatment of the politics of knowledge to some combination of ignorance, conspiracy and economic interest. Uncritical assumptions about the progress of knowledge may be declining among historians, but they remain strong in respected popular works. See the many editions of Stephen Jay Gould’s *The Mismeasure of Man* first published by W.W. Norton in 1981.

occupational success. In other words, the bio-social discourse of the developing (or developmentally defective, or maladjusted) child was part of the landscape needed for the articulation of its opposite: the agentive, political child. This is the historical significance of the 1927 headline from the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, “3 Young Rebels Flee Psychology”. It was a tension that structured a plot running through the unpublished case records of foster children as a whole.

Industrialism, individualism and childhood

The historical coincidence between the rise of romantic sentiment for individual dignity and utilitarian demand for industrial efficiency stands as one of the great paradoxes of modernity – at least on the surface.¹⁰ A profound cultural symbiosis between them was incorporated (though not exclusively so) at the very origins of the modern child – a figure whose tremendous emotive power has been produced (at least in part) as a response to the disciplinary regimes within schools, treatment centres, clinics and custodial institutions.¹¹ So too, the modern child emerged with a number of complimentary figures. None was more critical to it than the new middle-class woman; caring, but efficient, motherly and professional.¹² This woman remains the guardian of a new social order, especially through the management of poor children, whose ties to their own mothers are so often figured as broken, frayed or twisted. It is well known that, for this transformation in childhood and womanhood to take place, the figure of ideal fatherhood had to move as well – from master to breadwinner. This is why, during the nineteenth century, the traditional master–servant approach of binding poor children out to paternalistic households lost its economic feasibility and moral legitimacy. As a result, the self (the person of the child within, rather than relations of servitude within the productive household) became the most important modern site for stabilising (and contesting) cultural reproduction.¹³

In America, the search for ways to discipline the child within was complicated by the mass disorderly movement of workers that increased in both volume and diversity as the twentieth century approached. During this period approximately a third of all Eastern European Jews migrated to the United States. At the local level, the picture of demographic movement was awesome. In Cleveland, Ohio the number of persons originating from England, Ireland, Canada and Germany declined by tens of thousands between 1890 and 1930, while newcomers born in

¹⁰On romanticism and the self, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). On utilitarianism and the self, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

¹¹On childhood and the twin elements of romanticism and utilitarianism in child nurture, see Jacqueline S. Reiner, *From Virtue to Character: American Childhood, 1775–1850* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 46–101; Bernard Wishy, *The Child and the Republic: The Dawn of Modern American Child Nurture* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968).

¹²Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle-class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹³Mary Ann Mason, *From Father's Property to Children's Rights: The History of Child Custody in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

predominately Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Jewish countries made up as much as 75% of the city's population growth in the peak years. The city added 40,000 newcomers from Russia, 32,000 from Poland, 30,000 from Bohemia, 20,000 from Italy, 18,000 from Yugoslavian countries, 10,000 from Hungary, 5000 from Lithuania – all joining a city that had swelled over three-fold to about 900,000. Just as the southeastern European migration was restricted by US federal law between the First World War and the Great Depression, over a million African-Americans left the former slave states. Cleveland's African-American population expanded more than seventeen-fold in the four decades following 1910, rising to almost 150,000 by mid-century. These figures underestimate the dynamism of the situation because they do not track the massive number of persons who came to the city and returned to their native lands after a few years.¹⁴

To recap: America entered the late nineteenth century flush with novel ideas about the individual, a growing capacity for institutional control and order, but challenged by a mobile, increasingly diverse population. These factors played into a middle-class fear of urban disorder and alienation that was “inextricably connected” with child welfare reform.¹⁵ What were respectable people to do, asked Charles Loring Brace, the founder of the *Children's Aid Society*, when “the outcast, vicious, reckless multitude of New York boys, swarming now in every foul alley and low street, come to know their power and *use it*?”¹⁶ He did not accept the idea that the answer lay in building more custodial institutions of unprecedented size, ordered by industrial discipline for poor, disabled and otherwise marginal people – young and old alike.¹⁷ These institutions were expensive, and suspect for treating children as cogs in a machine, fitting them only for institutional life. Brace's alternative was to send them on trains to individual families out West.

From the orphan trains into the era of the juvenile courts, a new army of social workers visited homes, erected settlement houses and dispensed poverty relief in ways that they hoped would assimilate diverse urban masses to the middle-class ideals of individual hygiene and self-discipline.¹⁸ Over no more than four decades,

¹⁴The numbers represent the increase in the reported numbers of “foreign”-born persons living in Cuyahoga County by country of origin as recorded in the US Census and presented with an excellent summary in David D. Van Tassel and John J. Grabowski, eds. *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), xxxiii–xxxiv, 541–542. Also see Part III of Jacqueline Jones, *The Dispossessed: American's Underclasses from the Civil War to the Present* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992); Kimberly L. Phillips, “‘But it is a fine place to make money’: migration and African-American families in Cleveland, 1915–1929”, *Journal of Social History* 29 (1996): 393–413.

¹⁵Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 200–212.

¹⁶Robert H. Bremner, *From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), 213; Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

¹⁷Paul S. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

¹⁸On assimilation, see Rivka Shpak Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives: Hull House and the New Immigrants, 1890–1919* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989). For more institutional details on visiting and family regulation by the helping professions, see Anthony M. Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Juvenile Delinquency* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1969); Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979); LeRoy Ashby, *Endangered Children: Dependence, Neglect, and Abuse in American History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 17–54.

these policies were coordinated with new psychiatric and vocational counselling clinics, successful enforcement of compulsory education and child labour prohibition.¹⁹ By 1933, an estimated 102,000 American children were fostered in families, another 140,000 continued to be housed in orphanages, and many tens of thousands more were held in state institutions for the feeble-minded and juvenile reformatories.²⁰ By mid-century the number of children in foster care exceeded those in custodial institutions, and by century's end there were more than twice as many children in foster care, with a total numbering over half a million persons.²¹

The rise of foster care and an increasingly robust system of cash relief directed toward mothers complimented each other. The architect of Ohio's juvenile court system, claimed a mother had a right to cash relief because, "her services in rearing children are performed for the State; she is caring for its future citizens and doing it as no one else can". Likewise, Ohio stipulated five principles for the placement of juvenile wards: (1) require documentation of neglect prior to pursuing custody; (2) attempt to reunite the family; (3) give corrective medical care; (4) require the children to attend school and church; (5) attempt to "make the daily life of the children approximate the family ideal in order that their individuality may be developed and that they may escape institutionalization".²²

It was poverty, not parental death, that created children who were wards of the state. Among Cleveland's interwar foster children, 94% had at least one living parent, and 51% had two. Therefore, children were not taken directly from the street; most of the time they were taken from homes declared unfit, and the reasons for such a declaration are very telling. Middle-class assumptions about breadwinning, homemaking and childrearing framed the arguments that social workers offered. For example, when living fathers were declared unfit to retain custody of their children, more than two-thirds of the time it was justified because of his economic failures. These reasons were used for taking custody from mothers about one-third as often (23%) as they were for fathers. The vast majority of the time, motherly fitness was adjudicated in terms of her physical illness, lack of personal hygiene, household disorder, mental defect, alcoholism, other drug use, prostitution and other sexual transgressions (77%). Fathers were judged in terms of these bad habits, bodily illnesses and moral weaknesses less than half as often as mothers (30%).²³

¹⁹Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

²⁰Marian J. Morton, "Surviving the Great Depression: orphanages and orphans in Cleveland", *Journal of Urban History* 26 (2000): 438.

²¹Bernadine Barr, "Spare children, 1900-1945: inmates of orphanages as subjects of research in medicine and in the social sciences in America", PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1992, p. 32.

²²C.V. Williams, "The Children's Bureau", *Ohio Bulletin of Charities and Correction* 22 (1916): 115-121; Mary Irene Atkinson, "Division of inspection", *Ohio Bulletin of Charities and Correction* 28 (1921): 12-13; Harry H. Howett, "Division of child-care", *Ohio Bulletin of Charities and Correction* 28 (1921): 36-39; George S. Addams, "Mother's Pensions", *Ohio Bulletin of Charities and Correction* 21 (1915): 19.

²³The strength of association for the gendered distribution of justification for custody was moderate to strong, 0.519 at the 0.0001 significance level. For more explanation, see Patrick J. Ryan, "Shaping modern youth: social policies and growing up working-class in industrial America, 1890-1945", PhD dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1998, pp. 187-196.

The enforcement of gender distinctions in acceptable child care was skewed against and more harshly applied to non-white parents. In Cleveland between the wars, African-American mothers were more likely than white mothers to be incarcerated as part of the child custody rationale, and African-American fathers were more likely to flee once white professionals intervened and took custody of the children.²⁴

From the professional perspective, taking custody of children was justified in terms of the children's "best interests", but it carried with it more diffuse disciplinary effects. As a profound act of power, its conforming effect would obviously extend beyond the horizon of those who directly experienced it. For those who did, foster care was supposed to be a way of instilling morally correct values and preparing youths for their proper social roles as future men and women. Psychological testing and child guidance entered this disciplinary dimension as a tool in the negotiations over what type of placement a child should have, whether they should continue in school, whether they would continue receiving aid in their late-teen years and whether they would get the best apprenticeships or job placements. As the remainder of the article will show, testing helped articulate key elements of the dominant discourses on poverty, gender and race as part of a way to situate the individual within the economic system. It also provided an opportunity for the subjects of examination to say something for themselves and about these things.

IQ, racial hierarchy and the developing child

Historians have traced the progress of scientific racism through various applications of psychological testing.²⁵ In America, the story often begins with a student of G. Stanley Hall named Henry H. Goddard. Goddard translated the Binet–Simon intelligence test, secured diagnostic status for it from American medical authorities and, most tellingly, coined a new word, "moron", to signify a new dangerous class of persons who purportedly were infected with and would likely spread social disorder.²⁶ By 1913, Ohio eugenicists following Goddard established a Bureau of Juvenile Research as a state agency designed to identify, sort and isolate moronic children from the general population.²⁷ Eugenic programmes appeared in numerous states, but the diffusion of testing technology in the 1920s was beyond the control of any one group of professionals.²⁸ By the Great Depression, thousands upon thousands of students and juvenile wards were being tested in groups or as individuals

²⁴Contemporary studies establish that racial inequity continues to permeate a broad spectrum of American institutions for poor children. See Naomi Cahn, "Race, poverty, history, adoption, and child abuse: connections", *Law & Society Review* 36 (2002): 461–488.

²⁵Carson, *The Measure of Merit*, 75–109, 159–194. Also see note 6 above, and William H. Tucker, *The Funding of Scientific Racism: Wickliffe Draper and the Pioneer Fund* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

²⁶Leila Zenderland, "The debate over diagnosis: Henry H. Goddard and the medical acceptance of intelligence testing", in M.M. Sokal, ed. *Psychological Testing and American Society, 1890–1913* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 46–74.

²⁷Patrick J. Ryan, "Unnatural selection: intelligence testing, eugenics, and American political cultures", *Journal of Social History* 30 (1997): 669–685.

²⁸Patrick J. Ryan, "'Six blacks from home': childhood, motherhood, and eugenics in America", *Journal of Policy History* 19 (2007): 253–281.

each year in cities across the country.²⁹ Intelligence testing had become the most important psychological examination of the twentieth century, though its uses were not as uniform as the leading eugenicists had envisioned.³⁰

In 1915 another student of Hall, Lewis Terman, successfully encoded intelligence testing as an index (IQ) rather than as a mental age, and the concept of IQ spread like a virus because of its simple, brutal efficiency. It is difficult to imagine two or three keystrokes on a case report holding more power than an intelligence quotient. In the hundreds of pages of notes, reports, correspondence and other documents produced for each child fostered through the Cuyahoga County Child Welfare Bureau (CCCWB) between the wars, only two types of notation appeared in red ink to set them off against the ordinary black type: IQ scores and the brief sentence fragments noting child-custody orders. Surely, this notional habit helped case workers quickly locate important information buried in the notes. Standing alone with a carriage-return's white space, the two or three digits draw the eye.

Such visual distinctiveness helps produce, assign and circulate fundamental statements amid the minutia of notes. On behalf of the law, the red ink pronounced this child now belongs to this agency, with this person, in this home. He or she must go here, must obey them. The red ink said on behalf of human science, this child has an invisible thing called intelligence (or lack thereof) within his or her head. It is a unitary, unchanging, measurable quantity, but it lurks behind the veil of bodily appearances. Those two or three numbers stood brightly ready to make the invisible unforgettable for the professionals reading or making the notes. The moron, the ordinary child, the child of genius begins to take shape in the eye. If the court order had authority to say who held the child, the score pronounced who the child was on the inside, or what the child might or might not become.

There is nothing inherently sinister in mundane notational habits, but the textual force of IQ upon the reader exposes a discursive link between knowledge of and power over the child that demands some deeper thought. Here we have an index that places individuals upon a one-dimensional scale to make grouping them easier. Casually reading the records, it becomes apparent that African-American foster children were often labelled intellectually inferior to other children. Table 1 gives a brief account of this racial pattern as it was manifested by the assignment, notation and circulation of IQ.

Interestingly enough, gender distinctions were rarely spoken about in terms of general intelligence; sorting girls and boys apparently did not depend on this sort of justification. Most girls (66%), and almost all African-American girls (over 90%), were placed as domestic servants as teenagers. Placing girls as domestic servants lowered the county's custody costs, even as it precluded high school attendance, and limited the acquisition of more marketable or advanced occupational skills outside of homemaking. Because domestic service was seen as adequate female work, a girl's vocational guidance was given less attention. Consequently, her IQ mattered less than the boys'. The greater significance of IQ for boys makes the relatively larger gap (10 points) in the assignment of intelligence to African-American boys

²⁹H.M. Walker, *The Social Adjustment of the Feeble-Minded: A Group Thesis Study of 898 Feeble-minded Individuals Known to Cleveland's Social Agencies* (Cleveland, OH: Western Reserve University Press, 1930).

³⁰Paul Davis Chapman, *Schools as Sorters: Lewis M. Terman, Applied Psychology, and the Intelligence Testing Movement, 1890–1930* (New York: New York University Press, 1988).

Table 1. IQ supported racial hierarchy.

Group	Mean IQ	Std. Dev.	Max	Min	N
African-American girls	87	16	118	61	15
African-American boys	83	15	113	66	13
White girls	90	14	114	65	26
White boys	93	16	120	48	39
African-Americans total	85	14	118	61	28
Whites total	92	15	120	48	65
Girls total	89	14	118	61	41
Boys total	90	16	120	48	52

Table 2. Vocational recommendation to case worker by IQ.

Vocational counsellor's recommendation to case worker	N	IQ Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
No vocational interview	22	82	17	48	118
Place youth in work programme or special school	13	84	9	66	101
Help youth find employment	27	90	15	66	114
Encourage youth to continue high school	23	97	11	61	113
Help youth to gain post-secondary schooling	5	107	12	94	120
No recommendation	3	94	7	90	102

*Two-tailed test association 0.4173 at $p=0.000$; Spearman's correlation coefficient 0.4334 at $p=0.000$.

versus white boys particularly noteworthy. So, too, religion, ethnicity and nativity were not so clearly expressed through IQ scores as the polar black–white distinction.³¹

The assignment of IQ had consequences, particularly for boys. Through a series of steps, test scores served as a sorting mechanism for the organisation of resources. The first step in this sorting process is shown in Table 2 as a statistically verified positive association between IQ scores and the recommendation that vocational counsellors offered to case workers. Those with relatively low scores (below 90 in this population of children) were likely to receive no vocational interview or report in their files. Often it was recommended that low-scoring boys should be placed in a federal work programme or a state custodial institution. If this was not available, the vocational counsellors recommended that, at age 15, they should be encouraged to leave school and find work to help pay part of their custody costs. For boys holding documentation of a higher IQ, it was more likely that the vocational counsellor would recommend the county maintain full financial support after age 15 to the foster family in the hope that he would remain in high school and gain either skilled training or post-secondary education.

The correlation between recorded IQ and the recommendation from the vocational counsellor was not perfect, but it does confirm the previous summary. Table 3 suggests further that the racial hierarchy justified by IQ and passed through the vocational counsellors' reports had an impact on the training and education that

³¹For more on ethnicity and gender, see Chapter 6 of my dissertation, "Shaping modern youth" as cited in note 23.

Table 3. Available training and education by race and gender.

Vocational course	African-American girls	African-American boys	White girls	White boys
Unclear	2 (9%)	3 (20%)	4 (15%)	10 (22%)
Unskilled training	19 (91%)	8 (53%)	17 (63%)	14 (31%)
Skilled/semi-skilled training programme	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	1 (4%)	9 (20%)
College/professional	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	5 (18%)	12 (27%)

*Pearson's chi-squared p-value = 0.00001; Cramer's V association = 0.41 at 0.0001 p-value.

foster youths were actually afforded by their case workers. Access to skilled trades and higher education was rare for foster youths as a whole, but white boys were almost four times more likely than African-American boys to receive the encouragement and financial support needed to attend college. Counsellors and social workers regularly justified case-by-case decisions in terms of boys' measured intelligence, and from such statements offered predictions about boys' occupational futures. By contrast, no cases could be found when an African-American foster girl received support for, or otherwise obtained, any skilled training or advanced education. Table 4 documents that, as a result of these patterns of assistance, white foster youths were five times more likely than African-Americans youths to exit the system with some occupational experience in trades or the professions.

Tables can only suggest (as these do) that the assignment of IQ, the writing of reports, the affording of opportunities and resources, and the gaining of occupational status by poor youths were associated with racial and gender distinctions. Causal explanations and questions about meaning require a closer reconstruction of foster care as a structured experience. The next section will provide this examination and argue that vocational guidance based upon IQ was engaged in a politics much more profound than controlling institutional resources and decisions.

"Making something of oneself", schooling and the foster child as social actor

In the Northern states, African-American children were not excluded as completely from social assistance by law or practice as they were in the South, yet IQ was one of the ways in which racial hierarchy resonated nationally. It helped create a new pathway between racism and the emerging Northern, liberal professionalism. Nevertheless, if we limit the issue to charting the inequities of resources justified

Table 4. Occupational experience by race.

Work experience upon discharge, usually 18–21	African-Americans	Whites
Unknown	0 (0%)	3 (5%)
No occupational experience	6 (17%)	11 (15%)
Unskilled	28 (78%)	40 (55%)
Skilled	2 (5%)	17 (24%)
Professional	0 (0%)	1 (1%)

*Pearson's chi-square for occupational status by race gave a p-value of 0.079 and Cramer's V association of 0.278 with p = 0.079.

by scores, we will likely overlook the experiential dimension of producing test data itself. In one sense, intelligence testing threatened to flatten the discourse on human talent into a unitary, hierarchical scale with its unmatched representational simplicity. Its two or three digits did not merely claim to classify what the child or youth had achieved, nor did it certify any particular performance of skill. It offered an index of all possible achievements, all possible skills to which the individual might reasonably aspire. It did more than measure children; it claimed to define all reasonable expectations for the development of the child. In this sense, IQ was a technology of normalisation that attempted to collapse the subjective space of childhood's potentiality. In the terms of American liberalism, IQ threatened to captivate the future of hope by consigning each individual to a place on a pre-determined scale of election.

In contrast to IQ's awesome discursive display of knowledge-power, suppose for a moment that, at the site of the production of the score, the tested child occupied an intersection between his or her subjective experience of agency (the mere fact of being a subject of testing) and the machinery of clinical objectivity. Situated within an entire notational project of professional social work, testing for guidance might have been a setting for reflexivity (the act of taking the self as an object). This reflexive, disciplinary space, as it will be argued below, was not merely a utilitarian one defined by the two or three keystrokes of the typewriter's red ink. If we use the case records to reconstruct the stories of particular foster children, sorting and shifting the evidence that pertains to them as individuals (much like the clinical method itself), it soon becomes possible to imagine that these youths' spoken words were not as easy to number and manipulate as an intelligence quotient. The bright red ink begins to fade from view, no longer exercising its monopoly upon our reading of the discourse.

Take the case of an African-American boy whom I will refer to as Carter Johnson. As with many other poor children in Cleveland, when Carter's mother died and his father became unemployed, he and his two siblings became objects of professional investigation and concern.³² In his situation, this was complicated because Carter's father left his three children with close friends while searching for work away from Cleveland. When these friends of the family were cited by the authorities for making and distributing liquor during Prohibition, a case worker of the Humane Society (a private organisation engaged in local social work) investigated the home, and recommended that Carter and his two older siblings be taken into state custody. The court agreed with the Humane Society, and Carter became a county ward in 1925 at the age of six, while his father was away.

The early case notes described Carter as a favourite of all who knew him. He explored every new thing he found, spoke with an endearing "sort of lisp" and was the kind of boy who reportedly would sit in every open seat on the bus just to experience the differences. Always a good student, Carter spoke words to his foster mother when she was learning shorthand. He called it helping her with her lessons and when she finished he would say to her, "Now, I've helped you with your lessons, you help me with mine." Carter's foster families encouraged his schooling,

³²Approximately 37% of foster children's mothers were deceased, and 57% of their fathers were some combination of unemployed or absent (the two are highly inter-related). Another factor was evidence of vice in the household. All three are present in Carter's custody record and thus his case contains the most common justifications for authorities to take custody of children.

saw that he was engaged with the Boy Scouts and provided him with music lessons. When Carter began the fourth grade, he told the case worker he wanted to be a lawyer. These notes, these observations, were delivered with an affirmative professional judgement, as the emotional impression Carter left upon the case workers, his teachers and his new foster family seeps through nearly every page of his middle childhood.³³

Carter's exuberance may have been extraordinary, but his statement of professional aspiration (to become a lawyer) was not uncommon among foster youths. The goals expressed in the guidance clinic were not determined by larger racial hierarchy, nor were they aligned with scores. Unlike the other tabulations presented above, group differences in stated aspirations shown in Table 5 were (statistically speaking) probably a matter of chance. Knowing a boy's or girl's race or IQ score would not allow you to predict with any confidence what they told the counsellors and social workers they wanted to be when they grew up. Reading against the evidence we have of a pattern of racial sorting and profiling through IQ, it is a striking fact that the youths generally refused to speak about themselves and their occupational futures in racially informed ways.

The notes do not suggest that foster youths were unaware of the racial elements of the system, nor do they indicate blissful innocence of the world of work. What they suggest is an understanding among youths that pursuit of any higher occupational goals required that they gain apprenticeships, skilled on-the-job training or high school diplomas. This was the rub. There were 1285 wards in Cleveland's foster homes in 1929, and by 1931 their number had swelled to over 1800, along with hundreds more being sent to large custodial institutions.³⁴ As the system expanded under economic collapse, foster youths faced two types of placement: wage and board. Board placements allowed foster children to live with a family without providing agricultural or domestic labour to pay part of their way. Much more could be said about how this system of payments was gendered, and about the sexual activity, reproduction and marriage of foster youths. Within the limits of this article, however, it is most important to understand that, practically-speaking, only board-placed youths could attend high schools or colleges, or pursue unpaid skilled training in the trades. Cleveland's Cuyahoga County Child Welfare Board (CCCWB) was not funded adequately to support all poor children and youths with board payments. Telling the vocational counsellor you were satisfied with washing dishes or shining shoes or ironing clothes would only make it easier for them to reduce the payments to your foster family, and tell you to get any job you could, or to send you off to a farm or into a public works programme.

Because the CCCWB did not have the funds to board all youth wards, it fell to the case workers to move a large proportion of the youths to wage-placements around the age of 15 years. Girls were ordinarily moved from their childhood board-placements to youth domestic service placements, while the boys less uniformly were moved to youth farm labour placements. Just as the placement system itself precluded high school graduation for most foster youths, it also systematically separated these youths from their childhood foster parents, friends, siblings and

³³"Family Files", box 1, 1st folder, third child, Humane Society Transfer Summary; case notes, 8-22-29 and 12-3-29. Unless indicated, all subsequent quotes come from this case record at the dates given with the type of document indicated.

³⁴Morton, "Surviving the Great Depression", 444-446.

neighbourhoods during their mid-teens. As a group, youths did what they could to avoid a reduction to wage-placements, to stay with their foster families, near or with their siblings, and in high school attendance. One part of this effort was the widespread expression of high occupational hopes.

This systemic background is essential for understanding the distance between the cute affectionate figure cut for Carter in his middle-childhood and the way he was figured as a teenager. As he approached the age of 16 in 1935, a farm-placement was prepared. This would necessitate the end of his high schooling and separate him from his foster family and siblings in the city. All would be good for the boy, the notes reasoned. He was no longer so lovable, as he “walked the streets, parted his hair down the middle and played the drum”. Of course, most youth resisted upheaval, and so case workers regularly attempted to create support for the transition within the youths’ own network of family and friends. In this case, the worker offered Carter’s foster family another child as compensation. They refused. He hoped adding children would lessen the attention Carter received because the “fos. mo. is very indulgent and spoils ch...”. He scolded Carter, telling him “not to love himself too much; that he should not put too high an estimate on his own value”. Unbowed and angered by this transparent attempt to reduce his importance in the foster family, Carter told his case worker that he was part of the foster family and would always be their son and claimed he wanted, “to . . . make something out of himself”.³⁵

Carter redoubled his efforts to combine work and schooling in order to stave-off replacement. He found a job at night which continued into the summer. In the spring of 1936, he and his foster father took a civil service exam to become meter readers. Carter scored well on the exam and was eligible for appointment in January 1937. If appointed, he could earn up to 85 dollars a month and finish high school at night. Highlighting his responsible actions to establish himself as a breadwinner, Carter reportedly told the case worker that a “job with the government was his ambition; that if he had this type of job, he could take care of it and could be assured that he would have a job that would provide him with an income ample to take care of his needs in the future.” Temporarily, at least, Carter successfully repositioned himself from cute boyhood to respectable young manhood. This must have helped sustain the board payments to his foster family, and these certainly allowed him to continue high schooling, where he earned above-average marks. He supplemented the family income by selling newspapers on the streets, and washing dishes at a neighbourhood restaurant.³⁶

Unfortunately, the job as a meter reader never came through, so in July the case worker asked Carter to go to the clinic for testing. He scored an 83 on the intelligence test, and the notes and reports for Carter again shifted tenor. Just prior to the tests, the worst depiction of Carter in the notes had him as an overconfident wise-guy who should have been paying his own board; after his test results appeared, the case notes began describing Carter as “slow in academic subjects” and “retarded”. Both of these characterisations might justify the end of his board payments, but the second was decidedly more dangerous to his stated aspirations.³⁷ Carter continued to

³⁵Case notes, 10-08-35, 10-29-35, 2-8-36.

³⁶Case notes, 1-15-35, 3-20-35, 4-2-35, 5-1-35, 7-12-35, 2-8-36, 4-3-36; Summer of 1936, 9-29-36, 11-2-36 and 3-11-37.

³⁷Case notes, 7-14-36; 5-9-38.

Table 5. Vocational goals voiced by youths by race and gender.

Youths' goal	African-American girls	African-American boys	White girls	White boys
No goal reported	8 (38%)	3 (20%)	6 (22%)	13 (29%)
Rejected goals	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (7%)	4 (9%)
Unskilled	1 (5%)	1 (7%)	1 (4%)	2 (4%)
Skilled/semi-skilled	2 (10%)	9 (60%)	9 (33%)	14 (31%)
Professional/business/artistic	10 (47%)	2 (13%)	9 (33%)	12 (27%)

*Pearson's chi-squared and Cramer's V returned high p-values at 0.21. There is a high probability that there is no relationship between youths' stated goals in the vocational interview and their race and sex.

push the arguments about his future, his plans and his hopes to become a respectable man. At this point, the professionals had failed to convince Carter or his family that a new placement would be good for his character, and now he was refusing (implicitly) to accept the test results. Carter had only shifted from joining the height of American public life (the law) to pursuing a humble but respected civil service (the mail).

In response to such aspirations, the vocational counsellor simply told Carter, "you must realize that the vocational field for a Colored boy is very limited so in discussing what you would like to be, keep that in mind".³⁸ One can only imagine the crushing blow of these words: did they bring with them associated connotations and images too extensive to notate: smiling porters and sweating sharecroppers; the Sambo and the slave? We cannot know. But, the direct weaving of racial hierarchy into the deployment of IQ in the counsellor's assault on Carter's aspirations was clearly related to larger themes. Most immediately, the counsellor's stinging words should be read in terms of the local refusal (Table 5) by foster youths to "discuss what [they] would like to be", by accepting the needs of the welfare system to move them to the cheapest form of "care". Much less did these youths easily conform to categories of race or the authority of IQ. The counsellor's words to Carter tell us less about his particular case than they do about the failure of the testing regime (red ink and all) to monopolise the negotiation about who these youths were or who they might become. The failure was not for a lack of effort. Counsellors were almost three times as likely to encourage white boys (as opposed to African-American ones) to seek vocational goals higher than what they expressed. They were almost twice as likely to tell African-American youths to leave high school for low-status employment.

As much as foster youths resisted the imperatives of the system, it should not be overlooked that the clinic's reports carried influence with case workers because they were bolstered by the accoutrements of professional authority, the objectivity of science and the simplicity of IQ scores. Almost two-thirds of the clinical recommendations matched the training and job status that the case workers provided for youths. Eighty-four per cent of the time (59 out of 70 cases where we have the evidence) the advice given to youths paralleled the employment status they would actually achieve at discharge from the system. In Carter's case, the counsellor recommended stopping board payments because, "according to psychometric results we would not expect [Carter] to have reached the present level in school". Carter must be "putting forth a

³⁸Vocational report 7-24-37 and 10-2-37.

tremendous effort in order to keep up with his work”, because he did not have the mental capacity to carry out his plans.³⁹ The case worker told Carter that he must get a day job to pay his own board or go to a farm. He would turn 18 in December, and they would not continue to support high school attendance. Carter tried to advance other possibilities. It was his senior year in high school, and the school allowed students to attend morning classes and work afternoon jobs. He reminded them that he had passed a civil service exam once, and said that he was preparing to take another to qualify to appointment as a mail carrier.

The significance of the clinic’s advice was not limited to vocational issues (especially for boys) because vocational, custody, board payment and schooling issues were interdependent. A change in one arrangement usually required adjustments to the others. With multiple parties involved, case workers sought cooperation. The ensuing negotiations seem to have increased Carter’s attention to his future and heightened his sense of self. In a very contrived way, the systematic treatment of his childhood had provided Carter with the platform to take himself as an object – to state that he would “make something out of himself”, and not to simply go where he was told and be whatever the psychologist, counsellors and social workers predicted he might become.

It was only after the testing experience had failed to transform his self-understanding into a manageable form, only following the refusal of his foster family to displace him within the home, that the vocational counsellor lowered the blunt edge of racial hierarchy: realise you are a “colored” boy. Here, the point is not to suggest that Carter or other boys were immune to the power of such words, any more than they could ignore the economic and educational consequences of reduced board payments. It is only to suggest that the clinic, the testing experience and such advice gave foster youths and families something quite stark to work against.

Carter’s response was to ask his foster mother (who was also African-American) for help. They called the case worker on the telephone and she quoted the vocational counsellor’s claim, “in discussing what you would like to be” remember you are a “Colored boy”. She argued that Carter was only behind in school because of his case history and that he earned what money he could by selling newspapers and doing other jobs. He spent money responsibly on clothes and other essentials. These arguments marshalled powerful cultural resources by positioning Carter as a hard-working self-controlled young man. If the report of this pivotal conversation is to be believed, her effective rhetorical advance was quickly complimented by two strategic retreats. With Carter behind her on the telephone, she first claimed he would happily take the night jobs in the recommended occupations as a porter or a bus-boy, if he could only gain placement funding that would allow the foster family to support his desire to complete high school. Next, without challenging the validity of the psychological tests directly, she emphasised Carter’s personal drive to overcome his lack of ability: his individual agency. She reportedly said, he “knew and verbalized that he thought too slowly to take on college. He was interested, however, in getting a high school education and diploma, due to the fact that so many positions, which he might hold, required at least a high school education.”

³⁹Vocational reports, 1937.

According to the notes, this reasoning allowed the case worker to admit that the “tests had not been given to determine his particular ambition”.⁴⁰

The precise manner of these notations about Carter operated on the tension between deterministic understandings of intelligence (the developing organism) and the potent liberal ideal of self-determination (the political subject). This did not require the triumph of one discursive position over the other as the configuration of Carter was played through the landscape of childhood. Instead, the notation of the conversation leaves us a small trace of how the generative tension opened up and signified the distinctive space between the developing child and the political child.⁴¹ Following the telephone conversation, the case worker was able to note that Carter was, “industrious and although his mentality does not indicate that he should finish high school, the tremendous drive he has to get through, probably is the cause for his passing grades”.⁴²

Had Carter’s foster mother changed the social worker’s mind, or did he do this to himself through the process of notating and reflecting upon the many texts with opposing images of Carter? We only can know that, after this date, the case notes figure Carter as a person whose effort, whose character, will overcome his lack of natural ability. This becomes the direction of the story. The bold red-inked index to general intelligence faded to the background, or it was reduced to a foil for more powerful words telling of Carter’s industriousness and self-discipline. As a result, Carter was one of the few who kept his board payments past his eighteenth birthday, supporting him through the crucial months of his high schooling.

Carter’s position as a social actor worthy of assistance was bolstered in the notes again when he purportedly quit the high school band to increase his earnings selling newspapers and focus upon his studies. He earned a “B” average in the fall of 1937. The case worker proudly wrote that he had saved 68 dollars by the winter of 1938. Carter found a short-term National Youth Administration job in the spring, but when that ended he had trouble finding summer work. In the fall of 1938 he resumed band, attended the prom, and (joining only 20% of African-American boys in foster care) he graduated in February 1939 with a regular high school diploma.⁴³

In the spring of 1939 Carter took a job as an elevator bellboy for a downtown hotel, but the next fall he enrolled in night school at Fenn College. Ten years later a final case note records that he visited the CCCWB office in an attempt to track down information about his birth-mother. The case worker recorded that he was a “well-groomed, intelligent young man”, working as a receptionist in the district attorney’s office while he attended law school. Undoubtedly Carter’s experiences had only bolstered his ability to present himself in such a favourable light. Little did she know, he was pursuing a dream which the child welfare system had actively discouraged; one that Carter had first voiced more than 20 years earlier at ten years of age.⁴⁴

⁴⁰Case notes, 10-18-37; 5-9-38.

⁴¹See note 2 above.

⁴²Case notes, 10-18-37; 5-9-38.

⁴³Case notes, 1-9-38, 2-3-38/2-23-38, 5-9-38, 7-28-38, 9-28-38, 11-28-38.

⁴⁴Case notes, 1938-1939 and 11-26-49.

Conclusion

Considering the powers that professionals in the child welfare system possessed, the case records reveal a striking ability of youths to resist and to defend themselves. Unsurprisingly, youths usually rejected the conclusion that they and their families were dysfunctional. Youth aspirations for high status and well-paid careers were not easily dismissed; after all, was not individual ambition the heart of the American dream? Youths used the ideas about the development of individual competency, a language closely associated with the justification of the testing regime itself, to push for more resources and more opportunities.

The contest between foster youths seeking resources for themselves and professionals trying to predict how those resources could be used most efficiently was not a simple dichotomy. Both groups drew upon and advanced the language of individualism. Youth drew upon ideas of competent individualism and the dream of a social structure based upon merit (a meritocracy), which the professionals not only endorsed but were attempting to make legible and predictable through psychological techniques and clinical advice.

As Nikolas Rose has shown, carving out new territories of subjectivity was an ongoing process hardly limited to foster care or intelligence testing. It has continued in a far wider project of “maximising the mind” through the governmentality of childhood and family.⁴⁵ The tensions defining this project are not simply between two contending groups (white, middle-class, professional adults versus black, poor, uneducated youths). They result from a larger paradox of the modern individual. When the child is positioned as a developing organism who might be objectively measured and classified, the processes of this objectification often do not operate well without giving space to the child as a social actor who participates in his or her own assessment and/or development. A number of years ago, Valerie Walkerdine wrote persuasively about a similar coupling in the relationship between developmental psychology and child-centred pedagogy.⁴⁶ So too, the ability of IQ to incorporate techniques of racial inequality into a language of individual ability is one of the most important paradoxical movements in the entire history of human science. American intelligence testing depended on a discourse of individual achievement. This ideal of a meritocratic nation of agents was articulated by ordinary people like Carter Johnson in the pursuit of a language of hope that could not be so easily captivated by two or three digits typed in red on a child’s permanent record.

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⁴⁵Rose, *Governing the Soul*, 155–204.

⁴⁶Valerie Walkerdine, “Developmental psychology and the child-centered pedagogy: the insertion of Piaget into early education”, in J. Henriques et al., eds. *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity* (London: Methuen, 1984), 153–202.