

# The Gazette

The newspaper of The Johns Hopkins University

Robert Gordon Draws Student Protest at Homewood  
By Christine Rowett

Though his beliefs have made him controversial for nearly 20 years, Robert Gordon makes no apologies.

In 1976 the Hopkins sociologist produced a model of race differences in delinquency rates. His research was based in part on juvenile court records in Philadelphia from 1949 through 1954; records showed the prevalence for delinquency was 50.9 percent among black youths and 17.9 percent among whites.

In the years since, Dr. Gordon has been asked to explain and defend similar research.

"Nowadays, it takes self-confidence to speak up for objectivity without fear of playing the fogy," he wrote in 1988. "And so, although most scientists continue to conduct themselves as though objectivity matters, the principle itself is seldom affirmed."

Most recently, the book *The Bell Curve* by Charles Murray and the late Richard J. Herrnstein expanded on that research, stating--among other things--that on average, blacks are less intelligent than whites.

Dr. Gordon, who considers himself one of a few "catalysts" for *The Bell Curve*, does not defend or promote the book. He simply stands by it.

His stance was outlined in a story titled "Professors of Hate" published last month in *Rolling Stone* magazine. The story focused on Michael Levin of the Philosophy Department at City College of New York and on The Pioneer Fund, which sponsors research by Dr. Levin, Dr. Gordon and others. Dr. Gordon was prominently described as one of the "Professors of Hate," who believe genetics and race account for differences in intelligence.

Dr. Gordon said he does not take a position on the contribution of genetics to the between-race difference in IQs. He does agree, however, that genetics contributes substantially to IQ differences within race.

The *Rolling Stone* article prompted a one-page letter addressed to the Hopkins "community." Attributed to representatives of the black student body, the letter condemns the professor and his teachings. It was published in the Hopkins News-Letter Nov. 11.

"[Dr.] Gordon is an intellectual disgrace to Hopkins and its credibility as an academically reputable institution," the letter states.

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## Forum planned

The university and the Black Student Union will co-sponsor a forum Wednesday, Dec. 7, to discuss the issue. Howard Taylor, a Princeton University sociologist, will be the featured speaker. Dr. Taylor is the former director of Princeton's Afro-American Studies Program and a researcher in social psychology, the IQ heritability controversy, and race and ethnic relations. Additionally, three Hopkins professors will sit on a discussion panel. The time and location of the forum have yet to be determined.

Kenneth Anderson, president of the BSU, helped organize the event. He said Dr. Gordon will be invited to attend.

"I have no fear of his statements," Anderson said. "They should be acknowledged for what they are: misguided research that has gone astray, that has nothing to offer the community."

Though Dr. Gordon admits he has not yet read *The Bell Curve*, next semester he plans to teach a course on the book. He will accept only students who have taken his *Intelligence and Society* course.

"In general, there's an enormous range of individual differences in IQ scores," Dr. Gordon said. "Most people don't realize this, and they tend to treat IQ scores much lower than their own as though they're not to be believed."

His research, he said, concludes that there is a moderate connection between low IQs and crime among blacks and among whites. But the connection to the crime difference between blacks and whites, he said, is much stronger.

"The difference between the black version of that prevalent statistic and the white version is closely consistent with the difference in IQ distributions," Dr. Gordon said. "It suggests the black-white difference in IQ distributions fully accounts for the black-white difference in delinquency."

"If you care about black crime rates, then you have to care about this," he continued. "If you don't care about black crime rates then you can chase your favorite variable that's politically correct and uncontroversial."

The unsigned letter from the black student body also calls for the removal of Dr. Gordon--who has been at Hopkins more than 30 years--and poses a "challenge" to the university's "institutional endorsement" of Dr. Gordon.

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Ouster is not the answer

M. Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, a research scientist at the Institute for Policy Studies whose focus is women and minorities in the workplace, praised the students for demanding a high quality of education, but warned that seeking the firing of Dr. Gordon is inappropriate.

"I can appreciate the feelings of hurtfulness. Some of these ideas can be upsetting," she said. "[But] if the university stands for anything, it does stand for diversity. It is very important for students to understand that someone cannot be attacked simply because we disagree with him or her."

Dr. Fernandez-Kelly does question the tests behind Dr. Gordon's research and said certain variables, including socio-economic and cultural factors, were not considered.

"There are all kinds of questions about this research," she said.

One of the most significant of those questions, she said, is the definition of race.

"How white is white? How black is black?" she said. "Very few credible scientists would not agree with the difficulties in defining race."

The views of *The Bell Curve*'s authors and their allies are nothing new, she said. Some scientists and a segment of society have long believed--mistakenly, she said--that those of a lower social or economic standing are inherently less intelligent.

"Historically, differences in intelligence have always been attributed to people who are vulnerable, poor," she said. "Poverty is always associated with low levels of intelligence."

Dr. Gordon said that in 1986 he and Linda Gottfredson, who is now his ex-wife, wanted to form a center at Hopkins for the study of intelligence in society. The proposal, he said, was turned down flat.

"One person told me that this is not the direction the discipline wants to go in and, therefore, neither should the department," Dr. Gordon said, his voice rising. "I thought that Hopkins was supposed to be a leader."

"If that center had been established, [Dr. Gottfredson] and I would have written a book that would have been the [equivalent] of *The Bell Curve*," he added. "We would have led the nation in the scientific study of this topic in sociology. Instead, this nation lost eight years of lead time."

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Student comment is mixed

On the Homewood campus, 4.6 percent of full-time undergraduate and graduate students are African American. Their reactions to Dr. Gordon's ideas have been mixed.

Anderson, a senior international studies major, and some other members of the BSU are reluctant to make public comments about Dr. Gordon.

"We are disappointed that the Hopkins community accepts [Dr. Gordon] and embraces him, albeit lightly," Anderson said.

Still others have disregarded the research, The Bell Curve and Dr. Gordon.

"I know I'm not dumb," biophysics major Tacey Long said. "So I just blew it off."

La-Tasha Terrell, a freshman majoring in international studies, reacts more strongly when discussing Robert Gordon.

"The fact that we're here disproves [his research]," Terrell said. "We went through a very competitive process just to be here.

"I think that he's a racist, but he's using science and scientific data against people," added Terrell, a member of the BSU. "If he were not a scientist, I think he would still believe it."

Dr. Gordon's response to his critics is characteristically impenitent.

"Most people who condemn my research really only know sort of superficially about it," he said. "The [result] is just pure ignorance of the findings and total indifference toward informing oneself about what's going on."

He will not satisfy those who label him a racist with a response.

"I don't feel obliged to deny things like that," he said. "I know some of the most eminent researchers in the country. I know they all think well of my research."

A bright red flier posted to "non-racist students" at Homewood recently encouraged them to avoid Dr. Gordon's Intelligence and Society course.

"Dr. Gordon is a messenger for the forces of bigotry and fascism," the flier states. "We urge you to boycott [his] class." No group has publicly taken responsibility for the flier.

"There is a direction for real concern to be channeled, but it's not toward the messenger," Dr. Gordon said. "It's toward the problem.

"I care about what goes on in the black community," he said. "Crime in the black community has gotten worse over the 20 years or so I've been watching it than my wildest misgivings would have led me to expect, so what does the future hold?"

He suggests that there are only two solutions: breaking the link between IQ and educational achievement, or raising IQs. The former, he said, is very difficult to do. Raising IQ scores through genetic means, he said, is possible.

"If the gene pool changes in a population over time--so that the intelligence-producing genes become more frequent--IQs go up on the average," he said. "But that's a question called eugenics, and it seems to drive people unnecessarily ballistic."

Eugenics, he explained, basically calls for people with low IQs to have fewer children and people with high IQs to have more children.

"Eventually their children will marry one another," he said. "There's a slow migration upwards that would parallel the course of human evolution."

He realizes it is an unpopular theory, but he is convinced of its validity. And he doesn't expect to convince all others, or to receive unbridled support.

"You're never vindicated in this business. You win, but the other side never concedes," he said. "I do my research, write my papers, mind my own business."

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