Science for the People and its Progeny Challenge
Biological Determinism

Jon Beckwith
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The reappearance of biological determinism as new scientific approaches and/or new political/socio-economic conditions arise. Its impact through the popular media.
Science for the People

closed down in 1990

the Council for Responsible Genetics (1983) and the Genetics and Society Working Group
How?

- Directly challenge faulty science where it is being done
- Publish articles in academic journals and the public media
- Prepare educational materials
- Public workshops
- Conferences that bring together scientists, journalists and teachers
- Publish books
- Most of us teach
Psychologist Arthur Jensen

*Harvard Educational Review*

“How much can we boost IQ and scholastic achievement?”
Genes, race and Intelligence

Jensen represented the field of behavior genetics

Lewontin, Gould, Hubbard and Allen
Genes and Criminality: The XYY Male

1974: A group from SftP protested and successfully stopped research programs that screened newborn baby boys for the extra Y chromosome and drew attention to the poor and refuted science behind the “criminal chromosome.”
Television - Law and Order

Born Bad (TV episode 1993 #4.9)
The lawyer of a 14-year-old boy claims he is not responsible for the beating death of his friend because he has an extra Y chromosome and is genetically predisposed to criminal behavior.

16 November 1993

Persistence: 28+ years
“...an XYY male ...is usually over six feet tall and very aggressive.”
Here’s the good news

CSI Miami “Born to Kill”
May 14, 2007
Sociobiology.... Carries with it the revolutionary implication that much of man’s behavior towards his fellows ranging from aggressive impulses to humanitarian inspirations may be as much a product of evolution as is the structure of the hand...
The Sociobiology Study Group is Formed

• Our Response

Against “Sociobiology”

Elizabeth Allen, pre-medical student, Brandeis University; Barbara Beckwith, teacher, Watertown Public High School; Jon Beckwith, professor, Harvard Medical School; Steven Chorover, professor of psychology, MIT; David Culver, visiting professor of biology, Harvard School of Public Health, professor of biology, Northwestern; Margaret Duncan, research assistant, Harvard Medical School; Steven Gould, professor in the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University; Ruth Hubbard, professor of biology, Harvard University; Hiroshi Inouye, resident fellow, Harvard Medical School; Anthony Leeds, professor of anthropology, Boston University; Richard Lewontin, professor of biology, Harvard University; Chuck Madansky, graduate student in microbiology, Harvard Medical School; Larry Miller, student, Harvard Medical School; Reed Pyeritz, doctor, Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, Boston; Miriam Rosenthal, research associate, Harvard School of Public Health; Herb Schreier, psychiatrist, Massachusetts General Hospital. (Affiliations for identification only.)

Editors’ Note: We regret that C. H. Waddington, who would have been asked to reply to this letter, died on September 26.

• The Issues: Race, class and sex roles
• The activities
Biology as a Social Weapon

The Ann Arbor
Science for the People
Editorial Collective

1977
1983

The Council for Responsible Genetics formed and eventually published the journal GeneWatch which covers all things genetic.

~1985

As the publicity for Sociobiology waned, and with the beginnings of human genome sequencing, the Sociobiology Study Group changed its name (ultimately to Genetics and Society Working Group) and also its focus to human genome mapping and sequencing.
Discrimination as a Consequence of Genetic Testing

Paul R. Billings,* Mel A. Kohn,† Margaret de Cuevas,† Jonathan Beckwith,‡ Joseph S. Alper,‖ and Marvin R. Natowicz§,###**

*Division of Genetic Medicine, Department of Medicine, California Pacific Medical Center, San Francisco; Departments of †Medicine, ‡Microbiology and Molecular Genetics, and §Pathology, Harvard Medical School, ‖Department of Chemistry, University of Massachusetts, and ###Department of Pathology, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston; and **Division of Medical Genetics, Shriver Center for Mental Retardation, Waltham, MA
1998

Human Genome mapping and sequencing arrives
How the politics of biology shapes opinion, policy, and our self-image

Born Bad?
Are Political Orientations Genetically Transmitted?

JOHN R. ALFORD  Rice University
CAROLYN L. FUNK  Virginia Commonwealth University
JOHN R. HIBBING  University of Nebraska
Race and Genetics:

1. Search for Intelligence genes and
2. Distinguishing peoples from geographically distinct regions by genome analysis
The researchers found two different versions of the gene
Selection?
Our cherished “national dream of a well-mixed and harmonious meritocracy…may be unattainable.”

"Whatever advantage these genes give, some groups have it and some don't. This has to be the worst nightmare of people who believe strongly there are no differences in brain function between groups," says anthropologist John Hawks of the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

Completely refuted within a year by several studies. But no media coverage of refutation.
How? Computer program looked for the small % of genetic markers in the human genome that differed between different groups of people. There was never a marker that was found in everyone in one group and not another. No race-specific genes.

“I was naïve”
The Genetics and Society Working Group
1. Book
2. Articles critical of the new “criminal genes” and “political genes.”
3. High school unit on genetic ancestry

Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002
The Genetics and Society Working Group

2006 Conference on Genetics and Race
Workshops: 1) at Exhibit on Race: Power of an Illusion, Boston Museum of Science and 2) at annual Cambridge Science Festival