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## AFQT, *The Bell Curve*, and Future Earning Potential

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Oral Presentation 1.3

**AFQT, THE BELL CURVE, AND FUTURE EARNING POTENTIAL**

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“The average black and white differ in IQ at every level of socioeconomic status...” state Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray in 1994’s controversial book, The Bell Curve (269). Implicit in this statement is the idea that blacks are genetically less intelligent than whites, and it is because of this, that the gap in black and white median incomes persists. Herrnstein and Murray believe that the portion of IQ, as measured by the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT), that is influenced by environmental factors is virtually irrelevant. This is due to the fact that less intelligent people live in less desirable environments because of their lower earning potential.

My research provides a more optimistic conclusion regarding the future earnings potential of the youth of the disadvantaged. Regression analysis shows that AFQT scores are, in fact, dependent on neighborhood characteristics, especially measures of school quality. The data also show that poor neighborhood conditions affect whites as well as blacks. The resulting implications suggest that the racial divergence in AFQT scores, and the future earnings that they predict, could be the culminating result of the years of segregation of blacks into areas with poorer neighborhood conditions, rather than a function of some genetic difference. Policy implications of this research support the need to equalize public schools and other neighborhood conditions in order to provide equal opportunities for all.