

POTTER

STATE OF NEW YORK



LETCHWORTH VILLAGE

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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SUPERINTENDENT

THIELLS, ROCKLAND CO., N. Y.

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Dr. Lawrence Kolb,
Treasury Department,
United States Public Health Service,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Dr. Kolb:

I have received your letter in which you state that from the point of view of the U.S., the so-called motor minded are not especially desirable.

My thinking about the problem is as follows. I would like your criticism of it before the doctors arrive here.

From an economical and social point of view we do not want immigrants, who, themselves or their progeny, cannot conform to the standards which have been set for, and have been met by the large mass of people in this country. I refer mainly to educational and social standards.

One of the factors making for conformation to these standards is intelligence. Hence, it is not the mere technicality of whether we dub an individual as mentally deficient or not mentally deficient, but it is something more fundamental than this; has he, or has he not, sufficient intelligence to conform? We demand that an immigrant be physically unhandicapped, not because we are primarily interested in his being physically well, but, because he must be physically able to conform to social and economic requirements. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to demand just as much of his intellectual endowment.

Now we know that scholastic achievement is very dependent upon intelligence and that the method of testing intelligence by the Stanford-Binet scale gives us a very reliable index of the individuals educability. We, also, know that certain inmates in institutions for mental defectives, while failing on a Binet test, measure up quite high on performance tests. Whether they are true defectives or not, is a question; but the important thing is that they are in an institution, they are public charges, they failed in their pursuit of an independent existence, they were unable to compete with the average in the public schools, and the reason for all of this is a special kind of intelligence short-coming, in spite of the fact that they have some ability in manual ways.

Dr. Lawrence Kolb.

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The problem, as it seems to me, from the above reasoning, is to gauge the intellectual endowment of the prospective immigrant, rather than deal with the mooted question, is he a defective. As I understand it, your staff is dealing with a large number of illiterates. Therefore, the Terman test is not applicable. We have found in our experience here that there is a non-language test, devised by Pintner, the Pintner Non-Language Test, which we believe measure the kind of intelligence which is necessary for scholastic achievement. We, also, have observed that the Ferguson form board and the Healy A and Healy B Construction tests are, as a rule, the "Waterloo" of our cases, even though they do very well on other types of performance tests.

If I may be so presumptuous I would suggest the following procedure for inquiry into the Intelligence (not necessarily the diagnosis of mental deficiency, yet you can call it that if you want to) of prospective immigrants.

I. Brief family history when obtainable.

II. Brief personal history when obtainable with specific inquiry into the amount of formal education in such countries where this is usual (England, Germany and France, for instance). If the applicant has completed an education equal to our common school education, he is of, at least, average intelligence. It maybe wise, where possible, to require a sworn statement from responsible authorities as to the educational achievements of the applicant.

III. When the applicant has not had the amount of education indicated above, or is illiterate then it should be a routine to use intelligence tests. Ordinary questioning and conversation is not an invariable reliable index of the applicant's intellectual status. The Psychometric procedure should be as follows:

(a) Make the applicant as comfortable mentally and physically as possible. Make him feel at home, in other words. Explain, when possible, what it is all about. Encouragement and reassurance is never out of place.

(b) As a demonstration test and to accustom the applicant to the technic of examining, and to take the place of verbal instruction, give the Goddard form board test. Do not consider the results in the final analysis.

(c) A logical transition is then to the Ferguson form boards. Record score.

(d) The next step is to give Healy Construction Test B and then Healy Construction test A. Record score of each and take the average as the final score.

(e) Give the Pintner Non-Language Test. Record score.

Thus we obtain three scores--one for the Ferguson form boards, one for the Healy construction tests, and one for the Pintner Non-Language test.

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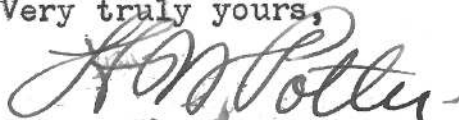
Inasmuch as the average mental age ascertained in the draft back in 1917 and 1918 was 13 years, I would suggest that if the applicant failed to get a score of 13 years on two out of three that he be excluded and if necessary, officially diagnosed as mentally deficient.

The only thing I, myself, might say on the other side of the question is that 13 years may be too high. If this is an objection it can be lowered to 12 years, but under no consideration lower than 12 years.

Of course there are other things to be taken into consideration, as interfering with performance of the psychometric procedures, such as emotional instability, fatigue, etc. But this is another question, and I am assuming that the above tests will be used with that very essential reasoning, commonsense.

Any criticism that you might offer and any suggestions you might make concerning the teaching or training of the officers who come here will be very welcome indeed.

Very truly yours,



Howard W. Potter, M.D.
Clinical Director

HWP-MI