

## **Fancher on Gould, Goddard, and historical interpretation: A reply.**

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### **Abstract:**

Contends that R. E. Fancher's (see record 1988-31600-001) evidence concerning intentions behind retouching of photographs of the Kallikaks in H. H. Goddard's (1912) study of mental retardation and heredity fall far short of challenging S. J. Gould's (1981) findings on the same topic. Further, Fancher's citation may misrepresent J. D. Smith's (1985) work on Goddard.

**Keywords:** psychology | history of psychology | scientific communication | photography | editing photography | developmental disabilities

### **Article:**

Raymond Fancher's article (June 1987) critical of Stephen Jay Gould's (1981) conclusion that some of Goddard's photographs of the Kallikaks were retouched in order to give them a negative appearance was intriguing in several respects. First, it is difficult for me to understand how Fancher could find comparable the opinion that Gould secured from the Director of Photographic Services at the Smithsonian Institution and the comments of a publisher of unreported credentials relative to photography. Second, the retouched photograph that Fancher compared to the Kallikak pictures was altered when it was published in a book in 1984. The fact that the retouching was done by the recent book's publisher makes the comparison to the Kallikak photographs of 1912 even more difficult to comprehend. The reason that the publisher gave for retouching the photograph in his book does not seem to me to imply anything convincing about the altering of the Kallikak pictures. On the basis of this new "evidence," Fancher went on to explore alternative and "innocent" reasons why Goddard's photographs were altered. Finally, he suggested that Gould's interpretation of the retouching of the photographs has created a possibly incorrect historical impression that has been repeated in other sources, including his own book, and "which now bids fair to become part of the standard history of intelligence testing in America" ( Fancher, 1987, p. 586). As an example of other sources that have referred to Gould's conclusions concerning the retouched photographs, Fancher cited my book, *Minds Made Feeble* ( Smith, 1985). He emphasized that I quoted verbatim from Gould's discussion of the photos and

that I referred to Gould's book as "brilliant." Apparently this reference was intended to illustrate the impact of Gould's questionable historical interpretation.

Stephen Gould's conclusion concerning the Kallikak photos may someday be proven incorrect. What he presented, after all, was his interpretation based on expert opinion. Fancher's evidence and arguments, however, fall far short of seriously challenging Gould's findings.

Fancher quoted my work several times in his article, and it is to his citation of my book as an example of how questionable historical interpretation is passed along that I wish to direct my closing comments. After saying that judgments about the character and behavior of historical figures should be made with great caution, he advised those who would attempt to understand their predecessors to be as fair and as open with them as they would have their successors be with their own lives. I would ask that Professor Fancher read again *The Mismeasure of Man* (Gould, 1981), which I believe is fair and carefully researched, and yes, a brilliant work. I also ask that he consider these remarks from the closing pages of my own book:

I do not believe that Henry Goddard was a sinister man intent upon doing harm to the poor, the foreign-born, the uneducated, or people with different racial or religious backgrounds. He was as much a product of a powerful idea as he was the creator of a social myth. ( Smith, 1985, p. 193)

In *Minds Made Feeble* I attempted to tell the story of Henry Goddard and the Kallikaks in a clear, accurate, and fair manner. I am convinced that I succeeded in achieving at least the latter two of these aims.

## REFERENCES

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