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# THE MENTAL ABILITY OF ONE HUNDRED INMATES OF THE COLUMBUS (O.) WORKHOUSE

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One hundred inmates of the Columbus Workhouse were tested by the Yerkes-Bridges Point Scale<sup>2</sup> for measuring mental ability. The results are interpreted in relation to the crimes committed, the school grade attained, and the color of the prisoners. Their accomplishments are also compared with the population at large to discover (1) whether defectiveness is either the direct or contributing cause of criminality, (2) with the results of a similar study of a penitentiary population to determine whether the workhouse population is of such a low degree of mentality that its members are unable to commit a high grade crime.

Since the establishment of the psychological clinic in connection with the juvenile court in Chicago and many other large cities, the mental ability of juvenile delinquents has been receiving considerable attention.<sup>3</sup> But so far there has been little done with the adult criminal. The only work of importance that has been reported in this field seems to be, (1) that of Rossy<sup>4</sup> with 300 inmates of the Massachusetts State Penitentiary, (2) Ordahl's<sup>5</sup> study of 53 male convicts of the Joliet State Penitentiary, (3) Kohs'<sup>6</sup> work at the Chicago House of Correction with boys from 17 to 21 years of age, and (4) Haines'<sup>7</sup> results with 100 consecutive admissions to the Ohio State Penitentiary.

The population of the Columbus Workhouse varies from 270 to 350 for different seasons of the year. There are about ten times as many men as women. The lower age limit is 18 years. The maximum sentence is 2½ years. The principal crimes punishable by a workhouse sentence are vagrancy, petit larceny, non-support, contributing

<sup>1</sup>Ohio State University.

<sup>2</sup>Yerkes, Bridges and Hardwick: A Point Scale for the Measurement of Mental Ability.

<sup>3</sup>Bronner: A Research on the Proportion of Mental Defectiveness Among Delinquents. *Jour. of Crim.*, Vol. V, p. 561.

Kuhlman: The Mental Examination of Reformatory Cases. *Jour. of Crim.*, Vol. V, p. 666.

<sup>4</sup>Rossey: Report of the First Three Hundred Examined at the Massachusetts State Penitentiary. *Bul. 17, Massachusetts State Board of Insanity.*

<sup>5</sup>Ordahl: A Study of Fifty-three Male Convicts. *Jr. of Delin.*, Jan., '16.

<sup>6</sup>Kohs: The Practicability of the Binet Scale and the Question of the Borderline Case. *Tr. Sch. Bul.*, Jan. '16.

<sup>7</sup>Haines: One Hundred Consecutive Admissions to the Ohio State Penitentiary. Soon to appear.

to the delinquency of a minor, assault and battery, drunkenness, and disorderly conduct. This latter one is a somewhat miscellaneous group.

As the time limit prevented a study of the whole population, we selected from the records a number of cases proportionally representing each crime as well as the whole population. The only exception to this is that more than a representative number of vagrants were chosen for this class seemed to be a typical workhouse group. The cases were so selected as to otherwise represent each class compared as well as possible. As the records gave only the name, offense, color, home address, and age, it seems reasonable to suppose that this number of cases selected in such a manner with no way of knowing the mentality of the prisoners before selecting them, would fairly well represent the whole population. Two factors might tend to prevent this. The women were not tested and 30 men who were on a farm were not available. These men were probably above the average in mentality.

The ages of the men tested are shown in the accompanying table:

TABLE I.

SHOWING AGES OF MEN TESTED.								
Age .....	18-20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	40-45	45-50	53
Number .....	2	21	22	14	17	17	3	2

The median is 32 years.

The Yerkes-Bridges Point Scale was used in measuring the mental ability of the prisoners not only because we considered it the most reliable scale for adults, but also because Dr. Bridges personally criticised the technique of the two men who did the testing, and aided in crediting the results.

The general plan of this scale is the same as the better known Binet scale. It differs chiefly in the method of grading by giving a certain number of points' value to each test. The grade is determined by the sum of all the tests correctly passed.

That the average mentality of these convicts is low is shown by the fact that 20% of those tested could not both read and write. One of these was a foreigner, but he could write only his own name in his native language. This defect affected only one test and in this they were credited with 0.

As yet we have no uniformly accepted standards for the diagnosis of feeble-mindedness. By some investigators anything below 75 points for adults on the Yerkes-Bridges scale denotes feeble-mindedness.

Haines interprets Yerkes as counting anything below 75% of 88 points, the average accomplishment for adults, as feeble-minded. This is 66 points. Pintner and Paterson<sup>8</sup> call anything below 58.5 points feeble-minded, between 58.5 and 85.5 backward, and above that normal. Ordahl and many other workers with both the Yerkes-Bridges and the Binet scale call anything below the accomplishment of a normal 10-year-old child feeble-minded, from 10 to 11 years borderline cases, and above 11 years, normal. In terms of the Point Scale 10 years is 59 points and 11 years is 64 points. It is lamentable that we have no uniformly recognized standards for interpreting our data. This condition will remain until workers agree on some psychological definition of feeble-mindedness in terms of mental accomplishment.

TABLE II.  
ONE HUNDRED WORKHOUSE INMATES TESTED BY THE Y. B. SCALE.

Points Passed	Number Tested		Points Passed	Number Tested	
	White	Black		White	Black
33.....	1	..	74.....	3	1
41.....	3	..	75.....	3	3
46.....	1	..	76.....	3	3
49.....	1	1	77.....	3	3
51.....	4	2	78.....	3	3
53.....	2	1	79.....	2	1
54.....	1	..	80.....	3	2
55.....	2	2	81.....	2	2
56.....	2	..	82.....	4	2
57.....	1	1	83.....	2	2
58.....	1	1	84.....	1	1
59.....	2	1	85.....	1	1
61.....	6	5	86.....	2	2
62.....	1	1	87.....	3	2
63.....	1	1	89.....	3	3
64.....	2	..	90.....	1	1
65.....	2	1	91.....	1	1
67.....	3	2	92.....	2	1
68.....	1	1	93.....	1	1
69.....	2	2	94.....	3	2
70.....	2	2	95.....	2	2
71.....	5	4	97.....	1	1
73.....	4	3	99.....	1	1
Average for 100 tested.....			72		
Median for 100 tested.....			73.5		
Average deviation (M).....			11.8		
Median for 72 whites.....			76		
Average deviation.....			10.6		
Median for 28 blacks.....			64		
Average deviation.....			13.5		

Table II gives the gross results of all the cases tested. The average for the 100 cases is 72 points. The median is 73.5 and the

<sup>8</sup>Pintner and Paterson: A Psychological Basis for the Diagnosis of Feeble-mindedness. Jour. of Crim., Jan. '16.

average deviation is 11.8. The poorest record of 33 points, which is the performance of a normal 7-year-old child, is that of a black vagrant. The next is also a black vagrant. The best grade of 99 points is that of a man who had been the editor of a country newspaper. Through trouble caused by drink he was arrested for the non-support of his children. By the generally accepted standard of 66 points as the borderline of feeble-mindedness, 33% of those tested are feeble-minded. Calling 10 years or below feeble-minded and from 10 to 11 borderline cases, there are 21% of them feeble-minded and 10% of them borderline cases. Pintner and Paterson would call 19% of them feeble-minded and 61% of them backward. It is evident, taking even the most conservative estimate, that the amount of feeble-mindedness and backwardness to be found in the workhouse is many times greater than is to be found in the population at large. Probably in at least half of the cases cited, a lack of intelligence was the cause either directly or indirectly of the committal of the crime. But what can we say of the rest of them?

Surely we cannot say that feeble-mindedness was the cause which led these men to commit criminal acts, for they are not feeble-minded. Mentality is one thing and morality is another. A man may be high in one and low in the other. The former we are attempting to measure, but the latter has never been successfully attempted by empirical methods. We recognize amentia and dementia. Probably moral defectiveness and moral insanity are just as common and often exist as separate and distinct disorders. This is most strikingly brought out in the case of 15 convicts who tested above 88 points. Here we have criminals who are supernormal mentally.

The accompanying table gives the medians for the different age groups.

TABLE III.  
SHOWING MEDIANS FOR THE AGE GROUPS.

Age .....	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	40-45
Number of cases.....	21	22	14	17	17
Median .....	71	73	70	75	75

There is a striking uniformity for the different age groups. Contrary to expectations we find the higher age groups doing better than the younger prisoners.

From table II we can make a comparison of the accomplishments of the negro prisoners with the whites. The median for the 28 negroes is 64 points, the median for the 72 whites is 76 points. These comparative results agree with the work of other investigators, who have found that negroes do more poorly than whites. While the ma-

jority of the negroes are toward the bottom of the list, two of them made more than 90 points.

TABLE IV.

SHOWING POINTS PASSED, ARRANGED ACCORDING TO THE SCHOOL GRADE ATTAINED.

Am't of Schooling	Av. for Grade	Am't of Schooling	Av. for Grade	Am't of Schooling	Av. for Grade
1.....	11	1.....	11	1.....	11
<i>No Schooling</i>		<i>Fifth Grade</i>		<i>Eighth Grade</i>	
33.....	..	65.....	..	56.....	..
41.....	..	74.....	..	63.....	..
57.....	51	75.....	74	64.....	..
61.....	..	78.....	..	65.....	..
61.....	..	79.....	..	73.....	..
<i>First Grade</i>		<i>Sixth Grade</i>		<i>Seventh Grade</i>	
41.....	..	61.....	..	73.....	..
61.....	51	62.....	..	73.....	..
<i>Second Grade</i>		<i>Seventh Grade</i>		<i>High School Graduate</i>	
41.....	..	67.....	..	76.....	..
56.....	55	70.....	..	77.....	..
69.....	..	71.....	..	78.....	78
<i>Third Grade</i>		<i>Seventh Grade</i>		<i>High School Graduate</i>	
46.....	..	71.....	..	80.....	..
51.....	..	71.....	74	83.....	..
51.....	..	73.....	..	85.....	..
54.....	57	74.....	..	87.....	..
55.....	..	76.....	..	90.....	..
64.....	..	78.....	..	95.....	..
67.....	..	80.....	..	97.....	..
68.....	..	80.....	..	99.....	..
<i>Fourth Grade</i>		<i>Seventh Grade</i>		<i>First Year High School</i>	
49.....	..	86.....	..	70.....	..
51.....	..	86.....	..	71.....	72
53.....	..	87.....	..	75.....	..
53.....	..	<i>Seventh Grade</i>		<i>Second Year High School</i>	
55.....	..	61.....	..	82.....	..
58.....	..	61.....	..	89.....	..
59.....	..	67.....	..	92.....	89
59.....	..	69.....	..	94.....	..
74.....	68	76.....	..	<i>Third Year High School</i>	
75.....	..	77.....	..	94.....	94
77.....	..	81.....	78	<i>High School Graduate</i>	
79.....	..	81.....	..	<i>High School Graduate</i>	
82.....	..	84.....	..	89.....	..
82.....	..	87.....	..	94.....	91
82.....	..	89.....	..	<i>Two Years University</i>	
83.....	..	91.....	..	<i>Two Years University</i>	
92.....	..	93.....	..	94.....	94

Table IV gives the points for the different school grades. Just how reliable they reported their school grade is impossible to tell. Probably it was often overstated. Especially does this seem true with those credited with first year high school. Evaluating these records as we may, it is surprising that in general there is such a progres-

sive rise in the points from one grade to the other. One might argue that the tests are not a measure of mental ability but depend very much upon school training. Mrs. Wolley<sup>9</sup> gives a better solution when she finds that a boy or girl leaves school not as a rule primarily because of economic pressure, but because they have reached the limit of their ability to keep up with the progress of their class. This fits in nicely with the results shown in the table. These men quit school at the age or at the point representing their actual mental age. That is, a man of a normal 9 year old mentality went to school till he received the training of a normal 9 year old child and then dropped out. Just how much truth there is in this argument remains to be proven.

The accompanying curves show the accomplishments of the 100 workhouse cases compared with 100 consecutive admissions to the Ohio State Penitentiary as tested by Dr. Haines. Of these 99 were men and one was a woman. Four were not tested by the Yerkes-Bridges scale as they were foreigners too deficient in the use of the English language to be able to do themselves justice in the tests. Nine others were foreign born and had language defects. Seven of these come at the bottom of the list and probably should be omitted from the list; but at least some of these were of such low mentality that they had been unable to learn to read or even speak the English language. This is borne out by their results on a set of performance tests. So they are left in the list.

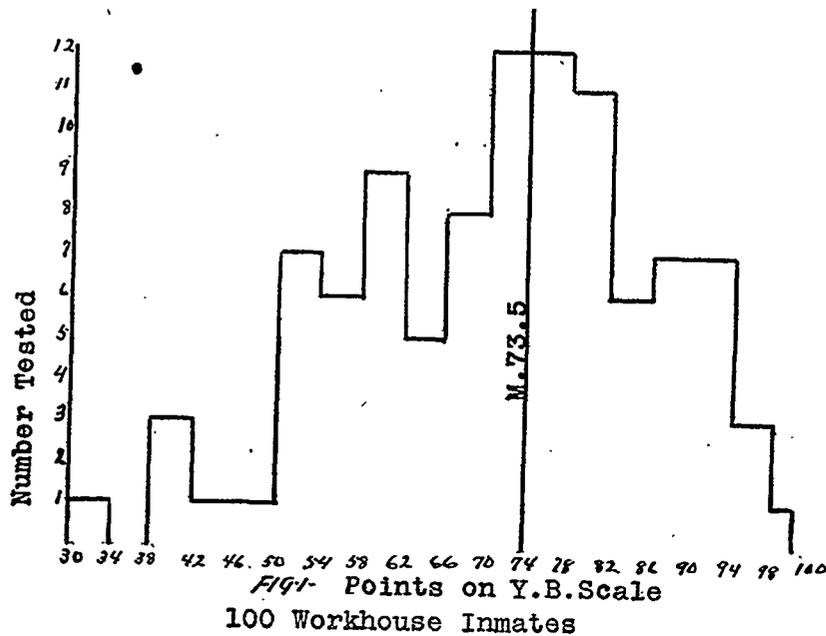
The median for the 96 tested is 78.5 points and for the 87 native born prisoners is 80 points. This is somewhat higher than the workhouse median of 73.5 and bears out the prior statement that the workhouse population is of a lower grade of mentality than the penitentiary population. Taking the actual accomplishments of the 96 tested and using 66 points as the borderline, 27% of the penitentiary population is feeble-minded. Of the 87 cases without language defects, 20% is feeble-minded. Whichever one we take, it is lower than the 33% of the workhouse population. Rossy finds 22% of the cases tested in the Massachusetts State Penitentiary feeble-minded and 9.6% borderline cases. But he seems to call below 12 years feeble-minded, from 12 to 13 borderline, and above that normal. Counting below 11 years feeble-minded, he would get only 13% as such.

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<sup>9</sup>Woolley: A Comparison of Those Who Leave the Cincinnati Schools With Those Who Remain in School. Reported at the Chicago meeting of the American Psychological Association.



A Comparison of Workhouse Inmates with  
Penitentiary Convicts.



cases below 66 points and 5 cases above 88 points. The median for 13 cases of non-support is 76 points. The average deviation is 8.5. There are 4 below 66 points and one above 88 points. The causes of non-support are varied. It may or may not be a high grade crime. The median for 10 cases of delinquency is 75 points. Two cases are below 66 points and one above 88 points. The median for 9 cases of drunkenness is 69 points. Four are below 66 points and one is above 88 points. Both the intelligent and unintelligent get drunk. The median for 9 cases of assault and battery is 73 points. There are 3 cases below 66 points and one above 88 points. The median for 6 cases of disorderly conduct is 79 points, with one below 66 points and one above 88 points. We therefore find that there is not so much variation in mentality for the different crimes as we might expect. These results are shown graphically.

Summary.

1. While defectiveness likely leads to the committing of some crimes, it is not the cause of all crimes, for some criminals are not defective mentally.
2. There is a marked uniformity in the results of the different age groups of the prisoners, showing that the older prisoners are no more defective than the younger ones.
3. The negroes do more poorly than the white prisoners.
4. There is a high correlation between the school grade attained and the mental age of the prisoners.
5. The average mentality of the workhouse population is lower than the average of the penitentiary population, but many workhouse prisoners (30%) are above the penitentiary average.

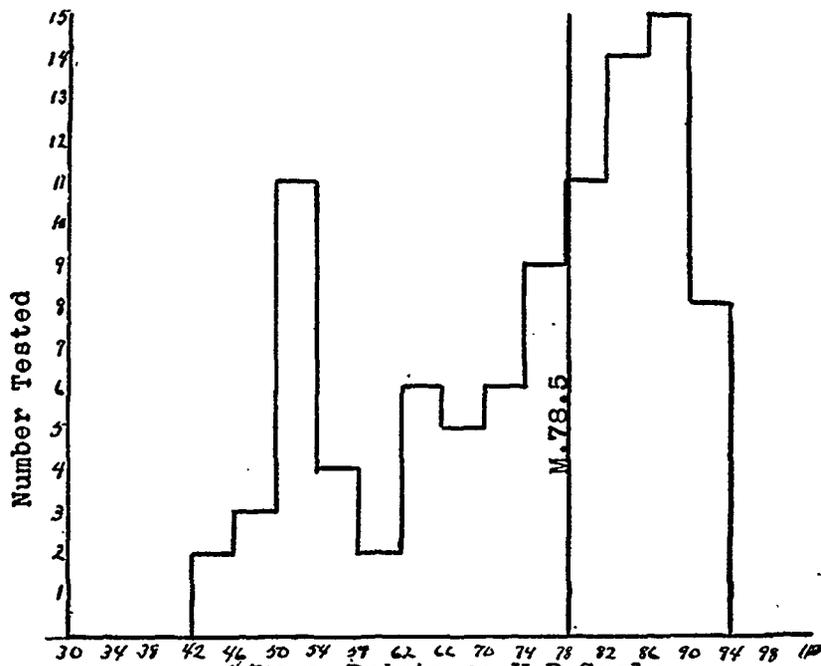
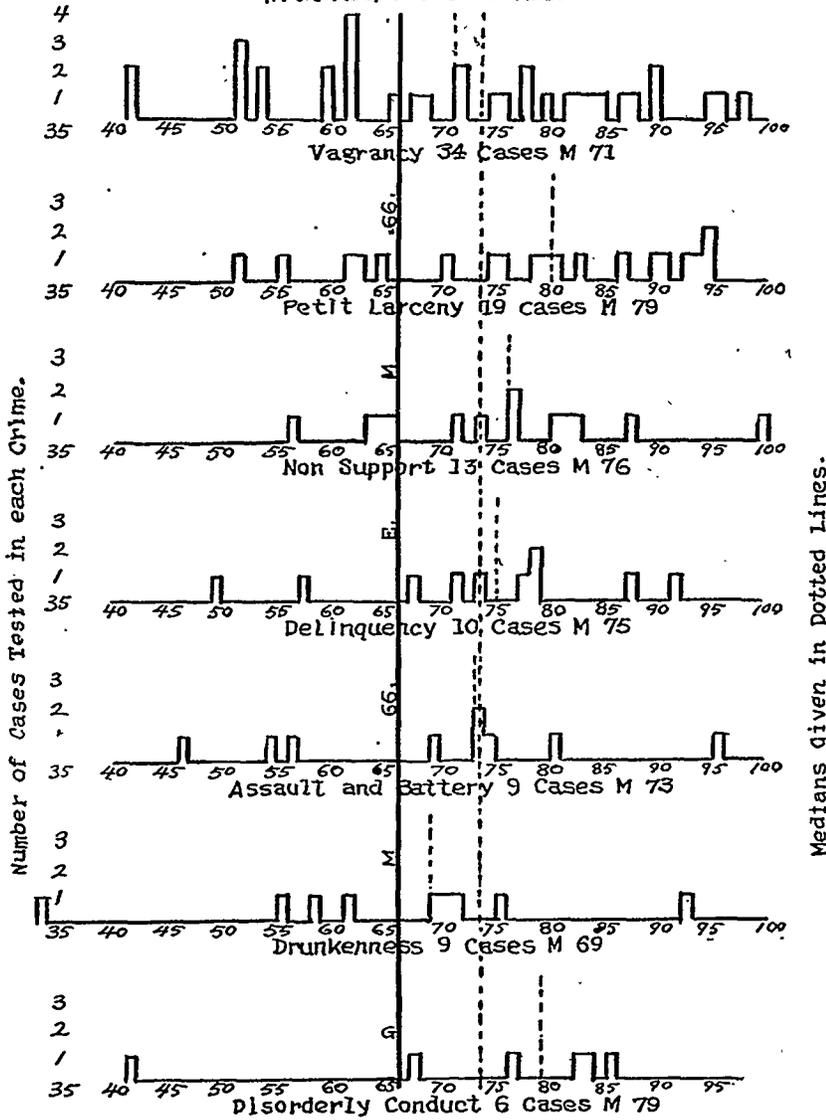


FIG-2- Points on Y.B. Scale  
96 Penitentiary Convicts.

6. There is not a wide variation in the average mentality of the prisoners who have committed one crime as compared with those who have committed another crime.

point Scale Distribution of Workhouse Cases Arranged With Respect to Crimes.



Points Made on the Y-B scale. FIG-3

Medians Given in Dotted Lines.