

For decades, the secondary and college education environments continued to grow more mechanized, more reliant on tests, and more bureaucratized. In 1965, the US Department of Education required schools to take standardized tests in order to qualify for Title I funds. A *New Yorker* excerpt from Art Howe, Yale's Dean of Admissions from 1960, reveals much of the strengthening standardization of the day. "Sometimes I lie awake nights worrying about whether we've been kidding ourselves into taking a lot of brainy kids who are too egocentric ever to contribute much to society. Or have we been taking a lot of twirps who have read the how-to-get-into-college books, listened to their counselors, and learned to take tests and to give the right answers to interviewers - a bunch of conformists who will keep right on doing the smart thing for themselves?"

A landmark investigative report appeared in 1980 written by Allan Nairn and Ralph Nader, entitled, *The Reign of ETS*. It accused the ETS of an array of criticisms ranging from catering to the upper class and ignoring the rights of test takers and minorities. At the same time a young student at Princeton named John Katzman started a test-prep company called the Princeton Review, aimed at a wealthier sector of people than Kaplan's mostly middle-class audience. Yet the tactics were strikingly similar; Katzman recalls telling his young students, "I'll buy you Chinese food if you tell me as many questions as you can remember."

Testing's great push of the 1980's was spurred by a landslide report written during the Reagan era, entitled *A Nation At Risk*. In bold and sweeping terms, this report pushed for more testing as the answer to the global economic trends of the time period. Throughout the next two decades, there was nearly uninterrupted support for widespread testing, marked by a 1989 Bush Education Summit, the America 2000 policy report, the 1996 National Education Summit, and President Clinton's 1997 call to action for American education. His State of the Union speech pressed for stronger standards and more accountability in addition to a national achievement test that has yet to take hold.

By the year 2000, 49 states had established core standards and testing implemented around those standards, and 27 of those states back them up by high-stakes tests. A rising backlash against high-stakes testing in particular is surging up recently, despite a Bush administration that has vowed to increase the testing load even more.

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Want to make high stakes tests history?  
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## A Brief History of Testing

The often overlooked roots of testing date all the way back to the eugenics movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This movement was spearheaded by two men, Frances Galton and Charles Spearman. As a founder of the Eugenics Society, Galton was known as the father of mental measurement and is famed for saying, "wherever you can, count." Spearman's work defined a "general mental ability," or *G* force, which was passed on from gene to gene. Later in his life, he spent much time doing experiments with children at a village school in the Berkshires, measuring their ability on various areas such as classics, English, math, French, and responses to sensory and teachers input. Once he obtained the data, the students were ranked according to their various "general intelligence abilities." Towards the end of his life, Spearman's remarks drew sharp connections between the world of eugenics and today's modern testing culture when he proclaimed, "Here would seem to lie the long wanted rational basis for public examinations."

The cause was next taken up by Alfred Binet of France, who was the Minister of Public Instruction in 1904. A year later, he created the first practical intelligence test, the original version of today's common IQ tests, known as the Binet-Simon Scale. The origins of the "guessing game" tests featured notoriously subjective questions such as this:

*When the house is on fire, what must one do?*

*Set 1 - Call the fireman. - Telephone.*

*Set 2 - Save oneself. - Run into the street - One must run so as to not be burned.*

*Set 3 - One must get away. - One must put out the fire.*

The authors believed that these tests measured an untrained, "natural intelligence" in children. Binet is also quite famous for explaining, "It matters very little what the tests are so long as they are numerous."

Though Binet died in 1911, testing quickly came to America in 1916 with the help of Lewis Terman at Stanford University. His book, *The Measurement of Intelligence*, was the first broad call to action for increased intelligence testing in the states. Here he explains that "this will ultimately result in curtailing the reproduction of feeble-mindedness and the elimination of an enormous amount of crime, pauperism, and industrial inefficiency." He began the IQ system by giving a test to 2,300 subjects

and then categorized them by five classes: very inferior, inferior, average, superior, and very superior.

After three years of scholarships, they enlisted the entire Ivy League to use the SAT as a key admissions device. On April 24, 1937, the exams were given to 2,005 seniors at 150 different sites. The SAT was also adopted into the massive Army-Navy College Qualification Test, which was given to 316,000 high school seniors around the country in 1943. Chauncey wrote in his diary at the time, "The stage of development in which testing is not in is the same as the railroads were in the 1950's - a lot of separate small lines. The big developments were to come."

Ironically, Brigham's distaste for testing grew in a 5 page letter he wrote to James Bryant Conant, the president of Harvard, about the new Ivy League testing merger and explained, "If the unhappy day ever comes when teachers point their students towards these newer examinations, then we may look for the inevitable distortion of education in terms of tests."

As the industry expanded, researchers sought better and quicker ways in which to score the exams. Ben Wood, an influential testing advocate who convinced the New York State Regents to allow him to construct a high school examination for the state, soon worked with Thomas Watson, the founder of IBM, to develop a mass-scoring machine. But it wasn't until 1931 when a young high school science teacher named Reynold B. Johnson created an experimental electric grading device called the Markograph. IBM then bought the rights to his machine for \$15,000.

Back in Princeton, New Jersey, Henry Chauncey became the head of the College Board, and on the first day of 1948, the Educational Testing Service was opened. Testing criticism was small but growing, spurred by an article in the *Scientific Monthly* which claimed that the tests measured only "a very narrow range of mental activities." Nevertheless, ETS' first big job was a partnership with the Selective Service System to test up to 1 million college students. This examination, above all others, put Chauncey and ETS on the board as the leader in test manufacturing and scoring.

Stanley Kaplan, a notoriously good student from Brooklyn who didn't get into medical school, decided to make a mark for himself in the testing industry. Even in high school, Kaplan's small tutoring business landed him 25 cents per hour. Now in 1946 he opened an SAT tutoring business starting in his parents' basement. His work flew in the face of the credibility and reliability of ETS, especially when he would throw post-SAT parties where students would be let in if they remembered at least one question from the test that they would tell to Kaplan. He later sold his business to the Washington Post Company in 1980 for \$50 million.

Once his findings supported his pre-existing theories that higher social classes have higher intelligence, Terman remarked, "The children of successful and cultured parents test higher than children from wretched and ignorant homes for the simple reason that their heredity is better."

Testing's next leap took place in the ranks of the U.S. Army in 1922. Under the leadership of Robert Yerkes, the army's head psychologist, and Carl Brigham, a Princeton professor, they underwent a massive "national inventory of our own mental capacity" consisting of 81,000 "native born Americans" or English speaking Americans, 12,000 foreign born Americans, and 23,000 black Americans. English speaking Americans were given an "alpha" test, while foreigners were given a "beta" test. One example from the beta test reveals the degree of mental gymnastics that the foreign test-takers were forced to go through. Beta testers were given pictures and had to describe what was missing from the picture. In one instance, there was a tennis court without a net, and the foreigners were expected to recognize to put a net there, when at the time tennis was a sport for strictly elites. Once the results were in from these tests, Brigham declared that "the foreign born are intellectually inferior to the native born," and the American-born whites the smartest. He went further to declare that the "Nordic blood" was superior to "Alpine blood" which was superior to "Mediterranean blood".

Brigham later returned to the Princeton University admissions office in order to create an intelligence test that would help sort out the finest material for their college. The first large-scale standardized admissions exam would soon become the SAT, and would be first given on June 23, 1926 to 8,040 American students seeking entrance into the Ivy League schools. Ironically enough, in an unpublished manuscript of 1934, he wrote, "The test movement came to this country some 25 or 30 years ago accompanied by one of the most glorious fallacies in the history of science, name, that the test measured *native intelligence* purely and simply without regard to training or schooling. I hope nobody believes that now. The native intelligence hypothesis is dead."

The expansion of testing continued with the work of E.F. Lindquist, whose annual Iowa Academic Meet turned into the Iowa Every-Pupil Testing Program, where every public school student in the state was given achievement tests. Also arriving on the scene was Henry Chauncey, who was hired at Harvard to create a new scholarship for 10 top recipients from around the country where they would be given free merit scholarships. Chauncey's job was to find a way to select them. The previous tests were offered by the College Entrance Examination Board, a small association of private schools and colleges throughout New England. In deciding where to take the next step, Chauncey took a trip to Princeton to meet up with Brigham. In 1934, Harvard decided to use the SAT in order to select those ten young men from around the nation.