

## The Intelligence of Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews in Serbia

Richard Lynn\*

*University of Ulster, Coleraine, Northern Ireland*

Jelena Čvorović

*Institute of Ethnography, Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences,  
Belgrade, Serbia*

\*Corresponding author: lynnr540@aol.com

The intelligence of 136 adult Jews in Serbia was tested with Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices. The sample had a British IQ of 103.5, significantly higher than the IQ of 100 of Northern and Central Europeans and of 91 in Serbia. The 30 individuals who identified themselves as Sephardi had a lower IQ (100.3) than the 22 who identified themselves as Ashkenazi (103.8), but most of the sample identified themselves as mixed Sephardi and Ashkenazi showing that the Sephardim and Ashkenazim are well integrated in Serbia.

**Key Words:** Intelligence, Jews, Serbia, Progressive Matrices

Following the emancipation of the Jews in most of Europe in the nineteenth century, it began to be asserted that Jews have an exceptionally high average level of intelligence. In Britain, one of the first to make this assertion was Lord Ashley, who observed in 1847 that "The Jews are a people of very powerful intellect... they present, in proportion to their numbers, a far larger list of men of genius and learning than could be exhibited by any gentile country. Music, poetry, medicine, astronomy, occupied their attention, and in every field they were more than a match for their competitors" (Vital, 1999, p. 179). Francis Galton (1869, p.47) also believed the Jews are a highly intelligent people, writing in his *Hereditary Genius* that they "appear to be rich in families of high intellectual breeds". In France, the Count de Gobineau (1853) discussed the cultural and intellectual achievements of different peoples and concluded that the Aryans (Northern Europeans) and the Jews were the two most intelligent peoples. In the

United States, the physician Madison Marsh (1874, p.343) wrote that the Jews have "high average intelligence," and in 1898 Mark Twain (1985, p.12) wrote that the Jewish "contribution to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning is way out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers".

This contention was frequently reiterated in the twentieth century. In Britain, John Fraser (1915, pp. 30-1) in his book *The Conquering Jew* advanced the thesis that the principal reason for Jewish achievement is that Jews are more intelligent than Christians: "in alertness and knowledge, the Jew is the superior of the Christian; the struggle between the sons of the North, with their blond hair and sluggish intellects, and the sons of the Orient, with their black eyes, is an unequal one; if the Russian dispassionately spoke his mind, I think he would admit that his dislike of the Jew is not so much racial or religious as a recognition that the Jew is his superior, and in a conflict of wits will get the better of him".

Writing four years later, Joseph Jacobs (1919, pp.55-7) gave an account of the success of Jews in Germany and attributed this to Jews having high intelligence: "German Jews are at the present moment at the head of European intellect", hence, "a determinant number of Jews will produce a larger number of geniuses than any equal number of men of other races." In the United States, Thorsten Veblen wrote of the "intellectual pre-eminence of Jews in modern Europe" (1919, p.35).

With the development of intelligence tests in the first decade of the twentieth century, evidence began to accumulate substantiating the theory that Jews have high intelligence. Studies showing this began to be published in the 1920s in Britain and the United States, and more studies confirming this in the United States were published from time to time throughout the twentieth century. In the 1960s a landmark book was published by Nathaniel Weyl and Stefan Possony (1963) and a further book by Weyl (1966), which brought together the evidence of the high Jewish IQ and achievement and discussed the reasons for this.

By the end of the twentieth century, it continued to be asserted that Jews have a high IQ. Herrnstein & Murray (1994, p.275) wrote that "Whenever the subject of group differences comes up one of the questions sure to be asked is 'Are Jews really smarter than everyone else?'" They showed that in the United States Jews obtained an average IQ of 112.6 in relation to 100 for non-Jewish Whites. Others who have reviewed the evidence on Jewish intelligence and concluded that Jews have a high IQ include MacDonald (1994, pp.188-190); Eysenck (1995, p.159): "as far as Jews are concerned, there is no question that they score very highly on IQ tests"; and Michael Levin, who has written: "in every

society in which they have participated, Jews have eventually been recognised (and disliked) for their exceptional talent” (1997, p.132).

The studies of the intelligence of the Jews have been reviewed by the first author and are summarized in Lynn (2011, p. 316). This summary presents the IQ evidence for the four principal ethnic populations of Jews. These are the Ashkenazim, who are indigenous to northern and central Europe, but most of whom are now in the United States and Israel; the Sephardim who were resident in Spain until they were expelled in 1492, when they dispersed to various locations, principally to the Balkans; the Mizrahim, who were indigenous to North Africa and the Near East, most of whom are now in Israel; and the Ethiopian Jews, who were indigenous to Ethiopia, and most of whom are also now in Israel. The first three of these groups have some genetic affinity as they are all descended from the same original stock in Palestine, as shown by Hammer et al (2000) and Ostrer and Skorecki (2013). Ethiopian Jews do not have any genetic relationship with the other Jewish peoples, but are descendants of Ethiopians who converted to Judaism many centuries ago.

The conclusions of this study are summarized in Table 1. This gives the IQs of the four ethnic Jewish populations in relation to a British IQ of 100 (sd of 15) (column 1), the IQs of the Gentiles among whom these four Jewish populations lived given in Lynn (2006) (column 2), and the difference between the two (column 3). The first row shows that the Ashkenazim have an IQ of 110, the Northern and Central Europeans among whom they lived have an IQ of 100, and there is a difference between the two of 10 IQ points. The Ashkenazi IQ of 110 is based on studies in the United States, Britain, Canada and Poland. The second row shows that the Sephardim have an IQ of 98; and Europeans in the Balkans among whom they lived have an IQ of 92.5, and there is a difference between the two of 5.5 IQ points. The third row shows that the Mizrahim have an IQ of 91, the Arabs in the Near East and North Africa among whom they lived have an IQ of 84, and there is a difference between the two of 7 IQ points. The fourth row shows that the Ethiopian Jews have an IQ of 68, the Ethiopians among whom they lived have an IQ of 67. Thus, the IQ of 68 of the Ethiopian Jews is approximately the same as that of other Ethiopians and sub-Saharan Africans given in Lynn (2006).

The IQ of the Sephardim is the least well-established of the four principal ethnic Jewish populations. There have been no studies of the intelligence of the Sephardim in the Balkans. Their IQ of 98 was estimated from the data presented by Benbassa & Rodrigue (1995, p. 191) that in Israel the Sephardim fall about midway between the Ashkenazim and the Mizrahim on a number of socio-economic phenomena including average earnings and educational attainment.

**Table 1.** IQs of Jews and Gentiles.

Jews	IQ	Non-Jews	IQ	IQ difference
Ashkenazim	110	North/central Europeans	100	10.0
Sephardim	98	Balkans	92.5	5.5
Mizrahim	91	Arabs	84	7.0
Ethiopians	68	Ethiopians	67	1.0

To fill this gap in the research literature, we report here a study of the intelligence of Ashkenazim and Sephardim in the Balkans.

### Method

The sample consists of Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews in Serbia. Jews have been present in Serbia since Roman times. In the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, a large number of Jews who had been expelled from Spain settled permanently in the Balkans, including Serbia. Since that time approximately 80% of Serbian Jews were Ladino-speaking Sephardi Jews, and 20% were Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews. During the Second World War the Serbian Jewish population was almost completely destroyed in the Holocaust. In the early 1990s there were around 2500 Jews resident in Serbia. In the 2011 census there were 1185 Jews in Serbia, with approximately 40% in Vojvodina (mostly in Novi Sad, a city in Vojvodina, about 200 kilometers from Belgrade), and approximately 60% in Belgrade, the capital city (Census Serbia, 2011).

In the present research, Jews were recruited through personal contacts and community organizations led by the local rabbi, who heads the only remaining functioning synagogue in Serbia, the Belgrade Synagogue. Personal in-depth interviews were conducted in 2013 of Jews in Belgrade and Novi Sad. The data collected include intelligence, age, gender, group membership (Sephardi or Ashkenazi), complete genealogies including marital and reproductive histories. The sample consisted of 136 Jewish adults (62 men and 74 women) with an average age of 54.5 years.

The intelligence of the sample was tested with Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices (SPM). This is the most widely used of all "culture-reduced" tests, measuring reasoning ability, general intelligence and Spearman's *g* (Jensen 1998). The test has 60 diagrammatic puzzles with a missing part to be chosen from several options. The participants were not paid for their participation and there was no time limit placed on completing the test. Approximately two-thirds of the sample were tested individually and one third was group-tested at the Annual Jewish Family Seminar outside Belgrade.

**Results**

During the investigation, it was found that Ashkenazim and Sephardim are well integrated. Only 22 of the participants identified themselves as Ashkenazi and 30 as Sephardi, while 84 identified themselves as mixed. Table 2 gives the SPM means and SDs for the Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Mixed groups. These are followed by the American percentiles (US/PC) obtained in 1993 and given in the American standardization sample by Raven et al (1996, p. 65, Table SPM 1). The American percentiles are given because there are no satisfactory British adult norms for the SPM. The next column (US/IQ) gives the American IQ equivalents of the American percentiles. The last column gives the British IQ equivalents of the American IQs obtained by deducting 2 IQ points from the American IQs in accordance with the procedure adopted in Lynn (2006). Thus, the last row gives a British IQ of 103.5 for the total sample. The Ashkenazim obtained a higher mean score than the Sephardim but the difference is not statistically significant ( $t=1.185$ ). No adjustment to these IQs is made for a possible “Flynn effect” increase in the British IQ because there was no increase in the SPM among adults in Britain from 1979 to 2008 (Lynn, 2009).

**Table 2.** Means and standard deviations of Serbian Jews on the Standard Progressive Matrices (SPM) test, US percentile, and IQ according to United States and British norms.

Group	N	SPM raw score		US PC	US IQ	British IQ
		mean	SD			
Ashkenazim	22	53.3	4.0	65	105.8	103.8
Sephardim	30	51.4	6.6	56	102.3	100.3
Mixed	84	53.7	5.5	67	106.6	104.6
Total	136	53.2	5.5	64	105.5	103.5

**Discussion**

The results show three points of interest. First, the Jewish sample as a whole obtained an IQ of 103.5. This is higher than the IQ of 100 of the Northern and Central Europeans and confirms previous studies finding that Jews in Europe have a higher IQ than non-Jewish Europeans. Second, the IQ of 103.5 of the Jewish sample as a whole is substantially higher than the IQ of 88 for Serbia reported by Rushton & Čvorović (2009) and of 91 for Serbia given in the most recent calculations of national IQs given by Meisenberg & Lynn (2011) and Lynn & Vanhanen (2012). This 12.5 points advantage of Jews in Serbia compared with the general population confirms previous studies summarized in Table 1 showing

that Jews obtain significantly higher IQs than the populations among whom they live.

Third, our objective to obtain an IQ for Sephardic Jews in Serbia had only limited success. We did find that the Sephardi had a lower IQ (100.3) than the Ashkenazi (103.8), as predicted. However, this is only a 3.5 IQ point difference. Further, as noted above only 30 of the participants identified themselves as Sephardim, and only 22 as Ashkenazim, and this difference is not statistically significant. Most of the sample (N=84) identified themselves as mixed and their IQ of 104.6 was slightly but not significantly higher than that of the Sephardim and Ashkenazim. It is evident that the Sephardim and Ashkenazim are well integrated in Serbia through intermarriage over a number of generations and even those who identify themselves as Sephardim and Ashkenazim probably have some mixed ancestry.

## References

Benbassa, E. & Rodrigue, A. (1995). *The Jews of the Balkans*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Census Serbia (2011). Попис становништва, домаћинстава и станова . у Републици Србији: Становништво према националној припадности - „Остали“ етничке заједнице са мање од 2000 припадника и двојако изјашњени. ([www.popis2011.stat.rs](http://www.popis2011.stat.rs)).

Eysenck, H.J. (1995). *Genius: The Natural History of Creativity*, Vol. 12. Cambridge: University Press.

Fraser, J. (1915). *The Conquering Jew*. London: Cassell.

Galton, F. (1869). *Hereditary Genius*. London: Macmillan.

Gobineau, A. de (1853). *Essai sur L'inegalite des Races Humaines*. Paris: Didot.

Hammer, M.F., Redd, A.J. & Wood, E.T. (2000). Jewish and Middle Eastern non-Jewish populations share a common pool of Y-chromosome biallelic haplotypes. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 97: 6769-6774.

Herrnstein, R.J. & Murray, C. (1994). *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. New York: Free Press.

Jacobs, J. (1919). *Jewish Contributions to Civilisation*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

Jensen, A.R. (1998). *The g Factor: The Science of Mental Ability*. Westport CT: Praeger.

Levin, M. (1997). *Why Race Matters*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Lynn, R. (2006). *Race Differences in Intelligence: An Evolutionary Analysis*. Athens, GA: Washington Summit Books.

Lynn, R. (2009). Fluid intelligence but not vocabulary has increased in Britain, 1979-2008. *Intelligence* 37: 249-255.

Lynn, R. (2011). *The Chosen People: A Study of Jewish Intelligence and Achievements*. Augusta, GA: Washington Summit Publishers.

Lynn, R. & Vanhanen, T. (2012). *Intelligence: A Unifying Construct for the Social Sciences*. London: Ulster Institute for Social Research.

MacDonald, K. (1994). *A People that Shall Dwell Alone*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Marsh, M. (1874). Jews and Christians. *The Medical Surgical Reporter* 30: 343-344.

Meisenberg, G. & Lynn, R. (2011). Intelligence: A measure of human capital in nations. *Journal of Social, Political & Economic Studies* 36: 421-454.

Ostrer, H. & Skorecki, K. (2013). The population genetics of the Jewish people. *Human Genetics* 132: 119-127.

Raven, J., Court, J.H. & Raven, J.C. (1996). *Standard Progressive Matrices*. Oxford, UK: Oxford Psychologists Press.

Rushton J.P. & Čvorović J. (2009). Data on the Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices from Four Serbian Samples. *Personality and Individual Differences* 46: 483-486.

Twain, M. (1985) [1898]. *Concerning the Jews*. Philadelphia: Running Press.

Veblen, T. (1919). The intellectual pre-eminence of the Jews in modern Europe. *Political Science Quarterly* 34: 33-42.

Vital, D. (1999). *A People Apart: The Jews in Europe, 1789-1939*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Weyl, N. (1966). *The Creative Elite in America*. Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press.

Weyl, N. & Possony, S. (1963). *The Geography of Intellect*. Chicago: Henry Regnery.