

*Fred A. Bonner II*



**Academically Gifted  
African American Male  
College Students**

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**Fred A. Bonner II**

Foreword by Kofi Lomotey

Afterword by Donna Y. Ford



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# Foreword

Fred Bonner has produced a creative and important book addressing the unique circumstances of African American male gifted and talented college students. As Bonner points out, many of these students are successful in precollegiate and higher education institutions; yet, little is written about their challenges or their successes. This book begins the process of addressing this oversight in the literature.

The key question that Bonner raises in this book is what are the perceptions of African American male gifted and talented college students relative to the support they receive from their institutions. It is one thing to be gifted and talented. It is another thing to be supported by one's institution. Clearly, the lack of such support can be devastating to students.

This book, as Bonner indicates, is important because (1) African Americans, in general, and African American males, in particular, are underrepresented in gifted and talented classrooms—elementary, secondary and tertiary; (2) limited research has been conducted on gifted and talented students in higher education; and (3) even less research has been done on African American male gifted and talented students in higher education.

The challenges with regard to African Americans in gifted and talented programs begin in elementary school. As Bonner points out, teachers are generally the first providers of referrals for gifted and talented programs. Herein lies another illustration of the limitations of many teacher education programs in the United States.

We continue to prepare teachers to teach one particular type of student—white Anglo-Saxon Protestant males—a type that no longer exists in large numbers, particularly in major urban centers. Teachers, then, are baffled by the rapidly increasing number of students who do not fit into this category—students they have not been prepared to teach. The result is that teachers do what they can to avoid interacting with these “different” students. They place them in the back of the room; they send them to the principal's office; they recommend them for



expulsion, special education or suspension; or they just ignore them. This is not an indictment of teachers but, instead, is an indictment of many of our teacher training programs. What, you might ask, does this have to do with gifted and talented education? Everything, I would respond. Just as teachers are not prepared to teach culturally different students, they are ill-equipped to identify culturally different gifted and talented students. Hence, culturally different gifted and talented students, as Bonner points out, go unidentified at alarmingly high rates.

As Gail Kofsky indicates, cited herein, there are at least five reasons why African Americans are underidentified for and, subsequently, underrepresented in gifted and talented programs: (1) wrong criteria used, (2) biased screening employed, (3) erroneous referral processes implemented, (4) ignorance of diversity issues, and (5) poor teacher training.

In this book, Bonner reports on two case studies: one of an African American male gifted and talented student at a predominantly white college and another of an African American male gifted and talented student at a historically Black university. While this is a descriptive study rather than an empirical study, Bonner seeks, in part, to address the myth that the best African American students attend predominantly white colleges and universities. Indeed, we know that many African American students who have been highly successful in high school—as evidenced by standardized achievement test scores and high school grade point average—do, in fact, attend historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Another goal of Bonner is to delve into the issue of the focus on academic excellence at predominantly white schools as compared to that which is observed at HBCUs. Some evidence is uncovered—though it is not generalizable from a descriptive study—indicating that academic excellence is indeed stressed at predominantly white institutions and at HBCUs.

The limitations of a descriptive study are obvious; however, they play a key role in setting up future theory-testing explorations. In this instance, Bonner has opened the door for a plethora of studies, a door that I hope he and others will go through. Some of these future studies and research inquiries might look at questions such as the following:

- What is the relative benefit of predominantly white colleges and universities versus HBCUs in addressing the needs of African American male gifted and talented students? What are the strengths of each type of institution in this regard?
- Given the limitations of standardized tests, how might we better identify students who are gifted and talented? Might theories such as Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences offer some insights?
- What is the role of culturally responsive teaching in identifying culturally different gifted and talented students and in bringing about the overall academic success of African American students? Is it important for teachers to be knowledgeable about cultural differences of students and of the implications for teaching?

- What roles do factors such as peer groups, families, and faculty play in bringing about the success of African American male gifted and talented college students? How can they detract from or facilitate their success?
- What is the relative importance of selected factors (e.g., class size, potential relationships with faculty, institutional size, and geographic location) for African American male gifted and talented students when they go about selecting a college or university? Relatedly, what is the impact of such factors on the ultimate success of these students?
- How important is the mission of an HBCU (or a traditionally White institution) in addressing the needs of African American male gifted and talented students?
- To what degree does the description of the HBCU in this study reflect other HBCUs, in terms of being supportive, collaborative, and validating?

This is an important book that Bonner has put together. He gives us information about the experiences of African American male gifted and talented college students, he proposes ideas for critical future research, and he shows us more. What more has Bonner shown us?

- Teacher training, when addressing gifted and talented students—as in so many other areas—is critically important.
- Understanding learning styles is imperative for all teachers.
- Understanding the relationships that African American males who are gifted and talented engage in while in college will better prepare us to retain and graduate them.
- African American males who are gifted and talented suffer a double whammy: (1) they are discriminated against because of the color of their skin (and are, therefore, inadequately supported); and (2) they are not supported in ways that other gifted and talented students are.
- African American male gifted and talented students can be successful and supported at HBCUs.
- Not all African American gifted and talented students emphasize their talents; many view such behavior as “acting White.”

Enjoy.

Kofi Lomotey  
Southern University and A & M College

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# Acknowledgments

To my friend, mentor, advisor, and dissertation chair (the comfortable chair) James Swartz, who has been with me every step of the way in the development of my research agenda, I want to say that your guidance has not only led me to the completion of this book but also led me to receive two awards and a million dollar grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF). From the long hours discussing the intricacies of phenomenology and grounded theory and who we thought to be the best contemporary jazz artists, I have learned so much from you and owe you a profound debt of gratitude. You were the lightning rod helping me not only to frame my work in such a way as to give “voice” to these gifted African American males but to tell a story—a story that spoke of the assets that these men brought to higher education contexts as opposed to the deficits that the literature tended to convey.

To John W. Murry, my mentor-friend who encouraged me to pursue my passion and engage in research and scholarship that was not for the purpose of just completing a degree but for the goal of changing society, I want to say that we started off together—you as an assistant professor and me as a “green” graduate student, and you have always been there as a guiding light. I have used your mentoring and guidance as a model for how I interface with my students. We speak of modeling and scaffolding key mentoring behaviors—you have done just that!

Susan Johnsen, it was in your class that this little research light of mine began to shine. I consistently tell the story of how my research project in your course on giftedness, loosely titled “Cultivating Giftedness among African American Male Populations: A Study of HBCUs and PWIs,” was where it all began. You are the quintessential mentor. Although my study was typical of novice level research, you made me feel as if it was the most important study in the world. Thank you for all that you have done and continue to do for students, for the field, and for me.

Marcia Imbeau, Gordon Morgan, and Suzanne Gordon were a part of my dissertation “dream team.” Marcia, you provided such a wealth of knowledge when it came to responding to my queries related to giftedness and the gifted literature. Gordon Morgan, it was because of you that I chose to focus my hours outside of the Higher Education Administration program in sociology—you truly are a University of Arkansas legend. And finally, Suzanne Gordon, your editorial expertise and the amazing tone that you set at the beginning of my dissertation defense—“This is an amazing piece of work, don’t we all agree?”—gave me the confidence to hang in there and fight the dissertation defense hydra that day—I won!

Stephen James and Trey Williams, the two brilliant, creative, outstanding, talented, and gifted African American men who participated in this study, you are the hope and inspiration for generations to come. I thank you for allowing me into your lives to gain perspective on and tell a different narrative about academically gifted African American men, who too are worthy of our attention, but who often go unnoticed. Your stories that were shared some ten years ago are still instructive today for those who seek viable strategies and sage wisdom on how to frame higher education contexts that are supportive of high-achieving brothers like you. Beyond being gifted, you two are “just good people.”

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# Introduction

## WHAT CAN A STUDY CONDUCTED 10 YEARS AGO TELL ME ABOUT GIFTED AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES NOW?

Perhaps the best response to the question posed in the heading is to invoke the use of the old proverb, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” Given the ten-year time lapse since my initial interview with the two academically gifted African American males, a legitimate query is *how relevant and applicable are these findings in a very contemporary context?* In essence, do the experiences and narratives shared by these two men a decade ago have any salience today? As much as I would like to say that many of the challenges these men articulated have lost their savor and have been completely replaced by more affirming and positive engagements, such has not been the case.

Invariably the stories that these men shared, along with the experiences I was able to chronicle through observations and the collection of written documents, highlight a number of recurrent patterns. For example, the themes that were uncovered in the initial research study included relationships with faculty, peer relationships, family influence and support, factors influencing college selection, self-perception, and institutional environment. A survey of the current literature (Bonner & Evans, 2004; Cuyjet and Associates, 2006; Fashola, 2005; Ginwright, 2004; Hughes & Bonner, 2006; Kershaw, 2001; Kunjufu, 2005; Shujaa, 1994; White & Cones, 1999) focusing on African American males in secondary as well as postsecondary settings reveals many of the same maladies that existed since the initial study was conducted. A focus on the literature (Bonner, 2001; Bonner & Jennings, 2007; Bonner, Jennings, Marbly, & Brown, 2008; Ford, 1995; Ford, Grantham, & Harris, 1998; Ford, Harris, Tyson, Frazier-Trotman, 2002; Fries-Britt, 1998; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Harper, 2005; Hebert, 1998; Hebert, 2002) highlighting academically gifted African American males in particular reveals similar problems that this cohort continues to face.

Thus, the goal of this book is to not only highlight the problems but also offer alternative ways to look at the issues that continue to threaten the achievement of African American males in general and those academically gifted African American males in particular who seek to be successful in our higher education enclaves in this country. Whether it is the historically Black college and university (HBCU) environment or the predominantly White institution (PWI) setting, understanding the potential factors that contribute to the oftentimes arrhythmic experiences that these men have with academe is critical.

I implore the reader to consider each statement and problematize all the themes in an effort to determine more effective ways to frame our higher education settings to be more conducive to the learning, growth, and development of academically gifted African American males. While this book, based on qualitative research traditions, eschews any attempts at generalization, it is more than appropriate for the reader to use the narrative accounts and empirically derived findings to determine what aspects of these men's experiences are transferable to their specific contexts. Yes, in the 10 years since I conducted the initial study, we have witnessed many positive changes; not the least of which includes the emergence of a new and vocal generational cohort—the Millennials—and the election of the nation's first African American president. However, we have also witnessed change that has not been quite as positive. For example, increasing numbers of Black and brown children with concomitant decreases in the number of Black and brown teachers; the *overinclusion* of students of color in special education and the *underinclusion* of these students in gifted and talented programming; and a retrenchment in key funding for those who are in the direst need if higher education is to be an option. So, what this book will offer and what Trey and Stephen's experiences will provide you with some ten years later is a window to look out on the past and a door to open up to opportunities in the future. These gifted African American males are ready to talk—are you ready to listen?

#### ACADEMICALLY GIFTED AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN COLLEGE: SUCCESS IN THE HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY (HBCU) AND PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION (PWI) CONTEXT

I try to be creative. I like being spontaneous. I don't like it when people know my next move. I never let my left hand know what my right hand is doing. Because, when people have got you figured out, they can do a lot of things to you and I don't like that.

—Trey Williams

I think you could have many interpretations of that word—gifted. Yes, I think you could call me gifted.

—Stephen James

“You’re interested in studying whom?—academically gifted African American males? You know the greater academic community doesn’t believe this being exists!” These words spoken by a trusted friend and colleague rang out in my mind like the synchronized chimes in a clockmaker’s repair shop. Was my graduate school comrade aware of some writ that unbeknownst to me would lead my dissertation process to result in the sequel to the *Never-Ending Story*? Had I stumbled upon a research topic that would prove to be the bane of my doctoral existence? Were the pundits within academe ready to focus on students of a caramel, chocolate, ebony, or mocha hue, particularly if this focus cast the light in a direction away from the alabaster and ivory stalwarts who traditionally occupied center stage? All these questions swirled around in my head as I contemplated conducting research highlighting the experiences of the academically gifted African American male collegian within the historically Black college and university (HBCU) as well as the traditionally White institution (TWI) context.

Although I had never attended a historically Black college or university, I am fortunate to have parents and a grandparent who are alumni of these institutions. The vivid stories they shared with me regarding their college days have allowed me to vicariously experience the HBCU. My mother attended Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical University (PVAMU), an institution located in Prairie View, Texas, a small town outside of Houston. She received both a bachelor’s and a master’s degree from the institution. My father received his bachelor’s degree from Paul Quinn College. Paul Quinn College at the time was a private Methodist institution of approximately six hundred students located in Waco, Texas. The campus has since moved to Dallas, Texas. My father later attended PVAMU, where he received his master’s degree. My grandmother received her bachelor’s degree from Bishop College, a small Baptist school. Bishop College at that time was located in Marshall, Texas. It has since moved to Dallas and been reorganized as a new institution—Paul Quinn College, my father’s alma mater.

My parents’ experiences heightened my interest in HBCUs, but I must also attribute a great deal of my interest in these institutions to several of my undergraduate and graduate program experiences. As an undergraduate at the University of North Texas, I received the University Intercultural Award. This award is presented to the highest-ranking (i.e., in terms of grade point average) African American and Hispanic student in each class. I received this coveted prize for two consecutive years. Although I was elated to be honored for what the university community recognized as academic prowess, I was somewhat pensive regarding the real meaning of this award. Would I have excelled in this manner had I chosen to attend an HBCU? Were the standards of educational excellence the same at HBCUs and TWIs? Did highest-ranking African American student mean more at a TWI?

This litany of questions piqued my curiosity to investigate academic achievement and scholarly excellence, both generally as these issues were found to impact African American male populations and specifically as they impacted academically gifted African American male collegiate populations. My initial



work in this area started during my graduate school experience at Baylor University. I completed an assignment in a master's level course on gifted and talented education entitled "Which Institution Is More Effective at Cultivating Giftedness among African American Males: The Historically Black College or the Traditionally White Institution?" I interviewed two African American male undergraduate students, one attending Baylor University and the other attending Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical University. Both men had been identified while matriculating in public school as academically gifted. Although this study was not the soundest piece of scholarship in terms of research methodology, it did provide me with a viable framework on which to build a more elaborate investigation of this topic in the future. And that is exactly what I did: as a doctoral student at the University of Arkansas, I was afforded the opportunity through my dissertation research to expand and recast this initial study.

### Why Study Giftedness?

Giftedness is a concept that has fascinated, perplexed, and even infuriated many. A cursory glance at the literature in this area will reveal our nation's bifurcated view on this topic. Both Nicholas Colangelo and Gary Davis, two higher education scholars who study gifted populations, assert, "On the one hand, we applaud the individual who has risen from a humble background. . . . On the other hand, as a nation, we have a strong commitment to egalitarianism, as reflected in that mighty phrase 'All men are created equal'" (Colangelo & Davis, 2003). Yet, throughout history, and some assert even prior to records being kept, we have always been interested in what Joseph Renzulli (1981) calls "people of superior ability."

Although the interest in giftedness has continued, there has not been widespread interest in identifying giftedness among individuals representing minority populations. If we look at the information reported by the College Board as well as the *Carnegie Quarterly* we find facts and statistics that provide quite disparaging reports: that is, findings from these two sources suggest that African American students, particularly males, are three times as likely to be placed in classes for the educable mentally retarded as are White students, but only half as likely to be placed in classes for the gifted or talented. Juwanza Kunjufu (1991), in an *Education Week* article that looked at Detroit's male academies, found high levels of underachievement among African American male students; while this group comprised a mere 8.5 percent of the total U.S. school population, its members were found to represent 36 percent of the U.S. special education population. Further, it was Donna Ford (1994, p. 1), professor of education, who uncovered in her review of the literature on gifted African Americans that only 2 percent of the articles and scholarly publications she reviewed focused attention on gifted minority learners in general, and even fewer focused specifically on African American students (the largest U.S. minority population). These studies represent only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to a lack of viable research and scholarship focusing on gifted minority children.

The limited amount of literature highlighting the gifted African American student has primarily focused on students within elementary and secondary settings. The focus on giftedness during the K-12 experience is not unique to the African American student population; most gifted programming initiatives are primarily implemented at these levels. Unfortunately, gifted literature highlighting collegiate student populations remains very limited. Barring the work of a few scholars, including the likes of Donna Ford, Sharon Fries-Britt, Tarek Grantham, Shaun Harper, Thomas Hebert, and my own research, the experiences of the gifted African American collegian remain unnoticed. And perhaps what makes this population even more invisible is the fact that the research we conduct is often relegated to academic journals that typically fail to reach beyond the walls of college and university libraries. Hence, this book represents an attempt to reach the broader population in an effort to bring some attention to this cohort of students, who represent an important aspect of our national resources.

A growing body of literature has focused on the psychosocial (developmental) issues African American students experience during their college-going years, with a particular emphasis on the situations (academic and nonacademic) these students encounter relative to the type of institutions they attend. Prime examples include various studies showing the relative impact predominantly African American and predominantly White institutions have on the academic as well as the social experiences of African American students. Still other studies lend credence to the argument that African American students attending historically Black institutions experience a greater degree of person-environment congruence—meaning their sense of “fit” with the institution often stems from a close association between the student’s espoused worldview and the institutions’ espoused mission and goals.

Although most of the research in this area represents an array of achievement levels among the African American collegiate population, it is unclear as to what the particular institutional factors are that contribute to the success of these students. A primary reason why we should focus on these students is what Ford, Webb, and Sandidge (1994) call a “spilling over” of the issues confronting them at the K-12 level into the collegiate setting. In addition, the tried and true measures that colleges and universities traditionally employ lack potency when used as a means to assess the needs of the academically gifted African American male.

The overriding question this book seeks to answer is the following: What are the perceptions of academically gifted African American males attending historically Black colleges or universities and academically gifted African American males attending traditionally White institutions concerning their relationships with their respective institutions in cultivating their academic giftedness? More pointedly, are there identifiable factors influencing the success of the academically gifted African American male collegian, and if so, are these factors specific to the type of institution attended? This book reveals these factors, uncovered as themes in a qualitative research investigation of two students, both young, gifted, African American, and male. Although these case studies are not representative

of all academically gifted and talented African American males, they do serve as a viable medium to initiate dialogue concerning these two particular experiences, which may in turn transfer to other postsecondary contexts involving similar actors. In addition, this book offers a wealth of information to faculty, staff, and administrators within higher education settings, and also to parents and students themselves who are concerned about the conditions that are necessary to promote the success of these students.

# A Look at the History of Giftedness and Gifted Theorists

The study of giftedness and the manifestation of the concept is not a modern phenomenon. What some have termed a “universal fascination” with individuals who possess extraordinary mental abilities has continued to serve as grist for the discussion mill surrounding this topic. Jane Piirto, in *Talented Children and Adults: Their Development and Education* (1999), reported that from Plato to Gardner, from the patriarch Moses to the matriarch grandma Moses, society has struggled with developing viable definitions to deal with individuals who stand out by virtue of their abilities. Piirto goes on to assert that in Plato’s Republic, Socrates asserted that “ideal leaders must be soldiers and philosophers, and must be good in ‘the contemplation of numbers,’ or mathematics, for ‘natural reckoners are by nature quick in virtually all their studies’” (p. 15). Clearly, Socrates recognized that some people possessed more of a natural affinity for intellectual pursuits—“some people have ‘gifts’ of nature such as a ‘certain keenness for study’”—hence the early identification of a special class of people we have come to refer to as “the gifted.”

Giftedness as a concept was also highly debated among the warring classes of ancient Sparta. Gary Davis and Sylvia Rimm, in their text *Education of the Gifted and Talented* (1989), reported that military acumen and skill were highly valued among classes of young boys. Beginning at age seven, these boys received training in the arts of combat and warfare. Many of these young males, those who lacked physical ability and military acuity, were at best relegated to lower-class status in society, and at worst were killed, with many being flung from the side of a cliff.

In addition to the importance placed on the gifted during the Hellenistic period, particularly in terms of gifts manifested by way of military prowess, Davis and Rimm (1989) also report on the value the Chinese as well as the Japanese placed on highly intelligent children and youth. The Chinese during the Tang Dynasty in

the seventh century A.D. are particularly noted for their efforts at cultivating the talents of these individuals. The Japanese during the Tokugawa period (1604–1868) supported schools of various clans that tracked Samurai children differently than the children of commoners.

Thus, although the sociohistorical contexts that have framed the way the term gifted is defined are quite diverse, the term has always meant *exceptional ability* or *extraordinary talent*. And the term has served as a major means of separating the wheat from the chaff—the wheat representing those possessing outstanding abilities and the chaff representing those who are far less adroit. Additionally, during the historical periods mentioned above, we see the early rumblings of a system that has often served as the bane of our existence in education: namely, we see the very first signs of a tracking system. While the Chinese and Japanese may not have taken such drastic measures as flinging their young citizens who did not display exceptional talents and abilities from the side of a cliff like the Spartans, they did relegate these children to a lower status in life (Davis & Rimm, 1989; Meyer, 1965). Hence, death for children in these cultures was inevitable: for the Spartan child a quick and sudden death, and for the Japanese child a slow and enduring death—a death that lasted a lifetime.

## GIFTED EDUCATION THEORISTS AND INFLUENCES

In early America, concern for the education of gifted and talented children was not a high priority item on the national agenda. Some gifted youth were accommodated in the sense that attending secondary school and college was based on both their academic abilities and their ability to pay. Several individuals as well as national and world events sparked the development of the gifted education movement. Individuals such as Francis Galton, Alfred Binet, Lewis Terman, and Leta Stetter Hollingsworth from ages past exerted a major influence on the field. In contemporary contexts, individuals such as Howard Gardner (1983), Joseph Renzulli (1986), and Robert Sternberg (1985) have made major contributions to this evolutionary process. Beyond each of these theorists, myriad other influences have made a major mark on gifted education—Sputnik, formal definitions, standardized testing, teacher nominations, and learning style preferences. The relative contribution of each theorist and source of influence will be treated in turn.

### Sir Francis Galton

English scientist Sir Francis Galton (1822–1911), “a younger cousin of Charles Darwin” (Davis & Rimm, 1989, p. 9), is noted as one of the earliest theorists who conducted research and wrote on intelligence and intelligence testing. Galton was highly influenced by his cousin Charles’s book, *On the Origin of Species* (1859); from his study of this text, he reasoned that individuals who had acute senses

and who could sense approaching danger and find viable food sources would be favored from an evolutionary standpoint. In essence, Galton was creating a variation on Charles Darwin's theme; instead of the classic mantra "Only the strong survive," Galton asserted, "Only the smart survive." It was his view that those individuals possessing visual and auditory as well as tactile skills were those deemed to be the most intelligent—hence, able to survive.

What Galton's theory did was to establish what has been characterized as the hereditary basis of intelligence—meaning that individuals who were recognized or distinguished by their intelligence appeared to come from successive generations within particular families. Galton's conclusions were published in his most noted work, *Hereditary Genius* (1869). Although Galton's intelligence tests failed to consider key contextual factors such as access to resources, family background, and privilege, his emphasis on heredity as a means of determining intelligence is still widely used today and is shared by many individuals within and outside of the field of gifted education; however, this view is widely disputed by individuals who point to a variety of learning and environmental factors that influence intelligence.

## Alfred Binet

According to J. A. Plucker in *Human Intelligence: Historical Influences, Current Controversies, and Teaching Resources* (2003), after receiving a law degree in 1878, Alfred Binet initiated studies in science at the Sorbonne. Although he did not have any formalized graduate study in psychology, he is probably one of the most frequently acknowledged contributors to the field. Modern intelligence testing can trace its roots back to the work that Binet completed in France during the 1890s. Plucker goes on to report that in 1904, as a member of La Société Libre pour l'Etude Psychologique de l'Enfant, Binet accepted the challenge to devise a test that would identify "dull youth" in the community—a project that was completed for the French government. Along with his colleague T. Simon, he developed what has been referred to as the Binet-Simon scale, a measure that tested students' abilities at various ages. Binet's tests proved to be somewhat inconclusive and were later labeled as failures. It was found that the measures used to determine differences in abilities between normal students and dull students—tests such as hand speed, hand squeezing strength, pressure to the forehead before pain ensued, detecting differences in hand-held weights, and reaction time to sounds or in naming colors—were not particularly conclusive.

Yet, despite the seeming failure of Binet's tests, a term that has had major implications for the study of intelligence emerged from his work: the concept of mental age, the notion that children grow in intelligence and that any given child could be potentially ahead of or behind the intellectual stage for his or her actual age. Colangelo and Davis (2003) pointed out that at any given chronological age, children who appear to be more academically capable are partly due to greater intelligence.

## Lewis W. Terman

Lewis W. Terman accomplished some of the most influential research in the field of giftedness. As a psychologist at Stanford University, “Terman supervised the modification and Americanization of the Binet-Simon tests, producing what has served as the model for the development of intelligence testing in the country” (Davis & Rimm, 1989, p. 6). Additionally, Terman’s study of gifted children, through his project entitled the Stanford Studies of Genius, brought together a group that has been recognized as the most studied group of gifted individuals in the world. Joanne Whitmore, in her text *Giftedness, Conflict, and Underachievement* (1980), noted that Terman’s work was initiated with populations of individuals scoring above 140 on the Stanford-Binet IQ test. Whitmore went on to report that his findings contradicted previous studies that portrayed the gifted as being prone to insanity with an accompanying host of compensatory weaknesses; contrastingly, Terman’s research presented the gifted as an elite class possessing an extensive range of abilities.

Although Terman’s work was groundbreaking, apparently clarifying many misconceptions surrounding the gifted, a new problem quickly developed. Terman’s research, which advanced the notion of identifying giftedness through standardized testing, has caused the field to solely focus on this form of identification. Many view the strict reliance on this unitary measure as a form of bias and discrimination against the culturally different or the economically disadvantaged.

## Leta Hollingsworth

Leta Hollingsworth, as one of the first researchers to study high-ability children, was able to underscore critical aspects of the development of this cohort. Applying virtually the same IQ criterion as Terman in identifying gifted children, Hollingsworth was able to design a number of experimental courses that allowed her to design, teach, and evaluate these novel curriculum approaches. She suggested in her book *Children above 180 IQ* (1975) that high-ability children have five general conduct problems that they must grapple with at some point during their development:

1. To find enough hard and interesting work at school.
2. To suffer fools gladly.
3. To keep from becoming negativistic toward authority.
4. To keep from becoming hermits.
5. To avoid the formation of habits of extreme chicanery.

Hollingsworth’s study of children with IQs of 180 and above remains one of the most definitive works in the field. In 1931, she remarked: “It is the business of education to consider all forms of giftedness in pupils in regard to how many individuals may be trained for their own welfare and that of society at large.” Hollingsworth referred to gifted children as the “original thinkers” of their generations, who

required focused attention on instructional processes that would assist them in developing to their fullest potential.

## Sputnik

The launch of Sputnik on October 4, 1957, exerted a profound influence on national political, military, and educational fronts. For many individuals in the nation, Sputnik represented defeat—the Soviet Union had amassed scientific talent that had far outpaced the efforts put forth in this area by the United States. Several reports ensued that disparaged the American educational system and spoke candidly about the nation's lack of prowess in fields such as science and mathematics. Also, there was an outcry by many who asserted that those individuals showing great intellectual promise, namely, gifted youth, were not being challenged in school systems across the nation. In essence, the cultivation of the gifts and talents of high-achieving youth in our schools was at best haphazard and at worst nonexistent.

Sputnik's influence on talent mobilization in the nation was nothing short of revolutionary. School officials and governmental pundits began to pay closer attention to the curriculum offered in schools. According to a 1959 report by the first official U.S. education mission to the USSR, the typical Russian high school graduate had completed 10 years of math, 5 years of physics, 4 years of chemistry, 1 year of astronomy, 5 years of biology, and 5 years of a foreign language (Davis & Rimm, 1989). A flurry of dialogue that spoke to the rigors of an American education versus a Soviet education ensued. Ability grouping and accelerated course formats were but two of the measures taken to promote a renewal in curriculum.

## Howard Gardner

Perhaps most noted for his multiple intelligences (MI) theory presented in collaboration with his colleagues at Harvard Project Zero, an educational research group, Howard Gardner has made significant contributions to the field of gifted education. Gardner's theory, first presented in his work *Frames of Mind* (1983), challenges many of the assumptions regarding general intelligence, or *g*, according to which most models of intelligence tests are framed.

Gardner's theory challenged the narrow view of intelligence as residing solely in linguistic and logical-mathematical abilities, the abilities that most intelligence tests tended to measure. What Gardner suggested was that giftedness should be measured in the natural contexts in which it emerged; traditional IQ tests would be ineffective in capturing the nuances of this elusive concept. The eight intelligences Gardner presented include the following: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. What Gardner's theory has helped promote is a more inclusive definition of giftedness, one that takes on a more pluralistic view of intelligence. Fortunately, MI theory has served to include more diverse individuals among the ranks of the gifted, particularly people of color and women.