

the *American Florist* observed in 1919, "but the second Sunday in May is purely a floral holiday, which can and should be made of great advantage to the entire trade." Within a few years, confectioners, jewelers, and greeting-card manufacturers were sharing in the bounty.

Glad to have help in promoting her cause, Jarvis initially went along with the

florist industry. "But as it became clear that the florists were molding her 'holy day' to their own ends," Schmidt writes, "she became increasingly angered and alienated." In 1920, she denounced the industry and urged people to wear celluloid buttons. Too late. Against the forces of commerce, the "mother" of Mother's Day never really had a chance.

Why SAT Scores Are Falling

"What's Really Behind the SAT-Score Decline?" by Charles Murray and R. J. Herrnstein, in *The Public Interest* (Winter 1992), 1112 16th St. N.W., Ste. 530, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Virtually every year, the announcement of the latest Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores is greeted with alarms over the state of American education. The scores declined sharply during the 1960s and '70s, bottomed out in the early '80s, and have made only halting improvement since. Average scores for college-bound seniors in 1990-91 fell to 422 of a possible 800 on the verbal part of the test and to 474 on the mathematical part. The figures for all test-takers in 1963 were 478 (verbal) and 502 (math). We are worried about the right thing, say Murray, author of *Losing Ground* (1984), and Herrnstein, a Harvard psychologist, but for the wrong reason.

In fact, American high schools are doing as good a job educating the *average* student as they were in the early 1960s. Estimated SAT scores for *all* seniors, based on practice SATs given to nationally representative samples of juniors, were roughly the same in 1983 as they had been in 1960. That is hardly cause for celebration—the average senior's estimated scores were 375 (verbal) and 415 (math)—but at least things did not get worse.

It is not the average senior, however, who takes the SAT. The one million students who do take the test every year are a highly self-selected group, not even representative of the more than two million college-bound seniors (of whom roughly half go on to two-year colleges), let alone all seniors. They are an elite, Murray and Herrnstein note, and in their ranks are "a large proportion of America's most able young people." *Their* deteriorating perfor-

mance on the SAT is alarming.

The SAT decline is often attributed to "democratization"—an expansion of the pool of people taking the test to include students from disadvantaged backgrounds who in the past never would have considered going to college. There was indeed a large change in the ethnic composition of the SAT pool: In 1963, less than two percent of those taking the SAT were black; in 1991, minorities constituted 28 percent of the pool. However, Murray and Herrnstein point out, almost the entire impact of this change had already been felt by 1972—the year when the SAT scores of white students began a free-fall.

What happened, Murray and Herrnstein argue, is that "democratization" of the SAT pool was followed by "mediocritization" of the college track in high school, as more and more academically weak students went on to colleges and other post-secondary institutions. Rather than raising students to traditional academic standards, schools lowered the standards. Textbooks were "dumbed down"; Mickey Mouse electives were added; grades were inflated; less homework was required; multiple-choice exams replaced essay tests. Eventually, this weakened academic environment affected even the better students, who take the SAT.

America has good reason to be especially concerned about its ablest students, the authors say. This is "not because they are more virtuous or 'deserving,' but because of the reality that much [of] our society's functioning depends on them."