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[00:00:00] **Jack Schneider:** Welcome to *HEQ&A*, the podcast of the *History of Education Quarterly*. I'm your host, *HEQ* co-editor Jack Schneider. Every few weeks, we'll dive into recent work from the journal, asking authors how their projects challenge or extend what we know about a topic, exploring what's interesting and surprising about it, and then taking a step back to consider broader implications. In the second half of the show, we turn our sights to teaching. So, if you're an educator, make sure to stick around until the end. And now let's hear from one of our authors.

[00:00:50] **Sevan Terzian:** My name is Sevan Terzian. I'm a professor in the School of Teaching and Learning at the University of Florida, and the title of my article is "Subtle, Vicious Effects: Lillian Steel Proctor's Pioneering Investigation of Gifted African-American Children in Washington, DC." My article is about the first known detailed study of gifted African-American children that was conducted in the late 1920s by a social worker, an African-American social worker, named Lillian Steel Proctor. The article suggests that this was a very distinctive study because Proctor focused on the children and their school, home, and community environments. It argues that it was also an especially significant research endeavor because it considered African-American children within the racially segregated capital of the United States, Washington, DC.

[00:01:53] In addition, Proctor's study was prototypical in that it anticipated many of the intellectual challenges that African-Americans launched in the 1930s about hereditarian and white supremacist notions of race and intelligence. And what Proctor did back in the late 1920s was to point to systemic racism regarding the under-identification of gifted African-American kids and the relatively sparse opportunities that they had. And so ultimately this is a story of their neglect and exclusion. This study in focusing on the first known detailed study of gifted African-American youth exposes something we hadn't really known much about. It came in the form of an unpublished master's thesis, and yet it was empirically and theoretically robust. In addition, it extends our understanding of the absence of consensus regarding the nature of intelligence and race in the 1920s. It builds on historical studies about early conceptions of giftedness and gifted education in the United States. It builds on socio-cultural constructions of giftedness and how that works. And it also builds on studies regarding how African-American intellectuals and social researchers, levy challenges to white supremacist views of race and intelligence in education. There is no known historical examination of Lillian Steel Proctor's intellectual contributions and what she did to help lay a foundation of knowledge for future studies of gifted African-American youth. So in those ways, my study extends those earlier foundations.

[00:03:51] Some of the surprising things that come out of this study and examining Lillian Steel Proctor's investigation of gifted African-American kids in the late 1920s in Washington, DC was--first of all, it comprised a counter-narrative to white supremacist notions of race and intelligence. Many prominent psychologists of the 1920s Lewis Terman, Leta Stetter Hollingworth, Carl Brigham, were quite influential in pioneering studies of gifted youth and making claims about race and intelligence. And there's no sugarcoating the fact that they were making white supremacist claims and suggesting that African-Americans were inherently intellectually inferior. Here, in Proctor's study, we have an example of a challenge--a vocal and eloquent challenge--to those kinds of claims.

[00:04:46] In addition, one of the other distinctive features of Lillian Proctor's study was that unlike many of her contemporaries, she took particular notice of the larger community context within which the children of her study lived, beyond heredity. In other words, place mattered. And in this case, the place was Washington, DC that had a high percentage of African-Americans living there and was racially segregated.

[00:05:16] And the final thing that was maybe surprising about Proctor's study is that even though she challenged, and vociferously challenged, hereditarian and racist notions of intelligence, she did not fundamentally question whether you could quantify intelligence or not. And at times she even suggested that African-Americans may have had cultural deficits.

[00:05:43] So in those ways she was not completely revolutionary, but a very compelling figure in how she both adhered to and questioned prevailing notions of African-Americans' so-called deficiencies.

[00:06:01] I think there is some broader implications for this particular investigation that occurred in the late 1920s. First of all, it's an eloquent early example of the agency and advocacy of African-American intellectuals and social researchers about unequal educational opportunities for African-American children in schools and society. It also highlights the salience of location. The choice of Washington, DC, as both the nation's capital, but also as a metropolis with a high percentage of African-American residents was especially significant because prevailing studies of gifted children drew from samples in places like California, where the percentage of African-American residents was quite low. And finally it's worth noting that African-Americans remain woefully underrepresented in programs for the gifted and talented in American schools. We must come to terms with the deep historical roots of this discrimination and reject the notion that African-Americans are culturally or intellectually inferior. Studies like this can help us understand where those very troubling and false notions originated.

[00:07:33] **Jack Schneider:** The second half of the show is dedicated to thinking about teaching. We ask authors to put on their guest lecturer hats and take students into the weeds. What should they pay attention to, methodologically speaking? What else should they be reading if they want to take a deep dive into the historiography? And where are there opportunities for further research?

[00:07:53] **Sevan Terzian:** The story behind my investigation of Lillian Steel Proctor's investigation of gifted African-American children and the master's thesis that produced that work was somewhat fortuitous because I was originally studying the research of an African-American psychologist from the 1930s named Martin Jenkins, who would later become president of Morgan State University in Baltimore. And while examining Martin Jenkins archival papers there, I found some field notes that I had mistakenly attributed to him but were actually from this social worker from the 1920 named Lillian Steel Proctor. And that's what led me to her master's thesis that she completed at the University of Chicago. That was based on her study of those kids in Washington, DC. So I guess if there's a methodological message here, it's follow the trail. And when surprises come up, laugh about it, and go after it. Uh, it's not a linear path, but you got to fumble around to find interesting things.

[00:09:00] In addition to that, I would also say unpublished master's thesis can sometimes be profound, not usually, but they can. And unpublished work like that can sometimes be called gray literature because it hasn't been vetted in quite the same sense, but we can treat those as primary sources and that's what I've attempted to do here.

[00:09:22] And then I think that contemporary published sources on gifted education from the 1920s, from people like Lewis Terman and Lita Hollingworth and Carl Brigham, those can also be treated as primary sources, even though they were published. And when we contextualize those in lines of secondary historical research, then we can get not only a sense of what Proctor's study may have meant in her time, but also can mean for us now.

[00:09:53] Most broadly and most prominently, there is a profound and impactful book recently published by Derrick Darby and John Rury called *The Color of Mind* that traces--it's a philosophical and historical examination of white supremacist notions of intelligence. And the so-called inferiority of Black people intellectually. That's a really important orienting piece, not only for my study, but for many studies we might consider on race, intelligence, and education. There's also a nice body of literature on various dimensions of the study that I've done. Articles by Clementine Beauvais on Lewis Terman and the significance of California. And she's also written about how educational psychologists bullied teachers into accepting their authority. That's a piece that appeared in the *Quarterly*.

[00:10:47] Robin Rollins has written about the historical and socioeconomic cultural constructions of giftedness, how its meaning and significance has changed based on not just intellectual notions--but popular cultural notions of what these exceptional people represent to society. Jim Winter Porter has written eloquently on race, national security, and giftedness in mid 20th century America. VP Franklin and William B. Thomas have each written prolifically on African-American social researchers and intellectuals in the early 20th century in ways that challenged white supremacist views on race and intelligence.

[00:11:25] And Donna Ford, who's a prolific and profound scholar on gifted education has written a great deal about the under-representation of African Americans in gifted education. And that serves as a very powerful orienting lens for helping us understand historical antecedents.

[00:11:46] We need many more investigations of studies related to race and gifted education. One may be, for instance, I'm thinking about the history of race and gifted education for other minority groups in American society, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans. Also international considerations about the political constructions of giftedness and why gifted people matter to society. Those vary from place to place and from political context to political context, but there may be some continuity's worth uncovering as well. Having said that, there could be also very valuable state level investigations within the US that are historical in nature. Because of the decentralized nature of American education states varied widely and how they defined and accommodated gifted children.

[00:12:45] And finally, we need more critical interrogations about the constructs of giftedness. And one way we might accomplish that is have historians collaborating with psychologists and helping us better understand things we should agree with and things we should question regarding this very powerful, but often misunderstood conception.

[00:13:11] **Jack Schneider:** Check out *History of Education Quarterly* online. The journal is published by Cambridge University Press and it's carried by most academic libraries. You should also be sure to follow *HEQ* Twitter handle: @histedquarterly, which regularly sends out free read-only versions of articles, and the show's Twitter handle @HEQandA. And don't forget, subscribe to the show so you don't miss forthcoming episodes. We're available on iTunes, Stitcher, and wherever you get your podcasts. HEQ&A is produced at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. Our producer is Jennifer Berkshire and our theme music is by Ryan Shaw. I'm Jack Schneider. Thanks for joining us.