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**Title**

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**Abstract**

Global university rankings have become increasingly important ‘calculative devices’ for assessing the ‘quality’ of higher education and research. Their ability to make characteristics of universities ‘calculable’ is here exemplified by the first proper university ranking ever, produced as early as 1910 by the American psychologist James McKeen Cattell. Our paper links the epistemological rationales behind the construction of this ranking to the sociopolitical context in which Cattell operated: an era in which psychology became institutionalized against the backdrop of the eugenics movement, and in which statistics of science became used to counter a perceived decline in ‘great men.’ Over time, however, the ‘eminent man,’ shaped foremost by heredity and upbringing, came to be replaced by the excellent university as the emblematic symbol of scientific and intellectual strength. We also show that Cattell’s ranking was generative of new forms of the social, traces of which can still be found today in the enactment of ‘excellence’ in global university rankings. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)