



Irksome Things

There are a lot of things, large and small, that irk me. One of them is our tendency to evaluate a presidential candidate based on his intelligence or academic credentials. When Obama threw his hat in the ring, people thought he was articulate and smart and hailed his intellectual credentials. Just recently, when Newt Gingrich announced his candidacy, people hailed his intellectual credentials and smartness as well.



By contrast, the intellectual elite and mainstream media people see Sarah Palin as stupid, a loose cannon and not to be trusted with our nuclear arsenal. There was another presidential candidate who was also held to be stupid and not to be trusted with our nuclear arsenal who ultimately became president — Ronald Reagan. I don't put much stock into whether a political leader is smart or not because, as George Orwell explained, "Some ideas are so stupid that only intellectuals believe them."

All the evidence that I see is that academics and intellectuals have messed up the world. I challenge anyone to show me a major calamity that was engineered by a stupid, inarticulate person, but those caused by intelligent, articulate persons are too numerous to count, from the likes of Hitler, Stalin and Mao to Woodrow Wilson, FDR and Obama.

My vision of a good presidential candidate is a person with ordinary intelligence but great respect and love for our Constitution. Maybe Palin's and Reagan's respect and love for our Constitution qualified them as dumb in the eyes of the mainstream media, intellectuals and academics.

There are less important things that irk me. One of them is teleological explanations. I've listened to TV weather reports and heard the weatherman say, "There will be morning clouds, but the sun will try to come out later in the day." Often, the weatherman's predication is wrong, and it remains cloudy all day. Would the weatherman explain that the day remained cloudy because the sun didn't try hard enough? Trying to do something is purposeful behavior. Inanimate objects cannot engage in purposeful behavior.

Another mini-irk is to hear someone say something such as "Dave and myself went shopping." My question might be that if Dave hadn't come along, how would you describe what you did? Would you say, "Myself went shopping?" Grammar lesson: Myself is a reflexive pronoun. As such, it must be preceded by a pronoun to which it refers, namely its antecedent, within the same sentence. For example: "I, myself, wrote this column."

Another grammatical irritant is a statement such as "John is taller than me." Hearing such a



Written by [Walter E. Williams](#) on June 8, 2011

grammatical error, Dr. Martin Rosenberg, my high school English teacher, would pitch a fit, sarcastically asking, "Do you mean John is taller than me am?" He'd explain that am is the elliptical, or understood, verb in the sentence, and the subject of any verb must be in the nominative case; therefore, the sentence should be, "John is taller than I."

An irritant along mathematical lines is when the telephone information operator tells me that the number for the party I wish to reach is 285-77o-8855. On occasion, I've asked the operator whether I'd reach my party if I dialed 77o. She'd reply that I'd have to dial 770. Then I'd ask her why she told me to dial 77o, telling her there is a difference between o and zero. I would explain that the letter o is defined as a vowel and the 15th letter of our alphabet. By contrast, zero is defined as a number that when added or subtracted from another number does not change the value of that number. Needless to say, our conversation would go downhill and reach a strained and unpleasant end.

One shouldn't expect to go through a day, much less life, without annoyances of one kind or another, but I thought I'd share a few of mine with the people who read my column.

Walter E. Williams is a professor of economics at George Mason University. To find out more about Walter E. Williams and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

COPYRIGHT 2011 CREATORS.COM



Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative,
non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture, and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.



Subscribe

What's Included?

- 24 Issues Per Year
- Optional Print Edition
- Digital Edition Access
- Exclusive Subscriber Content
- Audio provided for all articles
- Unlimited access to past issues
- Coming Soon! Ad FREE
- 60-Day money back guarantee!
- Cancel anytime.