



Written by [Walter E. Williams](#) on June 25, 2014

The Education Establishment's Success

Many view America's education as a failure, but in at least one important way, it's been a success — a success in dumbing down the nation so that we fall easy prey to charlatans, hustlers and quacks. You say, "Williams, that's insulting! Explain yourself." OK, let's start with a question or two.

Are you for or against global warming, later renamed climate change and more recently renamed climate disruption?

Environmentalists have renamed it because they don't want to look silly in the face of cooling temperatures. About 650 million years ago, the Earth was frozen from pole to pole, a period scientists call Snowball Earth. The Earth is no longer frozen from pole to pole. There must have been global warming, and it cannot be blamed on humans.

Throughout the Earth's history, we've had both ice ages and higher temperatures when CO₂ emissions were 10 times higher than they are today. There's one immutable fact about climate. It changes, and mankind can't do anything about it. Only idiocy would conclude that mankind's capacity to change the climate is more powerful than the forces of nature.

During Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, his slogans were about hope and change. At the time, I asked people whether they were for or against change. Most often, I received a blank stare, whereupon I reminded them that change is a fact of life. Nonetheless, when candidate Obama uttered "hope and change," it was received with thunderous applause. There was also thunderous applause when Obama promised, "This was the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal." Only a deranged environmental wacko and duped people could believe that a non-god can change ocean depths.

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Americans fall easy prey to charlatans of all stripes because of the education establishment's success in dumbing down the nation. Nowhere has this dumbing down been more successful than it has in creating a historical amnesia. Historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. wrote in *The Disuniting of America*: "History is to the nation ... as memory is to the individual. As an individual deprived of memory becomes disoriented and lost, not knowing where he has been or where he is going, so a nation denied a conception of its past will be disabled in dealing with its present and its future."





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The National Assessment of Educational Progress tests students in grades four, eight and 12 on several broad subject areas every few years. Just 20 percent of fourth-graders, 17 percent of eighth-graders and 12 percent of 12th-graders were at grade-level proficiency in American history in the 2010 exams. Because students don't learn American history, they learn little about our founding principles and they fail to learn why America is an exceptional nation. But that's a part of the progressive/liberal agenda. If Americans knew and understood our founding principles and values, special interest groups and politicians couldn't run roughshod over our liberties.

But it's not just K-12 students who are ignorant of our history. In a 1990 survey — and there's been no improvement since — almost half of college seniors couldn't locate the Civil War within the correct half-century. More recently, 60 percent of American adults couldn't name the president who ordered the dropping of the first atomic bomb, and over 20 percent didn't know where — or even whether — the atomic bomb had been used. The same people didn't know who America's enemies were during World War II (Germany, Japan and Italy). In a civics survey, more American teenagers were able to name The Three Stooges (Larry, Moe and Curly) than the three branches of the federal government (executive, legislative and judicial). A third of the people who were asked the origin of the statement "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need" responded by saying it's from our Bill of Rights, when it's actually from *The Communist Manifesto*.

I'd say that the education establishment has been successful beyond its wildest dreams in reducing Americans' ability to think and therefore causing them to have little knowledge of or love for our founding principles.

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