



Ignorance in America

If ignorance really were bliss, anti-depressants would not be popped like M&M's today. This is the conclusion we have to draw if a recent ABC News article entitled "Are We Becoming A Nation of Know-Nothings?" (ironically, ABC erred in capitalizing "a" in their title) is any indication of the true state of America.



The piece reports on interviews conducted by New Left Media, in which two of its reporters asked attendees at an Ohio Sarah Palin book signing simple questions on the day's issues. Reporting on the answers, ABC writes:

The responses were, in most cases, startling. Here's a small sampling:

Q — What issues would she bring to office? Woman — "Oh gee." Other Woman — "Fairness, realness." Woman — "She's gonna make a difference"

Q — What difference? Woman — "I don't know, I never really thought about it"

Q — What policy would she bring to office? Woman — "Good Judgment"

Q — Any specifics? Woman — "I think she would get control of some of the spending".

Q — What's some of the spending you'd like to see cut? Other Woman — "All of it. All of it."

Q — What would you like to have her do on foreign policy? Man — "I don't know, I don't have an answer."

While this certainly plays into the Left's narrative about the pale Palin intellect, ABC points out that it reflects not Palin and her supporters but the overall dumbing-down of America (and they illustrate this point well, as the above passage is rife with punctuation errors).

This is no doubt true. Remember that these results have been replicated with Barack Obama supporters and the citizenry in general. For instance, there was the widely disseminated [video](#) from HowObamaGotElected.com in which Obama voters showed a striking lack of basic knowledge (interestingly, John McCain voters fared better when asked the same questions). There are talk-show host Sean Hannity's "man on the street" [interviews](#) and Jay Leno's "Jaywalking" [segment](#), in which the respondents' answers are wanting enough to be the stuff of comedy. But the *pièce de résistance* may just be Howard Stern's [interviews](#) in Harlem, New York City, in which the interviewer attributed McCain's positions to Obama and then asked Obama supporters if they agreed with them (e.g., "Do you like Obama's pro-life stance?"). You guessed it, the respondents enthusiastically supported Obama's "positions."

So are we Americans just a stupid lot? It's certainly fashionable to thus contend, and [videos](#) have been made in support of the idea. Yet, to lend a little more perspective, there is a reason why Englishman Winston Churchill said "The best argument against democracy is a five minute conversation with the



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average voter.” No matter what the country, “average” doesn’t translate into politics wonk, and there is a reason why foreign peoples support leaders such as Vladimir Putin, Hugo Chavez, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Moreover, it would be, well, stupid to think that the shows conducting the given type of interviews are always presenting an accurate cross-section of the target group. After all, if you broadcast those who might answer intelligently, you no longer have comedy — you have *Meet the Press*. And anyone can cherry-pick respondents for the purposes of making a group look bad.

Nevertheless, this anecdotal evidence cannot be dismissed, as studies ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#), for example) have consistently shown an educational decline in modern times. And while many people sense this intuitively, the causes of the phenomenon are less easily discerned. So let’s explore the matter.

There are many dimensions to this problem. First there is the lack of discipline in schools — and discipline and obedience are prerequisites for learning. After all, as discipline wanes, discord and disruption wax, and then a school increasingly resembles a strife-filled, or at least wild, environment. And how well could one learn on a battlefield or in the midst of a party (there’s a reason why libraries forbid loud behavior)? And how can one teach? The more time teachers have to spend being lion tamers (without the whip — they’re handcuffed), the less they have to train minds.

As for obedience, how can someone learn from you if he’s not first willing to listen to you? Remember that few children will apply themselves to academics if left to their own devices; the default for man is to be lazy absent motivation. And while we talk much today about making learning “fun,” not everything can be made so, and, regardless, it will never measure up to indulging your favorite pastime. Times tables or video games? That’s a question even the most uneducated child can answer.

Then there is the fact that only a very small percentage of the vast information in this world can be imparted to children. And the more time you spend on one subject, the less there will be for others. This means that the more class time we devote to sex education, environmentalism, multiculturalism and the like, the less time there is for things such as English composition, history, math and civics. Thus, even if were true that “ism” education had some merit, would it really be the best use of limited time and resources?

As for adults’ knowledge of the issues, ABC News laments American literacy and mentions that newspaper circulation is down almost 5 percent over the last five years. On the other hand, citizens often place the onus on the media, saying that it specializes in fluff and propaganda and fails to educate the electorate. But, really, this is much like the debate swirling around children’s education: Is the decline due to parents or teachers? The truth?

It’s both.

It is a systemic problem. In the 1950s, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen could appear on primetime television decked out in full clerical garb, discuss religion, philosophy and politics and garner huge ratings. But by the ’60s he had lost much of his audience, and today he’d be languishing on a religious station in the recesses of cable. If the people want serious discussion of issues, they will get it. And if they want *American Idol* and “reality” TV, they will get that.

As for the media, citizens would be a lot more interested if they could trust it to deliver what is most interesting: Truth. People will just look to entertainment if they want fiction. After all, Hollywood may not tell taller tales than modern media, but it sure tells them a lot better.



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