

## Decline

Thomas Jefferson once commented that "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be. . . .If we are to guard against ignorance and remain free, it is the responsibility of every American to be informed." (Letter to Col. Charles Yancey, January 6, 1816). The viability of any republic is directly tied to the intellectual and educational level of the populace. The ignorant and the stupid make good subjects, not good citizens.

Evidence is mounting, however, that Americans are falling short of the ideal of an educated populace as news stories from around the globe indicate. Talk show hosts have practically made a career of catching "the man on the street" not knowing what he should about his own country. The statistics indicate the situation goes far beyond late night talk show amusement: half of Americans can name 4 characters from "The Simpsons", but less than a quarter can name two or more of the guaranteed rights in the First Amendment, only 2 out of 5 voters can name all three branches of the federal government, only 1 in 5 know that there are 100 federal senators, only 1 in 7 can find Iraq on a map, and only one-fifth of Americans between ages 18-34 keep up with current events (Shenkman, 2008).

Both the secular and the spiritual cry out for the populace to be educated. We are to seek knowledge in a consistent and constant manner. (*Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding;* Proverbs 2:2, New American Standard Bible). We are to look for knowledge everywhere and not doing so is considered foolishness. (*Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech: "How long will you simple ones love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?"* Proverbs 1:20-22, New International Version).

To ignore this command is to risk the very quality of our earthly life. (*My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. "Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.* Hosea 4:6, New International Version). If we are commanded to double check our earthly spiritual leadership how much more should we be scrutinizing our secular leadership (*Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.* Acts 17:11, New International Version).

The primary reason for the current situation miring the United States is because the citizenry has failed to hold elected officials accountable. We simply do not know what they are doing, or, for that matter, what they should be doing. This is not a Democrat or Republican issue. It is an American issue. Both parties have consistently used misinformation, propaganda, and misdirection for decades to promote a program or political agenda along with mass media as a willing partner. The uninformed are easily duped.

Our elected officials typically represent only the most vocal of their constituency. The question is whether we want only the moneyed, suburban folks to be the only people from which they hear. If our

elected representatives get enough of a ground swell, they must at least acknowledge our concerns. I still believe that a representative democracy can work, and for it to work, we must all endeavor to be informed and actively participate in the political process regardless of our political and social "leanings". We must have a drive to learn and be informed of our government's operation and hold government officials accountable for their actions. Further, we must equally desire to transfer this drive to subsequent generations.

Enter our current national budget crisis. Either intentionally or unintentionally, the powers that be insist that education programs are among the first to be cut. While it is of the utmost importance that governmental budgets be balanced, it is troubling to consider the logic behind cutting education and not eradicating the so called "entitlement" programs (not to be confused with various retirement programs which are in essence contractual in nature). The question is whether it is more effective or desirable to "give a man a fish or teach him to fish"?

The biblical stance is straight forward: if one is not willing to work then he should not reap the rewards along with those that are willing and able to work (*For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.* 2 Thessalonians 3:10, New American Standard Bible). Note, this in no way excuses one from loving their neighbor or failing to extend love or compassion to the disabled. This is aimed solely at those who could be contributing to society but refuse. Rewarding the lazy merely enables them. Individuals so rewarded tend to develop a level of selfishness and apathy that is so pervasive that the greater good of society is sacrificed for the expediency of the moment. Crime and various addictions tend to be symptomatic of this egocentric condition.

Many in this country state that we must eliminate poverty at all costs and yet God says this is impossible. (*You will always have the poor among you.* Matthew 26:11a, New Living Translation. *There will always be some in the land who are poor.* Deuteronomy 15:11a, New Living Translation). The wards of the state soon become the devoted pawns of tyranny. If one wants to remain in power, one buys votes. The poor sell their votes very inexpensively.

Education however sets men free. Free to learn. Free to examine. Free to question. Education and knowledge provide a means to innovate, to modify one's surroundings, and to change the direction of a society. Educated and informed citizenry lift those around them; they sow the seeds of a strong economy, and are the only foundation upon which a republic can be built (Yeager, 2010).

The question before you then is whether to choose light or dark, life or death, to actively work toward a future where freedom will flourish or to idly allow a tyranny of fools to replace this long standing republic. Taking up the gauntlet of freedom will today, as in the past, require effort and sacrifice. Participation in the American political process requires personal devotion to acquiring knowledge, openly enlightening others (including our children and grandchildren), consistently informing elected representative of our opinions, and publicly holding our elected representatives accountable for their actions. Fortunately, this is not a fool's errand as the rewards are real and tangible. Likewise, the

consequences of turning our backs and folding our hands are just as real and tangible. I believe that instilling a love of both freedom and learning in our children and grandchildren are well worth the effort.

Shenkman, Richard. *Just How Stupid Are We?: Facing the Truth about the American Voter*. New York: Basic Books, 2008. Print.

Yeager, Evan T. "Seek Knowledge." *King's Kruizers Newsletter* 9 (July 2010): 4-5. Print.

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