

LET'S SMARTEN UP, AMERICA

Mark Twain said... "Don't let your learning get in the way of your education." Twain was a great wit and folksy philosopher, but he forgot to finish the sentiment. How about adding... "And don't let your ignorance and lack of mental/emotional training weigh down yourself, your loved ones and all of society." The lack of progress in literacy rates and inadequate education for life are a national disgrace that harms all of us.

Before we warm up the tar, pluck a passel of feathers and run me out of town on a rail as some elitist and out of touch snob-hold your britches. Ignorance means literally not knowledgeable. Mental/emotional training might mean something like; using formal training in the many forms of reason, reflection and education on the story of man. Rigorous addressing of both makes the world safer, richer and joyful as our K-12 consumers become producers, innovators and creators.

So what's the bee in my bonnet? Literacy and problem solving skills still stink. That affects you. Literacy is measured in terms of reading, writing and basic computational skills. Folks are often categorized into five levels. Level 3 is a minimum standard for success in today's labor market and only half of those 16-65 years of age is at Level 3. It has not improved in at least 15 years and many suggest since 1971.

There is a huge increase in wages and decrease in demand on social services as literacy and educational level increases. One in three prison inmates are at Level 1 and re-arrest rates are directly related to educational level and literacy. Health and longevity both improve with literacy and educational level.

Yes, many a spiritual leader has said; "The poor-we will always have with us", meaning poor in mind, attributes of any kind and material possessions, etc. Fair enough. Although there is a range of aptitudes and opportunities in this country, the wealthiest nation in the history of the world can do a lot better than where we are in terms of literacy, problem solving skills and an understanding of the all of the journey of man. By all I mean all; music, art, industry, science, mathematics, philosophy, natural history, effective communication- you get the idea. There is no class in our lack of classical education just as there is nothing fit about our lackadaisical child fitness standards. Let me be clear, classical education does not mean creating a bunch of pencil necked geeks citing the great works of poetry. It is intense attention to fluency in our language, literacy in reading and writing, life skills based mathematics and science, exposure to civics and the humanities and in depth involvement of total fitness- both physical and the arts.

Does it start with family, well everything does but that does not exonerate society from the stark reality of society's role. The finger is to be pointed nowhere other than 180 degrees for our sorry state. Yep, that's right; point it right at each and every one of us. We are addicted to technology, whereby whizz-bang technology manipulates the world for us. We adore celebrities of typically easy virtue

pretending to be what we are told we think we should be and we make gods of sports heroes. All has led us to where we are; mediocrity in a land of unparalleled opportunity.

I am around Junior College kids every day whose fund of knowledge of the world is a piggy bank with no pennies. There is no lack of talent or intelligence. They are ill prepared. The men and women who brought light to the world and gave ideas flight did not do so without education. Suggesting otherwise is a myth.

My mom, an 86 year old retired master educator says... "If we take the question mark out of grammar and for that matter life, and if we stop asking, like a wide eyed wonder-filled toddler- Why? ... Society is doomed." Let's smarten up, America.

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