



## Are You an Optimist or Pessimist About America?

Of course, as an “extremist” writer and “thinker” on the matter of American education, I was not asked to contribute my views. I would have expressed guarded optimism about the growth of homeschooling as an alternative to our failed public schools. Nevertheless, I found some of the comments worth passing on to our readers. Here they are:



Brooke Allen, author and professor, wrote:

Which leads me to one of the root causes of my long-term pessimism: the state of American education. We are constantly confronted with dismal statistics on test scores, our students' performance relative to other developed nations, etc. But what is the reason for this, and what is the solution? It's not an answer, I think, to throw more money at the problem.... The problem seems to me a deep-seated one: we simply have no consensus as a nation, no unified philosophy of what an educated person should know. Perhaps this relates to the breakdown of government; we have arrived at no consensus as a nation about what a government should do.

Professor Allen is, of course, right. There is no unified philosophy of what an educated person should know. But there was one when I was going to public school in the 1930s. We were all taught reading by phonics, arithmetic by rote memorization, cursive penmanship, and grammar. Our principal read the 23rd Psalm at our assemblies, and we were all encouraged to become patriotic citizens. We also learned basic history and geography so that we could easily understand the witty historical and geographical references in Cole Porter's sophisticated show tunes.

The result was what Tom Brokaw has called America's Greatest Generation, who won World War II and went on to create our high-tech and booming consumer economy. Many of them made tons of money, which they salted away in foundations that some of their liberal heirs are now using to destroy the very values this generation fought to uphold.

Today our public schools are controlled by teachers' unions determined to impose Dewey-inspired socialist-progressive education on American children. And as long as this is the case, there will be no



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consensus on a unified philosophy of education. But that has not stopped individual Americans from taking matters into their own hands. The result is a growing homeschool movement, an increase in online educational programs, and the use of such tools as YouTube to teach students basic math. Technology and parental action are making the public schools obsolete. But is all of this enough to reverse our educational decline? We shall have to wait and see.

Paul Cantor, professor of English, University of Virginia, commented:

What has made America great is that, by and large, it has given the most talented and spirited among its youth a chance to show their stuff. If I am pessimistic, the reason is that this American tradition is being eroded by all sorts of factors, most of them emanating from Washington, D.C. But I nevertheless remain optimistic; it's because I still see exceptional young people in my classes and I can feel them straining to do something exceptional with their lives. If only we would get out of their way.

Indeed, it is encouraging to know that the younger generation is taking advantage of all the new technological tools available to them. In 2004, Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook and is now one of the world's richest men. These Internet billionaires have demonstrated how successful ingenious individuals can be when they master these technologies on their own or with the help of the experts.

David Gelernter, author and professor, wrote:

It goes without saying that American public schools, and most colleges and universities, are now on the long, slow ride to the gallows. Their high costs, obvious political agenda, and gross incompetence mean that eradication is their only conceivable fate. Online schooling is a far-from-perfect alternative, but it's the one we have.... It has enormous potential for good — beyond the decent education it provides. If we are imaginative about this new kind of public institution, these little red Internet schoolhouses, much good may yet emerge from the wreckage of American public schools.

Yes, the American public school system is slowly going down the drain. Yet, most parents still send their children to them, and taxpayers have not yet rebelled against paying for them. We are still a nation of laws and we believe in doing things the correct way: through our corrupt politicians influenced by the teachers' unions.

But the events in Wisconsin are beginning to shake things up. The attempts by the unions to remove the conservative Republican Governor will tell us more about the people of Wisconsin than anything else. It will tell us whether or not they are sane or too much addicted to government "services." If the latter, let 'em eat cake!

Dana Gioia, former chairman of the National Endowment of the Arts, commented:

I remain optimistic in general terms about the United States.... I am far less confident, however, about the nation's cultural and intellectual future. There has been a vast dumbing down of our public culture that may be irreversible. There can be no doubt from the many detailed and reliable studies available that Americans now know less, read less, and even read less well than they did a quarter of a century ago.

Tell me about it. I've been writing about the deliberate dumbing down process for years. As for the reading problem, I am one of the few writers who has been beating that drum for so long that sometimes I just give up hope that we can ever get our schools to do the right thing and actually teach



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our children to read.

But thanks to the homeschool movement, more American children are learning to read than would have been the case had the homeschoolers not taken matters into their own hands and created a movement that is saving thousands of children from the ravages of reading disability. It should be noted that when Dana Gioia was chairman of the Endowment he ordered a survey be made on the decline of literacy in the United States. He concluded: "This is a massive social problem. We are losing the majority of the new generation. They will not achieve anything close to their potential because of poor reading."

The survey, entitled *Reading at Risk*, had as much impact on American educators as a snowball being dumped into a pot of boiling water. American school teachers, educated by socialist professors of education, are in the IQ dumps. Sadly, most of them are either brain dead or terrified by their "reading supervisor."

Hugh Hewitt, law professor at Chapman University Law School, wrote:

Epic incompetence didn't matter so much when government was smaller. Now, penetrating every aspect of the economy and encroaching on what had previously been the private sphere, government incompetence is now poisoning everything.... There are so many destroyers of wealth and productivity, legions of dim-witted and credentialed bullies, that even the sunniest optimist may eventually pull down the blinds.

That's what many of us are often tempted to do: pull down the blinds and enjoy what there is left to enjoy and let the country suffer the consequences of its incompetence. But it's unfair to our children and grandchildren to just tell them, "It's over and you'd better adjust to the new totalitarianism." Americans still have enough freedom to change things. Over two million homeschoolers have used that freedom to get their kids out of government schools. As long as we still have such freedoms, we ought not to give up hope. Two million homeschooled kids can change a lot of things if they get involved in politics. Revolutions are always made by small determined minorities who know what they want. Most people are plasma spectators watching to see who wins. But as they say in sports, winners never quit, and quitters never win.

As a resident of California, Hewitt had this to say about the once Golden State:

Out here in California — once the best place of all when measured by freedom, creativity, plenitude, and sheer exuberant living — the arteries have already closed, and the political class seems simply incapable of doing anything to reverse the disease. Asking the California legislature to repeal what must be repealed and slash the tax burdens that must be slashed is akin to asking a third-grader to do calculus. There simply isn't the capacity. Jerry Brown knows it. We all know it. The goose is on life support.

Of course California also has one of the most dismal records on the teaching of reading in its schools. They imposed dyslexia-causing Whole Language on all the public schools, which has produced the worst literacy disaster in the state's history. We warned them back in the 1980s that this would happen, but they wouldn't listen. Has anyone gone to jail for their pedagogic mistake, which has crippled a million children? They've probably been given raises.

Heather MacDonald, fellow at the Manhattan Institute, observed:

In Seoul, South Korea, thousands of people sequester themselves for months and years at a time in "Exam Village" to study for grueling professional tests. In China, tiger parents push their



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children relentlessly to succeed. American teens are definitely good at socializing.... It's time to junk the communitarian agenda of progressive education and to embrace competition and grouping by ability in schools.... Most important, however, we should acknowledge that learning requires focused, disciplined work to master a body of knowledge that exists independently of a student's overrated need for self-actualization.

Nicely stated! Many Americans know exactly what is needed to turn things around. The only problem is that the American people have placed in power the wrong people. Milton Friedman once said that if you can get the wrong people to do the right thing, it is as good as if you had the right people in power. But, unfortunately, at this time we have the wrong leader in the White House determined to do the wrong thing. Our only solution is to get him out of the White House so that he can become an ex-President and devote his time to building his own presidential library. It will become a socialist shrine and a concrete warning to all of us to never let it happen again.



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