

# The problems with the american anti intellectualism movement politics essay



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The anti-intellectualism movement facing America today is a problem with far-reaching implications. There is currently a revival of this movement in American political life. Anti-intellectualism is defined as the “opposition to or hostility towards intellectuals, or to an intellectual view or approach” (Merriam Webster). The anti-intellectualism movement is characterized by the contempt for advanced education, the liberal arts, and science. Anti-intellectualism in the political sphere has founded itself on contempt for intellectuals, claiming that they are elites who are committed to ideological playfulness rather than practical application. However, it seems that toying with past and present ideas is necessary to engender the most effective political policies. Anti-intellectualism is a result of a failing education system, the integration of church into state, and the ease with which political “pundits” can drive the media. Currently, anti-intellectualism is spreading like a plague through the American political landscape. We as citizens can inoculate this disease through a complete overhaul of the US education system. An improvement to the educational system could occur with increased liberal arts integration into primary, secondary, and university education curriculums. In addition to the education system, the general American public needs to be edified about the basic American democratic tenant of separation of church and state. Furthermore, implementing more regulation on political “pundits” and demagogues in the media is necessary for the progression and success of politics in America.

Anti-intellectualism seems to promote the attitude that knowledge which is not profitable has no value and is not worth learning – “knowledge for knowledge’s sake” (DeFilippis, The Oklahoma Daily) is of little importance in

anti-intellectualism. However, “ knowledge for knowledge’s sake” (liberal arts education) could prove to be very beneficial in politics. Neither primary nor secondary schools consider the liberal arts a priority, and at the level of university education, students are expected to declare majors that funnel them into profitable jobs – a very small percentage of university students are encouraged to engage in the liberal arts. Our current education system will eventually lead us to be alienated from one another because people will only be educated in their particular profession. Liberal arts education, because it educates the whole individual, gives citizens an understanding of why their particular profession contributes to the whole. Therefore, all people will be able to see why all jobs are important. Liberal arts education encourages knowledge of many subjects. It would seem that knowledge of many subjects would be most effective in impacting political ideas since politics incorporates so many facets of life. Liberal arts education infuses students with knowledge of the historical and philosophical underpinnings of the US. Having historical and philosophical knowledge of America is fundamental to making informed political choices that best reflect what was intended for this country- we would not want to collapse into what our founding fathers escaped from. Liberal arts education would create more informed and progressive voters and politicians because they would be acquainted with a broad scope of policies that have not worked in the past; this would allow us as an electorate body to spring into the future by creating new ideas and better political policies. Furthermore, people educated in the liberal arts who have developed ordered intellects seem necessary in politics since these people are more educated in a variety of issues that affect a variety of people. As a result, those educated in the liberal arts will have the ability to

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understand and undertake issues that apply to many persons (the entire American populous), and not just one group. Liberal arts education promotes the progression of the individual mind which in effect promotes the progression of the collective mind which then positively affects the electorate and the decisions they make in the face of new problems.

Furthermore, with the emergence and further development of the globalized world, American citizens need to be educated on global issues now more than ever in order for America to be a respected nation and one that can pride itself on having substantial knowledge of nations we interact with the most. We are only a respected country inasmuch as other countries respect us, but we are currently looked upon unfavorably in the world market.

America's main competitors and closest partners in the world are very committed to education with liberal arts based curriculums- if we expect to be a competitor in the world market, it would be in our best interest to implement a stronger liberal arts education system. Liberal arts education would give people the knowledge necessary to understand the foundation of America and our position as a nation relative to other countries. In addition, liberal arts education would give us a better understanding of the global political issues America faces because we would have knowledge of global problems and how these problems evolved.

One of the main tenets the founding fathers implemented in America was the separation of church and state; the fact that religious values and principles are gaining importance in political rhetoric is inconsistent with this basic American democratic tenet. The anti-intellectualism movement caters to "folksy" type Americans who are generally committed to tradition and "<https://assignbuster.com/the-problems-with-the-american-anti-intellectualism-movement-politics-essay/>

faith.” This integration of religion into American politics is aided by the anti-rationalism component of anti-intellectualism which is characterized by relying on “faith” rather than rational ideas to formulate the best political infrastructure for society. This relegates us to the level of animals; our rational faculty is something that constitutes us as humans, so it seems odd that we would want to denounce such a faculty. America is a secular nation, and as a result, religion should not have a place in the political sphere nor in the realm of education. This anti-intellectualism movement favors faith; as a result, evolution theories are considered controversial, and creation theories find a place for themselves in the US education system. Schools are supplementing textbooks with creation theories as an alternative to evolution. This contradicts the basic tenet of the separation of church and state and the secularism of America. Creation theories should not have a place in our nation’s public schools, and implementing such values in education steers young minds away from the basic principles of America. In addition, the anti-intellectualism movement has managed to bring Barack Obama’s religious affiliation to the forefront of our political discourse. This should be a non-issue- America is a secular nation and therefore, politicians’ religious affiliations should be of no consequence to our political forums. Liberal arts education would teach people about the basic tenets of America and it would reaffirm the history and philosophical reasons behind the separation of church and state and why it is so vital to this country. As a result, commitments to faith would not enter the political realm because citizens would understand that they have no place in American politics.

Lastly, there needs to be more regulation on political pundits and demagoguery in American politics. The ease with which political “pundits” can spew political rhetoric and gain a respectable following is an indication of the anti-intellectualism problem we are facing in America. Political pundits in mainstream media have no substantial ideas to propose- they are quick to complain about current presidents and politicians, yet they never really propose solutions; they merely champion principles. However, principles are not enough to carry a nation in the political arena- policies are necessary, and implementing policies requires intellectual people. In essence, politics are constituted by policies and policies are constituted by ideas; as a result, ideas are fundamental to politics. Ideas are things which we come to know through rational, intellectual thought- we have to toy with ideas from the past and ideas for the future in order to come up with creative, effective political policies. Having a broad scope of knowledge makes coming up with new, creative ideas easier. If people are educated in the liberal arts, they will have this broad scope of knowledge which will help them come up with new and improved political ideas. Anti-intellectualism seems to contradict what politics really are- one must engage in intellectual discourse in order to achieve effective political policies.

The political “pundits” and politicians most involved in the anti-intellectualism movement often cite the founding fathers and the constitution in order to support their political rhetoric - this has implicit contradictions. This is because America was founded by intellectuals- “the leaders were the intellectuals” (Hofstadter, 145). If the intention of the founding fathers at the inception of America was to place intellectuals at the

helm, anti-intellectualism seems contrary to their intentions. Glenn Beck is a perfect example of a political pundit and a demagogue. He plays the side of the common people, yet he makes millions of dollars a year for his talk show- he is not a common person. The trend we are seeing in America is the attainment of good jobs via bachelor's degrees and more recently the move towards advanced degrees for any hopes of advancement. Yet someone like Glenn Beck, who is not university educated, has a very powerful, high-paying job engaging in controversial political discourse citing religion and the founding fathers. People idolize Glenn Beck and obtain their political ideas from him, and while he is not university-educated and is making millions of dollars a year, those who champion him the most have to make it in this world via their merit. Furthermore, Glenn Beck is skewing what is fundamental to America- one of his hot topics, religion, is NOT fundamental to America- the separation of church and state is fundamental to America. The only thing we have as citizens to represent ourselves and our ideas is our vote; it should be the most informed, intellectual, reliable vote possible. It is critical that we feel confident in our own education and in our own intellectual capacities and not rely on someone else to tell us what is important. The demagoguery that people such as Glenn Beck participate in would be a non-issue if people were liberal arts educated. This is because the false fears that Glenn Beck incites in people would collapse if people had their own knowledge of current issues and the liberal arts backgrounds which would enable them to think for themselves. People fail to realize the absurdity behind his rhetoric because of their lack of education.

Anti-intellectualism will eventually lead to the destruction of the American democratic state and the ideals to which democracy is committed. The anti-intellectualism movement needs to be destroyed, otherwise our weak political structure will continue to fail, and America will continue to endure the bad reputation it has gained in the world market. It is most likely no coincidence that the peak of the political anti-intellectualism movement is at a time in which we have an abundance of political policy crises. We will gain respect as a country and as a competitor in the world if we rid ourselves of this anti-intellectualism movement. Liberal arts education can cure our problem by giving citizens a broad scope of knowledge which would allow us to make informed and thoughtful political decisions rather than relying on the ill-advised rhetoric spouted by anti-intellectuals. Liberal arts education would also afford us the knowledge of what basic tenets shape the American political infrastructure.