

America: an educated, yet illiterate nation

[Philosophy](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

As we continue to discover and invent new technologies and sciences, people have progressively become mentally confined and have lost the ability to individually think and analyze. A particularly deleterious trend that has been plaguing our society is the decline of questioning and analysis of our world — what we hear, what we see, what we learn, etc. The American populace is thinking and analyzing less; they are now used to having the media feed them not only current information and news, but also provide them with a so-called analysis of that or stuff their minds with catchy advertising that prohibits thought. As we become more mechanized, technological, specialized and money-focused, we tend to de-emphasize the studies of history, culture, philosophy, and humanities. This has led to a state of critical philosophical illiteracy and ignorance regarding history, other countries, different people, and varying ideas in our culture. This weakens our societal structure since we see so little of the big picture that is the world today. Without the broad exposure to the world of ideas, we have limited mental tools for seeing contemporary situations in the proper context. Our viewpoints and behaviors tend to be more narrow and self-serving and we see alternative forms of expression as being " bad", " boring", or " strange" instead of interesting. Our tolerance for variety is diminished and our judgmental natures are reinforced. In effect, the lack of philosophy, caused by the overbearing role of media, in our culture leaves us our nation divided, depressed, and dismally near failure. The increasing intolerance that results from the collective philosophical illiteracy can be best seen in the American political and social atmosphere. Currently, America is facing trying times: the American people are increasingly split by disparate political and social opinions. For example, the election process for officials in the American

<https://assignbuster.com/america-an-educated-yet-illiterate-nation/>

government lends itself to a two party system, with different views on various political and social situations. The media and certain political " spin-doctors"/masterminds have exaggerated the differences between the two parties (Democrats & Republicans) and insinuated that participation in either party seemingly requires a citizen to have ALL of the views of that party. Since the populace takes the media's messages at face value instead of assessing the true issues behind the political ads and " analysts, " there are now giant rifts within the populace. Democrat and Republican affiliated citizens view each other as near-enemies and dub each other with such extremist epithets as cowardly, bleeding-heart liberals to crazy, fanatical conservatives. This separation is causing disunity within the Union that America is; this fracturing of the populace can be blamed on the general illiteracy. Has the American culture contain an exposure to philosophical ideas, this dangerous rift would not have occurred. For instance, some Sophists, who were traveling philosopher-teachers when Athens ruled supreme in Greece, taught the idea of relativism. They taught that what one considers to be " right" in one case, does not apply in another case. These philosophical ideas can be applied to today's controversial topics: we cannot unilaterally say that abortion is wrong for everyone — there are cases when some can argue that it is as well as other situations where some can argue that it may be necessary. However, an even bigger issue is the use of political attack ads. These concentrated 30-60 second segments issue forth a torrent of political propaganda and stop people from mulling over the issues at hand. Not knowing these ideas and having limited philosophical exposure, many Americans think of political groups as wrong and evil, rather than simply acknowledging their disagreement. Our culture currently does not

<https://assignbuster.com/america-an-educated-yet-illiterate-nation/>

allow shades of gray; instead, we are told to choose between red and blue or right and left; if relativism played a more important part in our culture and if citizens could think as well as truly analyze the messages politicians tell them, these dangerous splits in American unity can be healed. Philosophy teaches us to question and analyze what we see and that not a definite answer to our myriad questions; it guides us to the way of meditation, respectful discourse and enlightenment. America has, as noted before, become a mindless nation where independent thought and analysis has been replaced by a culture of senseless pursuit of material goods, resulting in adverse psychological problems in the populace. It is no wonder, then, that 18.8 million American adults currently suffer from depression; this is a number that is sharply rising. American culture, influenced by the media, is making Americans unhappy. One important part of American culture that is an indirect but large cause for the depression is advertising. Companies put the less than a minute videos on air to convince the American populace that the products that they can buy are wonderful and can make life better. For example, ice cream companies like Häagen-Dazs have commercial spots where they show thin men and, more often, thin women enjoying luscious ice creams. Then they encourage the audience, particularly women, that it's "ok" to indulge and "be naughty." People then consume these ice creams and other high fat foods because they do not think about the harmful message the ads convey or analyze the subsequent consequences of simply following the messages. Thus, because of detrimental messages and lack of analysis, American citizens are suffering illness like obesity and diabetes but they do not understand why and fall into depression, which they then complain is an insufferable suffering of its own. Then, these people,

<https://assignbuster.com/america-an-educated-yet-illiterate-nation/>

influenced by the short bursts of information in the pharmaceutical ads, take anti-depressant drugs but do not find happiness. However, simple analysis and thought could have prevented this. Furthermore, there are ideas in philosophy can help improve our lives. For instance, Buddha established that life is rife with suffering in his Four Noble Truths. However, instead of being depressed or committing suicide, as 10-20% of the population does, he suggested that we should follow certain "right" ideas and procedures, outlined in his 8-fold path, to live a good life. Another example of the corruptive influence of the media is the channel MTV. MTV, which touts itself as simply a music video channel, has grown in popularity and now broadcasts a variety of "pop-culture" shows. The young people in America, MTV's primary viewers, now look to MTV to dictate their actions and culture. For example, MTV has featured (with thought-prohibitive promotions and advertisements) such music selections as the "Emo" bands, which even became a destructive culture wherein the participants (teens) believe they are not understood by society and sometimes commit self-destructive behavior like social isolation or physical mutilation. The youth take MTV's lead without thinking through and analyzing the ideas behind and the consequences from these cultures. Philosophy, however, which involves questioning and studying the mind and self, offers the idea of self-evaluation as a remedy to this. Confucius, a famed Asian philosopher, noted, "When you see a man of the highest caliber, give thought to attaining his stature. When you see the one who is not, go home and conduct a self-examination" (Soccio, 45). Confucius effectively tells us that we should examine ourselves to understand ourselves and better ourselves instead of, in this case, complaining about someone else's lack of understanding. Literacy in <https://assignbuster.com/america-an-educated-yet-illiterate-nation/>

Philosophy can improve the quality of life of Americans and even save their lives. Finally, America is encountering a decaying governmental system fraught with myriad problems. All of these issues stem from the general American illiteracy in philosophical ideas. Centuries before America was created, the Athenian philosopher Plato wrote about his ideas of how a democracy, which he decided was a unsatisfactory form of government, formed in *The Republic*; if we take a close look at it, many of the ideas that he purported can apply to our current governmental system. Plato postulated that a democracy began as an oligarchy with a group of rich men running it. In the case of America, it was the Founding Fathers, all of whom were rich landowners, who fulfill this position. Furthermore, Plato suggests these elite few wish to create a constitution that promotes acquisition of wealth and property. The Founding Fathers did just that in creating the constitution. In addition, Plato surmised that since there is an inherent inequality, the only way that equality is feasible is that the oppressed must become so discontented that there is a revolution so that they can gain freedom and rights. The Civil Rights movement and the Women's Suffrage movement were both social revolts like this — the nonwhites and women were oppressed and revolted for freedoms. However, Plato did not stop there; he purported that the love of money and self-discipline are two tenets that are incompatible and impossible to be reconciled. This is plainly the case that we see today. With consumerism rampant, companies prey on the unsuspecting Americans' love for money and goods. Credit card companies and banks encourage the lack of discipline by providing loans and plenty of buying power. They later charge exorbitant interest rates on those loans. For these reasons, Plato saw the democracy as a corrupt and inefficient

<https://assignbuster.com/america-an-educated-yet-illiterate-nation/>

government system. Had the American populace been aware of Plato's philosophy, the populace could exercise a certain amount of self-discipline, avoiding such calamities as foreclosures and individual bankruptcy. There are students in colleges scoff at philosophy and ask, " why study philosophy?" The simple answer is that philosophy encourages unbiased analysis and questioning of the subjects we rarely think about. Philosophy started at the dawn of humanity; as the nascent civilizations looked at the world, they started asking questions, resulting in the subject of philosophy was.

Moreover, philosophy is the progenitor of all current sciences: the technological and scientific prowess of 20th century was born from Aristotle's analysis of the world and Descartes' rationalization. In addition, philosophy allows us to garner wisdom. Whereas knowledge is simply recording and knowing many facts, wisdom is the ability to question and analyze those facts; in effect, this opens our eyes to more than what we see. In fact, philosophy is the framework for a life of purpose. Studying philosophy can broaden and deepen our understanding of alternatives. It can help us to realize new possibilities. It can help us recognize fallacies in behavior and ideas. It helps clarify our thinking and can make our behavior and thinking more consistent. We can deepen and broaden our core beliefs through a study of philosophy. We can answer questions that have haunted us since we first began and fix problems that we have recognized before. We can question and analyze what the media tells us; we can form our own opinions, not those that are forced onto us. Only a strong foundation in philosophical principles will guide individuals to act right, learn how to become the ' chun-tzu,' or the Confucian ideal of a perfect human being. A population of citizens rich with such enlightened individuals can make a democracy successful. As <https://assignbuster.com/america-an-educated-yet-illiterate-nation/>

such, democracy without knowledgeable and wise citizens is a farce. Our culture needs philosophy; without it, we are suffering. Works Cited Murray, Bob and Alicia Fortinberry. " Depression Facts and Stats. " Uplift Program. http://www.upliftprogram.com/depression_stats.html. 8 June 2008. Soccio, Douglas J. Archetypes of Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy. 6th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2007.