

Why Public Schools and the Mainstream Media Dumb Us Down

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May 19, 2019

Original video available at [Academy of Ideas YouTube](#) channel.

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The following is a transcript of this video.

“Resist much, obey little; Once unquestioning obedience, once fully enslaved; Once fully enslaved, no nation, state, city, of this earth, ever afterward resumes its liberty.”

[Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass](#)

These were the words of caution which the great poet Walter Whitman offered to his fellow Americans. For Whitman recognized that crucial to a free and flourishing society are men and women who are willing to question, and even resist authority when necessary. But today very few of us live by the ideal espoused by Whitman, rather blind obedience is the norm. We have become populations of sheep, easily to be herded into

the chains of tyranny.

But what has led those of us in the West to largely shun the advice of Whitman? In this video we will examine two institutions that have played an integral role in the breeding of a passive citizenry – the compulsory state-run education system, which in North America is called the public school system, and the mainstream media.

Public schooling is viewed as one of the shining lights of the modern Western world. Who could question the value of an institution that provides free and compulsory education for all? But as with many institutions of our day the textbook picture of how the institution should work, greatly diverges from the reality of how it does work. If public schools taught individuals how to think, if they promoted intellectual curiosity and produced citizens healthy in body and mind, then few would question their value. But beneath the veneer presented by the bureaucrats that run this institution, a darker reality emerges. Or as John Taylor Gatto, a former teacher, turned one of public schooling's greatest critics, writes:

“Schools are intended to produce...formulaic human beings whose behavior can be predicted and controlled. To a very great extent schools succeed in doing this, but...in a national order in which the only “successful” people are independent, self-reliant, confident, and individualistic...the products of schooling are...irrelevant. Well-schooled people are irrelevant. They can sell film and razor blades, push paper and talk on telephones, or sit mindlessly before a flickering computer terminal, but as human beings they are useless. Useless to others and useless to themselves.

[John Taylor Gatto, Dumbing us Down](#)

Noam Chomsky echoed this sentiment, writing in his book *Understanding Power*:

"...given the external power structure of the society in which they function the institutional role of the schools for the most part is just to train people for obedience and conformity, and to make them controllable and indoctrinated."

[Noam Chomsky, *Understanding Power*](#)

To some this may sound like heresy, but a study of history reveals that this was the intention from the very start. The state run school systems in the West were modeled off the factory style of education first introduced in Prussia in the early 1700s.

". . .what shocks is that we should so eagerly have adopted one of the very worst aspects of Prussian culture: an educational system deliberately designed to produce mediocre intellects, to hamstring the inner life, to deny students appreciable leadership skills, and to ensure docile and incomplete citizens – all in order to render the populace "manageable"."

[John Taylor Gatto, *Weapons of Mass Instruction*](#)

Albert Einstein, an individual who reached heights of genius rarely seen, did not credit his compulsory schooling with his intellectual development. Reflecting back on his school years, Einstein noted that after completing his final examinations his interest in the field he would go on to revolutionize was all but dead: "I found the consideration of scientific problems" he wrote "distasteful to me for an entire year". Einstein believed that one of the major flaws of compulsory, state run education systems is their forced style teaching:

"It is, in fact, nothing short of a miracle", he wrote, "that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry...It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty."

[Albert Einstein, *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*](#)

After well over a decade of indoctrination in the school system, few emerge with a great thirst for knowledge and a curiosity toward the many mysteries of the world. Instead, as Bruce Levine writes in his book *Resisting Illegitimate Authority*, by the time a student graduates they have been bred “to be passive; to be directed by others; to take seriously the rewards and punishments of authority; to pretend to care about things that they do not care about; and that one is impotent to change one’s dissatisfying situation.” (Bruce Levine, *Resisting Illegitimate Authority*) But if our schooling cannot be relied upon to generate the critical and curious minds needed to protect a society from the actions of corrupted authorities, can the mainstream media play this role?

While there has been an increasing skepticism toward this institution in recent years, distaste and distrust toward the mainstream media has a long history:

“I have given up newspapers, in exchange for Tacitus and Thucydides, for Newton and Euclid, and I find myself much the happier.”

Thomas Jefferson

Nietzsche, one of the most intellectually free and curious minds of history, was also no fan of the mainstream media:

“Sick are they always; they vomit their bile and call it a newspaper.”

[Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra](#)

Richard Weaver, a professor at the University of Chicago in the first half of the 20th century, found it ironic that while we have freed ourselves from the earth-centered view of the cosmos, we have all the while dove headlong into an illusory view of the world created by the mainstream media. And while Weaver focuses on newspapers in the following passage, as they

were the dominant medium of his day, his words are even more applicable today, where modern technology offers far better tools for the manipulation of the masses:

“A great point is sometimes made of the fact that modern man no longer sees above his head a revolving dome with fixed stars...True enough, but he sees something similar when he looks at his daily newspaper...The newspaper is a man-made cosmos of the world of events around us at the time. For the average reader it is a construct with a set of significances which he no more thinks of examining than did his pious forebear of the thirteenth century...think of questioning the cosmology.”

[Richard Weaver, Ideas Have Consequences](#)

But why does the mainstream media so often choose deception over truth? Noam Chomsky in his book *Media Control*, suggests that like many politicians, the mainstream media is dominated by individuals who adhere to an elitist ideology. The 20th century American journalist Walter Lippmann epitomized this view, calling the masses “the bewildered herd” and suggesting that one of the main functions of the media is to put this herd in its proper place as passive spectators, not active participants, in the organization of a society. Or as Chomsky explains this elitist ideology is built on the notion that:

“...that the mass of the public are just too stupid to be able to understand things. If they try to participate in managing their own affairs, they’re just going to cause trouble. Therefore, it would be immoral and improper to permit them to do this. We have to tame the bewildered herd, not allow the bewildered herd to rage and trample and destroy things.”

[Noam Chomsky, Media Control](#)

For those of us who are not among the self-anointed elite, the question arises as to whether the controlling of the bewildered herd is done in order to promote a prosperous and

flourishing society, or merely to maintain certain institutional structures which favour the elites to the detriment of society at large. This open question only reinforces the need for a more skeptical attitude toward the authority figures of our day. We need, in other words, more anti-authoritarians.

It must be stressed that an anti-authoritarian is not someone who in place of a passive acceptance of authority, adopts a passive rejection of all authority. Many institutions and authority figures serve a beneficial purpose and therefore should be accepted. But anti-authoritarians recognize that consensus does not mean truth, that power corrupts, that people lie, and that some institutions in the words of Chomsky "have no moral justification...they are just there in order to preserve certain structures of power and domination." (Noam Chomsky, On Anarchism) Recognizing these undeniable facts, the anti-authoritarian is willing to look at all authority figures with a healthy dose of skepticism, and potentially even resist their commands, if such authority proves corrupt and harmful to the well-being of a society. Or as Henry David Thoreau wrote:

"If the machine of government is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law." (Henry David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience)

[Henry David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience](#)

But should we fear a world with more anti-authoritarians? The obedience bred into us in school and the blind deference to authority promoted by the talking heads of the mainstream media, may lead some to view anti-authoritarians as a threat to the stability of society. But nothing could be further from the truth. Anti-authoritarians are the crucial protectors of a flourishing society. For as the author C.P. Snow noted:

“When you think of the long and gloomy history of man, you will find more hideous crimes have been committed in the name of obedience than have ever been committed in the name of rebellion.”

CP Snow, Public Affairs 1971

Malevolent authority, combined with a passive citizenry is the recipe for tyranny and so anti-authoritarians should not be feared or ostracized, they should be welcomed. They are the individuals who raise the alarm and awaken the slumbering masses to the existence of corrupt authority. A society without a healthy number of anti-authoritarians, or a society in which anti-authoritarians are shunned and silenced, is a society that has chosen the comfort of illusions, over the desire for truth, and is therefore a society paving the way for its own destruction. For as the 18th century French philosopher Voltaire cautioned:

“So long as the people do not care to exercise their freedom, those who wish to tyrannize will do so; for tyrants are active and ardent, and will devote themselves in the name of any number of gods, religious or otherwise, to put shackles upon sleeping men.”

Voltaire