

Someone Taught Them

but they were not products of a school system

“They have to learn to read,” said a parent of a 6-year-old, as if school magically equals literacy.

From my interview with John Taylor Gatto

George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln – someone taught them, to be sure, but they were not products of a school system. Through most of American history kids generally did not go to high school – and yet the unschooled rose to be admirals like Farragut, inventors like Edison, captains of industry like Carnegie and Rockefeller, writers like Melville and Twain and Conrad and even scholars like Margaret Mead.

What we’re really talking about is a deliberate and massive retardation of normal human growth processes and the monopolistic assumption of responsibility and decision making so the challenge of reducing inferior breeding can be conferred on a managerial group.

We’re taking our real wealth – our children and their potential - and we’re throwing it away. We are burning it. We are smashing it.

What the young brain offers in any moment in history is a new way to see things, unquenchable energy that can be beaten down and it will rise back up again. And we’re just pitching it out in exchange for this stable orderly society.

Craig Venter, the beach bum surfer who shared the laurels for producing the map of the human genome... cut class often to hit the boogie board and only escaped junior high because a teacher changed his ‘F’ grades to a ‘D’ – so the school would be rid of him. George W. Bush had a ‘C’ average in high school and a ‘C’ average in college, but that was a higher ‘C’ average in high school and college that was earned by Massachusetts senator John Kerry... Al Gore flunked out of his first college and squeaked through his second with a ‘C’ average. Dick Cheney flunked out too. Legendary progressive Senator Paul Wellstone scored 800 on his combined SATs. Bill Gates and Paul Allen of Microsoft – no college degrees. Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak of Apple – no college degrees.

Michael Dell is another un-degreed immortal of the computer game, as is Larry Ellison of Oracle. Ted Turner, founder of CNN, dropped out of college. William Faulkner’s high school grades were too horrible to get him into the University of Mississippi. Warren Avis, the man who pioneered auto rentals at airports, decided that college was a waste of time and didn’t even apply. Edward Hamilton, the nation’s largest independent mail order book dealer, wrote me that the advantage he had was that he hadn’t wasted his capital or time on college.

Paul Orfalea, the highly intelligent founder of Kinko’s was not regarded as very bright by his high school. Lew Wasserman created modern Hollywood with his colossal MCA; he had no college and virtually no seat time in high school. Warren Buffet started business at the age of 6, selling iced Coca-Cola. By 18 Buffet had the equivalent of \$100,000 in the bank. Then applied to Warton Business School and was turned down.

Consider what society would look like if 65 million trapped school children learning to be consumers were suddenly set to actively imagining themselves to be producers instead of bored consumers?... Isn’t that exactly what America needs at this sorry, sterile juncture in our history – not more well-schooled zombies on whose backs the few can ride.

From Weapons of Mass Instruction

It was understood, as far back as the Roman Collegian, that if you submerge people in a rule-driven existence their imagination, the creative part of them, will naturally atrophy or vanish. There’s no room for it to be practiced. And those training procedures designed to retard imagination have been used by armies and churches throughout history. When we arrive at the 19th Century, German military states - like Prussia - had this worked out to a science.

Look at the liberal philosopher Spinoza. He said the way to get rid of imagination was to imbed people in nonsense rules, competitions, fill their minds with inaccurate information and eventually they'll make so many mistakes or be so frustrated they'll simply cede decision making to somebody else. And that, of course, takes place through schooling.

Dumbing down starts with grades and pats on the head. The system is designed to create an unquenchable consumption sequence. Boredom is essential because you don't want people who buy things that actually produce any satisfaction over a long period. Cars, suits, everything has to be disposed with as quickly as possible. Ideally you want to create a throw away economy and that takes a population that is easily bored and childish.

I was so furious that I'd spent my life hurting children [being part of the school system]. That anger, quite hot, lasted ten years. I'm still not un-angry.

John Taylor Gatto

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