

Review: Prof. Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation*, Penguin Books, New York, NY, 2009

Pages: 253

Writing on the Wall

This book demonstrates the sorry state of American (and by extension the West's) youth literacy. Not only that, it has merged with a rising apathy and disconnectedness to create a vicious circle of vice.

There is at times an overload of basic statistics which, with pause and discussion of the main hypotheses put forward, would have yielded more for less.

Surprisingly, there is only one fleeting reference to the heart of American exceptionalism, the Holy Bible (Authorized Version).

The author's avoidance of the greatest ever book in English and its 'exorcism' from the public schools system and most areas of public life by materialists is the biggest flaw in his analysis. As he rightly says, "the more you read, the more you can read", and it was the removal of the Bible which killed the desire of millions of children to read more.

Unfortunately, the trends highlighted are real and will only get worse as moral decay sets in further in today's 'enlightened' West:

"And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed:"

Isaiah 29.11, Authorized Version

Preface (pp. vii-xii)

The more kids contact each other, the less they heed the tutelage of adults.

Today, peer contact never ends.

Introduction (pp. 1-10)

Ninety percent of high school students spend less than five hours studying per week.

I) Knowledge Deficits (pp. 11-38)

In 1966, 60% of first year college students felt it important to keep up with political affairs. In 2005, the figure was only 36%.

Engineering degrees dropped 20% since 1985, and whilst US universities are the best, over 50% of doctorates go to foreign students. In a few years, 90% of all scientists and engineers will be in Asia.

Thirty-seven percent of high school students watch over three hours of television each day.

There now exists a pileup of apathy and incognizance.

In 2002, 83% of college students had a credit card with an average balance of about \$3,000.

Adolescents have always wasted their time and chances.

II) The New Bibliophobes (pp. 40-69)

Today's generation wears anti-intellectualism on its sleeve.

In July, 2005, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* sold 6.9M copies in the first two days of its release making it the fastest-selling book ever.

The more kids read the higher their scores.

In 2007, 46.9% of entering students graduated within five years.

Only 16% of college seniors read between five and ten books per annum.

Business studies has become the most popular major.

“The more you read, the more you can read.”

In 1946, 71% of adults had read a book in the last year, the most popular being the Bible.

Illiteracy is a harbinger of increased vulgarity and corruption.

Poor employee reading and writing skills is the second biggest problem for employers (“the skills of new college graduates are deplorable”).

III) Screen Time (pp. 71-111)

Setting kids in front of TV frees up parent time.

From 1994 to 2004 in St Louis, library book circulation fell from 82% to 64%, however, audiovisuals doubled from 18-36%.

IV) Online Learning and Non-Learning (pp. 113-162)

Digital youth fans believe in a “carry-over” effect, however, large aptitude tests only demonstrate failure. There is little or no improvement for schools “going digital”, and a negative correlation between math and reading performances and those that do.

Newspapers have the most rare words per thousand words (68.3), while college graduate conversations the least (17.3).

Media exposure to only common words keeps vocabulary stagnant.

A solitary teacher can do little to change education outcomes.

Visual media minimises verbal intelligence.

Web pages should be designed in an “F-shape” pattern with a mind for speed as common behaviour is to hunt for information and be ruthless in ignoring details.

Most people only spend one minute reading an email or 19% of the contents.

Teenagers don’t like to read a lot on the web and hard texts irritate them.

V) The Betrayal of the Mentors (pp. 163-204)

“Twixters” work service and menial jobs instead of following long-term career plans. Instead of moving out they move back home, and prefer fornication to marriage and family.

The trend is towards a collapsing youth labour market.

A liberal arts education is said to be the counter-poison to mass culture.

Narcissists can't take self-criticism, and education requires a great deal of it.

VI) No More Culture Warriors (pp. 205-236)

When the Twixters reach forty, they will realise that they have failed to learn and it will be too late.