

# American Thinker

December 2, 2014

## Give Gruber a Break

By [Charles Battig](#)

Jonathan Gruber has been roundly reprimanded in the press, blogging sites, and everywhere in between for his candid comments regarding “the stupidity of the American voter” being his assumed premise for the passage of the Affordable Care Act (a.k.a. ObamaCare). As viewed from Gruber’s academic pedestal, this was a most natural and fair assumption. His own education surely indoctrinated him with the elitist attitude of the privileged. A short review of the history of government education policies and goals ought to give Gruber a measure of sympathetic understanding for his natural assumptions as a government-employed sycophant.

The 1960 [Godkin Lectures](#), delivered at Harvard by Sir C.P. Snow, were introduced with this candid pronouncement: “One of the most bizarre features of any advanced industrial society in our time is that the cardinal choices have to be made by a handful of men: in secret: and, at least in legal form, by men who cannot have a first-hand knowledge of what those choices depend upon or what their results may be.” Snow was an English chemist turned novelist, and had served in the British Civil Service and UK government. Gruber was not yet around to be in that audience, but surely some of his future Harvard mentors were.

As part of this process, academia now functions to supply the technocrats needed to run the behind-the-scenes “scientific” mill essential to the elected politicians. The ordinary public is deemed smart enough to elect its representatives, but “too stupid” to meaningfully question the actions of the politico-academic establishment. Voters turn over their future governance to politicians, who in turn delegate scientific issues to selected scientists in government-subsidized universities and favored think tanks. Politicians select the scientific source required to justify a political cause; no other dissenting voices need apply. My scientist is on my side... “the science is settled.”

The roots of presumptive American “stupidity” can be dated to John Dewey’s efforts to reform the public education system in the early 1900s and beyond. A reshaping of American culture was underway as a result of the transition from an agrarian-based society to the machine-age industrialization. Waves of immigration added a diversity of cultural backgrounds to the American persona and public school classrooms. Home-based education and religious traditions were transitioning into a mass-production educational model tuned to produce reliable factory workers... the cogs in the wheels of production, aptly captured by Charlie Chaplin’s 1936 movie [Modern Times](#).

Against this zeitgeist, the expressed aims of John Dewey to restructure public education had a beguiling appeal. As expressed in his 1899 series of lectures and published as [The School and Society](#), Dewey made his case that the existing educational system treated children as passive entities in a one-way flow of didactic material from teacher to student, that the physical rigidity of the classroom environment impeded learning, and that the educational process should become student-centered with the student participating in meaningful classroom decisions. Dewey considered education to be foremost a societal process, and he minimized the tradition of learning facts, historical tradition itself, and religious belief. Learning was to be a social-centered, ongoing empirical procedure, in a learn-to-learn experimental class environment. The disciplinary role of the authoritative teacher would be minimized. A blend of old and these new pedagogic ideas might have had merit, but in practice, Dewey’s view alone permeated the public education establishment in the ensuing years. The 2006 book by Henry Edmondson, [John Dewey and the Decline of American Education](#) provides an in-depth analysis of Dewey’s heritage from a conservative’s view point of view.

Rudolf Flesch's 1955 [\*Why Johnny Can't Read\*](#) was another milestone in the educational wars. Phonics versus whole word reading became a contentious issue nationwide, and foreshadows today's Common Core Curriculum push.

[\*Why Johnny Still Can't Read\*](#) (2011) by Sam Blumenfeld contains these excerpts: "As a transactional process reading is not a matter of "getting the meaning" from text, as if that meaning were in the text waiting to be decoded by the reader. Rather, reading is a matter of readers using the cues print provide and the knowledge they bring with them to construct a unique interpretation.... This view of reading implies that there is no single "correct" meaning for a given text, only plausible meanings." The progressives' view of the world is one open to individual whim and cohort consensus, and one not necessarily founded on the traditional guides of established fact and custom. Traditional science would soon become "[post-normal science](#)" in which solutions become matters of expediency, emotion, and popular opinion.

Blumenfeld continues: "The progressive educators, who had introduced the new reading programs, were not about to give up their crusade to use the schools to create a socialist America. Their view, as first stated by their leader John Dewey, was that traditional phonics produced independent, individualistic readers who could think for themselves, while the new whole-word approach produced readers dependent on the collective for meaning and interpretation and were thereby easier to collectivize and control." Individual freedom of thought, initiative, and responsibility were to be early casualties of Rousseau in France and of the American socialists drive to conformity and the nanny state..

Gruber's inherent academic assumption of (ordinary) Americans' stupidity is elucidated by Charlotte Iserbyt's 1999 [\*The Deliberate Dumbing Down of America\*](#). She served as Senior Policy Advisor in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, during the first Reagan Administration. Gruber's matter-of-fact pronouncement of the "stupidity" of Americans reflects his academic assumption of the success of government education, and validation of Iserbyt's investigations into the education establishment.

From Iserbyt's book's preface: "In 1971 when I returned to the United States after living abroad for 18 years, I was shocked to find public education had become a warm, fuzzy, soft, mushy, touchy-feely experience, with its purpose being socialization, not learning. From that time on, from the vantage point of having two young sons in the public schools, I became involved -- as a member of a philosophy committee for a school, as an elected school board member, as co-founder of Guardians of Education for Maine (GEM), and finally as a senior policy advisor in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) of the U.S. Department of Education during President Ronald Reagan's first term of office. OERI was, and is, the office from which all the controversial national and international educational restructuring has emanated."

Another excerpt: "I realized that America's transition from a sovereign constitutional republic to a socialist democracy would not come about through warfare (bullets and tanks) but through the implementation and installation of the "system" in all areas of government—federal, state and local. The brainwashing for acceptance of the "system's" control would take place in the school -- through indoctrination and the use of behavior modification, which comes under so many labels: the most recent labels being Outcome-Based Education, Skinnerian Mastery Learning or Direct Instruction."

Americans' incremental molding into dumbed-down collectivists is a "given" in Gruber's academic world. He probably meant no insult by his comments, and was just stating an academic fact... a sort of insider's joke. Are we all "too stupid" to see that?

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