

America the Intelligent

Nobody asked but ...

I read an article in *Psychology Today*, by David Niose, entitled “Are Americans Just Stupid?”, but sub-titled “Anti-intellectualism has little to do with intelligence.”

In its introduction, Niose writes,

Be honest. As an observer of American society, the thought may have crossed your mind at one time or another – at least for a fleeting moment or two – that the nation’s dysfunctional state of affairs is the result of widespread stupidity. The people, too often misinformed and poorly educated, are getting exactly the democracy they deserve.

But then, Niose points out that there is no real evidence that Americans are less intelligent than residents of other first world nations. I suspect that America is rather the product of its place in cultural history. This country was founded as an outback for British aristocracy and a frontier for British imperialism. But those who peopled these shores were volunteers escaping old world monarchies and organized religions. All of the scientific, artistic, statist, intellectual, and religious ideas were controlled by a European in-crowd. Americans specifically rejected the monastic organization of the European courts. For their troubles, I am sure they were labelled as “anti-intellectuals,” “country bumpkins,” and “the fringe of civilization.”

Our problems today stem from the probability that we took our anti-intellectualism too seriously. We threw the baby out with the bathwater. Without doing critical thinking, we based most of our institutions on forerunners from England and Europe. Then we tried to express ourselves while wearing those straitjackets. Populism and nationalism were our response.

— Kilgore Forelle