

Wasted Genius - Preface

WRITING A BOOK CAN BE an educational experience, not so much from the research required, but more significantly from the challenge of marshalling the insights gained from all the random material gathered into some ordered form. It is not enough to know everything ever written or thought on a subject—that is the hallmark of “experts” who try to dazzle you with their accumulated knowledge. What matters, and adds to a reader’s understanding, can only come from a synthesis of everything discovered into meaningful patterns and conclusions.

In the case of *Wasted Genius*, the writing process forced me to draw some overarching conclusions based upon my own experience, the history of education and the theories put forth by scholars in the field, and from correlating such knowledge with recent findings in neurology that reveal how our brains and personalities develop and function. I discovered that the “theories” of most current scholars on the subject are the least instructive, but their diverse opinions do illustrate the vast number of wrong answers that come from most experts. (When most experts disagree with each other, shouldn’t we assume that most of them have to be wrong?)

“Experts” in soft sciences such as politics, economics, climatology, psychology, anthropology, and education usually lack the objectivity found among experts in the hard sciences. The rigors of the scientific method—observation, measurement, and the requirement of consistency of results—are not part of the soft-scientists’ tool kits.

Their deficiencies stem from trying to emulate the physical scientists, an effort that requires them to treat human behavior as if it obeyed some absolute physical laws such as gravity, momentum, evolution, or could be mapped like the celestial orbits of inanimate planets. That, of course, is impossible, humans being such independent and ornery creatures, so their findings end too often in the speculative, philosophical, often utopian arena of recurring fads, fancies, and follies that have so often throughout history held up mankind’s progress. The recent hundred-year love affair with IQ tests is one such fancy that should be unmasked.

I have for years had a vague uneasiness with the undue emphasis placed on tests and school grades. But it still came as a surprise to discover that such fears are fully justified. There have been a few vocal and authoritative critics of IQ tests during the past thirty years, and in the following pages, their warnings are summarized. But such criticism of IQ tests is not new. They were anticipated by J. P. Guilford fifty years ago, when he asserted the idea of “multiple

independent mental abilities.” And more than seventy-five years ago, L. L. Thurstone tried to warn us about the complexity of measuring anyone’s full capabilities with a single yardstick.

Jean Piaget, a pioneer creator of IQ tests, indicated one hundred years ago that there could be no single test of a student’s abilities and that the tests were only useful to measure a teacher’s progress in instructing students. In spite of such warnings, the entrenched educational and testing interests have promoted the tests far beyond their relevance—with dire consequences for both our children and our country. The voices of reason were drowned out by the self-aggrandizing ambitions and greed of the teaching and testing industry. This history illustrates a common feature of soft-science intellectuals: that they will drown out all opposition to their pet theories, not with logic or conclusive facts, but with what Thomas Sowell describes as their “verbal virtuosity.”

A related “blind spot” that has been perpetuated by soft scientists comes from numerous fallacies based on Darwinian evolutionary theories—that humans are just big apes, ruled by atavistic passions, and incapable of either controlling themselves or rising above raw instinctual behavior. This view, with its exaggerated application of the “survival of the fittest” mentality, and an excessive regard for “human nature,” gave added credence to the notion that intelligence is a fixed at-birth biological fact. That recently discredited notion has allowed the academics and intelligentsia to assert that intelligence varies by race and class, and that some people are “better” than others. It does not take a genius to see that these insidious concepts have been advanced by those who want to elevate themselves by denigrating everyone else.

Because abstract thinkers score higher on IQ and SAT tests, we have gradually become burdened by a new elite leadership that is long on theory and short on common sense. What’s worse, their influence has permeated the “approved” methods used for both parenting and schooling our youth. In the following pages, we will examine the results, focusing on the question of whether these new theories have resulted in any gains for our children compared to the children of our recent ancestors.

Two important elements of the nature-nurture debate that have been ignored by most writers on the subject are the importance of a balanced cognitive capability and the necessity to concede that there is a vast array of multiple capabilities that need balancing. Mitchell Estaphan teaches psychology at a nearby community college, and he has an theory about every human’s need for “balance.” His ideas are founded on an understanding of how different people’s brains work. The Left and Right sides contribute differing amounts of input to different individuals. The Left mode tends to supply a rational, emotionally controlled, and logical approach, usually based on observations of the real world and drawing on accumulated information. The Right side of the brain leans to intuitive, subjective judgments, with a more open expression of feelings. The Left is more concrete and “masculine”; the right more abstract and “feminine.” Since everyone has a mix of these quadrants, their abilities are founded on a number of different forms of intelligence, all of which contribute to success, and relegates the ability to nail IQ tests to being just one of their “multiple intelligences.”

Mitch's research supports the belief that slightly under one-half of students are abstract learners, who can readily learn from merely reading, while slightly more than half are applied learners, who learn best by seeing and doing real-life tasks. Because our schools teach a one-size fits all pedagogy, some students benefit while others fall behind. And yet all methods of learning are beneficial. My studies of history show that it has been the concrete thinkers, far more than the abstract thinkers, who have achieved the innovations and discoveries that have advanced societies. However, it is no secret that IQ tests reward the conceptual abilities of abstract thinkers and penalize the capabilities of practical doers.

Today's teaching establishment, which has made a fetish of multiculturalism, claiming that all cultures are equally praiseworthy, reveals its hypocrisy by failing to accept and cultivate the diversity of our students' learning styles. There are many equally valuable ways of learning and different personal bases for knowing. We must accept the idea of multiple intelligences and the need to understand the many elements that make up an individual's total mental capability. Estaphan points out that those individuals with skills across three or four quadrants gain an advantage from such "whole brained" flexibility and power that allows them to work with many groups and assume leadership roles and executive functions. A high IQ by itself offers no evidence of such capability.

This significant variability in the way our brains work reveals a few things about the history of human advances. If classic Darwinian theory applied to humans, the "survival of the fittest" concept would suggest that those with the greatest survival and reproductive skills would have passed on their genes to most of today's peoples. In most of the animal kingdoms, the strongest males control their harems and pass on their aggressive natures and vigorous bodies. Quite differently, when the earliest humans adopted monogamy, they established a pattern where a much greater diversity of genetic types was perpetuated.

Almost all males succeeded at reproduction, and the resulting multi-faceted gene pool created a greater probability for innovative and creative genius to emerge. And when our ancestors discovered fire, built shelters, and donned fur clothing, they largely escaped the harsh laws of survival of the fittest. And that was tens of thousands of years ago!

With shelter, heat, and monogamy, the human race has been able to sustain a broad range of capabilities, unavailable to all other living things. The occasional innovative tinkerers that emerged from that large and varied gene pool were the scientists, engineers and mechanics that powered civilization's advances. Unfortunately, for the past fifty years, our colleges have rejected diversity of mental style and instead have selected the tiny percentage of students who display the highest abstract and intuitive thinking revealed by IQ tests. Those are the people being advanced more and more into leadership positions, representing a new elite with a fondness for abstract concepts, an out of touch elite that harbors a contempt for the practical and traditional ways of thinking, a dangerous group that exposes us all to the folly of their ideologies, their speculative financial dealings, and their corrupt politics.

It is worth noting that few individuals being “produced” today are the equal in wisdom, maturity, and value to their country as the historic leaders that built and sustained us: Adams, Franklin, Carnegie, Washington, Lincoln, Reagan, Abigail Adams, Edison, or Harriet Beecher Stowe. The differences are not of a genetic or cognitive nature. On average, Americans today have the same cognitive powers that our ancestors did one hundred and two hundred years ago. The differences are of an environmental nature, a difference in attitude, a difference in initiative and self-reliance. There was some such “X factor” in the earlier Americans’ childhoods that is missing today. If there are ways to isolate that crucial influence—and we could thereby help our children grow, while simultaneously enhancing our winning national character—we would do well to find that principle and use it.

Any search for the secret ingredient that made America great must include the cumulative knowledge we have from the physical sciences of biology and psychology, as well as from the lessons to be derived from history.

Science tells us three things:

1. Children’s brains are not fully developed until their mid-20s.
2. There is no way to predict which child will accomplish great things.
3. Test scores miss most of the vital traits that make for success.

History tells us three things:

1. Great people make great nations
2. Empowering and ennobling cultures help people attain their full potential.
3. Parents, families, and schools are the bedrock of culture, and can be supported or undermined by community organizations, churches, and the media/entertainment industry.

The related historical truth that conspicuously applies to America is that our nation was made by its people—the various enterprising immigrants who settled the land. They left behind their homelands, their Kings and pompous aristocracies, and the closed economies that offered little opportunity to the poor or disadvantaged. They brought with them their love of freedom, their many spiritual Faiths, and their fierce independence and self-reliance. And those people, along with the hordes that followed, built America.

America did not become great because of its climate, geography, natural resources, or lady luck. Most of the European countries along with much of Asia and South America, North Africa, and the Far East had similar natural advantages. But the people inhabiting those other equally “blessed” regions never found a way to do what the Americans did. That failure to keep up was not because they were inferior in any way, but simply because their political systems, cultural mores, and autocratic leadership obstructed individual initiative. The ordinary people in those lands lost out simply because they never had the freedom or opportunity that was available in America.

America's growth in population and affluence was explosive! Starting in 1620 as a few small outposts, the new arrivals spread up and down the coast, into the mountains, and beyond to the Pacific ocean. There was no infrastructure waiting them, no docks, no bridges, no shelter or farms. With hand tools, they cut the forests, dug out the rocks and roots, plowed the soil, and grew their food. Within two hundred years, these first eight generations of Americans built a democratic nation of unheard of prosperity and power.

Within 150 years of the landing at Plymouth Rock, six generations of Americans had challenged—and then beaten—the most powerful nation in the world, claiming and winning liberty from their mother country. There were dozens of nations from China to Persia to France, spanning most of the globe, that had been building their cities, roads, and businesses for more than a thousand years, and yet not one could match the extraordinary and rapid progress achieved by those American pioneer generations. A marathon runner would have to give all his competitors a twenty-mile head start, then sprint to the finish line before all of them, to match the enormity and rapidity of America's achievement, an achievement fueled by our past generations, generations that were fueled by a different psychology than the one being taught in today's schools and colleges.

That explosion of progress from 1620–1870 occurred with no aristocracy, virtually no government, no large organizations, no stultifying Faith, no taxes, and no intellectual class. It is the author's contention that it was the absence of those impediments that allowed American individuals to attain such extraordinary progress. The common people of most any other society in the rest of the world could have done the same—if they had been free of such restraining and repressive influences.

Ralph Waldo Emerson has been called America's first intellectual, and his first published book was issued in 1836, more than two hundred years after the first settlers had arrived. Many intellectuals followed, and after 250 years of unparalleled progress, the common people—the concrete thinkers—started to be pushed aside by those who pretended to be smarter, more sophisticated, and better educated. That was the beginning of our national decline. The momentum and vigor of practical people is still carrying us forward, but slower and slower, as the obstacles to their efforts multiply. It is worth asking why members of our "Ruling Class"—with their years and years of schooling, advanced primarily because of their high IQ and SAT test scores, and employing all the advances science has offered—have somehow managed to reverse three centuries of progress. But reverse it they have, and one of the objects of this book is to explain how such an anomaly has occurred.

America is Broken. There were early signs in the 1960s, when a Harvard professor received favorable media coverage when he urged students to "light up, turn off, and drop out." Later, we saw Presidents John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton turn the oval office into a Hugh Hefner playhouse. Just recently, the breakage became significant, unprecedented, and unmistakable; the financial collapse of 2009 revealed the corrupt conspiracy between Congress, the Treasury

Department, Federal Reserve officials, Fannie Mae, and the most speculative trading divisions of our largest and once respected financial banks and insurance companies.

Corruption is not new. Politicians have always wasted or “redirected” billions of dollars to cronies and special interest groups; that is what government officials do. In the past, we were not crippled by a billion dollars of fraud here and a billion there. However, today’s leadership elites have escalated the cost of their greed and incompetence. We are talking in the trillions of dollars, and our ballooning national debt threatens the future of America.

This book is not political, but it does call for fiscal prudence— which might be called a form of “conservative” financial management. But the alternative—liberal spending in excess of one’s income—is a violation of every sound financial planning rule and should not even be considered a debatable political issue. There are many social issues where one can debate liberal-conservative positions, but in financial matters the need to minimize debt, eliminate deficits, maintain a strong currency and banking system, and establish transparency and honesty, are simple time-tested principles.

While deficits will eventually bankrupt the country, they have an added perverse effect: The growing acceptance that deficits can be tolerated is bankrupting the fiscal common sense of the American people. We are told that the deficit and national debt are not problems. We are told that each of us should also use credit to live the good life. Our governments at all levels sell us lottery tickets so we can hope to hit it big without the pain of saving or thrift. And yet we know that our children must be taught to save, to defer gratification of some impulses and desires, and to possess the character to be honorable in their personal and financial dealings. Those values are three of the most important things they need to learn.

But look at the bad examples rampant around us! The politician-demagogues deliberately create deficits to pay for the promises they made to keep getting elected. They lie. They steal. They cheat, and some demean the office they sit in. In this book we will examine how we got to be burdened by this new elite class in Washington and Wall Street that is destroying our country. We will reveal the impact they have on us, the citizens, on our children, and on American character. If we don’t throw the rascals out, these demagogues will surely bring on the decline of America and the end of our power and prosperity. Then what will happen to this sweet land of liberty?

Because the “best and brightest” as measured today by our left-leaning academics have few practical skills—and are predisposed against concrete thinking—their primary employment opportunities are in government-planning roles, complex financial manipulations, and in the proliferating special advocacy organizations and foundations that seek to change America. As a group, they have become parasites feeding on the productive fruits of the working people. Until we get our schools to nurture the practical abilities of “average” students and encourage the high IQ types to enter the hard-physical sciences, we are doomed to keep producing a harmful crop of unreasoning graduates hell-bent on assuming power-based positions in government and

think-tanks. And all because we have been hoodwinked into an incorrect understanding of who's smart and who isn't!

We must look beyond both IQ and EQ to a new concept of TCQ—a person's total competency quotient. All kids can be inculcated with the values and attitudes that make for successful lives. The average ones are frequently the most valuable to the nation, and the "brightest," except for their efforts in the physical sciences, should not get preferential treatment. We must recognize the great variety of attributes that make up a person's "intelligence." Only then can we gain an understanding of whether such qualities as integrity, rational decision-making, and initiative, are inborn or learned—and how these components affect the destiny of children and the country.

In short, we will examine just what "intelligence" represents, what makes a person an intellectual, and just what makes an individual and a nation successful. The good news is that parents and schools can once again raise the kinds of people that made America great. We will show that it has been our false notion of intelligence and expertise that has caused our growing national dysfunction. And curiously, it all gets back to the problems caused by overemphasis on IQ and SAT scores, school grades, and current theories on schooling and parenting. We will show how practical thinking trumps abstract thinking and how our nation's future is dependent not on the most intelligent but on the most balanced, the most pragmatic, and those with the highest integrity.