

America Lite
David Gelernter

Brave, compelling, mostly right on. A couple of threads he fails to pull

David Gelernter is a Renaissance man, a person who has distinguished himself as a computer scientist, artist, and philosopher, and now as a social commentator. This book attempts, similar to Charles Murray's "Coming Apart," to assess the male as that has affected America for the past few decades. Like Murray, he has a few simple prescriptions to fix the problem. That's the weakest part of the book. It will be fixed, but not by conscious action.

Gelernter is a master of the image, simile and metaphor. His writing is a pleasure to read. He is widely read, and his sources are different than mine. His ideas tie to those of Robert Trivers "The Folly of Fools," Michael Shermer "The Believing Brain," and a lot of what Stephen Pinker writes.

You can read the thesis of the book in other reviews. Fundamentally, he contends that the leftist intellectuals took over academia sometime after World War II. Having seized control of the educational establishment, they indoctrinated generations of children to the point that they are now knee-jerk, instinctive leftists. He calls them PORGIs, post religious globalist intellectuals. As many other writers have done before him, he notes that however intelligent they may be, they do not think for themselves, simply regurgitating the received wisdom which they have been fed since they were in grammar school. The lesson is anti-religion, anti-American, against patriotism, and for diversity. Whatever that means, and provided the diversity embraces only the right people.

His solution is to take education out of the hands of the educational establishment. He proposes delivering education over the Internet. I am working on a book of my own about how I am going to school my 10-month-old child when the time comes. The Internet is only the beginning. The Internet is a vehicle for delivering a vast amount of unbiased curricular material. This is absolutely necessary, but it is only a start.

We need to educate our children in matters of character and deportment. One of the strengths of this book is the homage this Jewish intellectual pays to WASP culture of days gone by. Our noblesse oblige. We did believe teaching character as we raised our children. We used the Bible as a reference in teaching character. Although the academic subjects were often secondary to teaching character, civic responsibility, patriotism, and the values of family, somehow academic subjects still manage to be taught better 50 years ago than they are today.

Gelernter leads into homeschooling, but he does not quite make the connection. The Internet will be the essential tool for delivering good homeschooling. I recommend John Gatto's "Underground History of American Education" and Diane Ravitch's more mainstream "Left Back: A History of Failed School Reform" as a good background on what has gone wrong with American education and why homeschooling is probably the only remedy. The problem with homeschooling is the problem with any

education. The most important element is an intelligent and dedicated teacher. That has to start with the parents themselves.

Now let me mention a few random thoughts which I think contribute to Gelernter's argument. He speaks of the countercultural revolution in the 60s having its roots in the 40s. I believe this is true, and I will add another major contributor to the argument. Children born in the 1940s and later were the first generations to be saturated by television throughout their childhood. Television, in turn, was dominated by the media elites, whom Gelernter correctly identifies as primarily second-generation Jewish immigrants, to whom he correctly identifies a leftist bias which was evident as far back as the Army McCarthy hearings and the treatment of Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential campaign. These children, washed in television, not only accepted their opinions from the media, but they did not develop the strong reading skills that characterized their newspaper reading parents. Television breeds intellectual laziness as well as physical sloth.

Gelernter idealizes the 50s as a period of American triumphalism. It is true that we were an economic pinnacle. However, the spirit of the times was decidedly gloomy. There was a dread of the Russians and the Red Chinese, and the fear that we would all die in a nuclear holocaust. The humorists of that time, Mort Sahl, Lenny Bruce, and Tom Lehrer, captured the angst quite well. I think that this fearful nihilism contributed to the mindless nihilism of the hippies of the 1960s.

Gelernter rather bravely identifies the role that Jewish intellectuals – the expression seems redundant – played in transforming America. He should give a bit more history of the Jewish people themselves. I think that evolutionary psychologist Kevin MacDonald is onto something in his trilogy on the subject, culminating in "The Culture of Critique." Throughout their 3,000 year history of the Jews have constantly struggled against host societies, using intellect and intellectual aggression as their weapons. This strategy led to Jews being expelled from medieval England and France, persecuted in the middle of the millennium by the Spanish, French, and Portuguese in the Inquisition, and then by the Slavs in the latter part of the 19th century during the pogroms. This was not totally without foundation; the Jews were at the center of the anarchist groups that eventually came together as the Bolsheviks. Around the turn of the century large numbers left for the United States, Argentina and Canada. They continued their leftist politics in their adoptive lands, which resulted in somewhat similar types of confrontations with the establishment in each of them. I broaden Gelernter's argument a little bit. In taking over academia, the Jews in the United States were simply doing what they had always done, and what had historically been in the genetic interests of the Jewish people.

Gelernter sees an evolutionary process out of this morass. I think will be rather more cataclysmic, like the fall of communism. The economic system which has been built in Europe and the United States on the untested and in fact thoroughly unsound theoretical premises of which the left is enamored are simply going to fall. The mistaken belief in equality of ability, which Gelernter addresses only as it relates to women, has resulted in the construction of an economic system which is premised on productivity much higher than we actually achieve. We have been supporting our pipedream by borrowing at an ever-increasing pace. The lenders have stopped lending: Greece is in default, with Spain, Italy, and

Portugal not far behind. The United States had a small crisis last year when we raised the debt ceiling. We have done absolutely nothing to cure the underlying problems in the interim, and the battle will be re-fought, more fiercely, in early 2013. Sooner rather than later, Europe and the United States are going to enter a severe correction, as they are forced to face up to their economic problems. Rather than default on sovereign debt, they will probably inflate their way out of it the way Latin American countries have traditionally done. However, there is no country which can bail us out, as we did for others. It will be a difficult time.

It would take a remarkable seer to project what the coming hard times will bring. First and foremost, I expect that society's freeloaders will be dumped rather unceremoniously. People who cannot produce will not eat. Or not eat very much. We beneficiaries of the Ponzi scheme called Social Security will see our benefits diminish, probably through the effects of inflation. I prognosticate that governments will conclude that their school systems are simply too expensive and cease the lavish funding that they have enjoyed. They will get even worse, and people who are serious about educating their children will increasingly turn to the tool which Gelernter recommends, the Internet, to teach their own.

I expect that University education will follow the same path at some point. MIT has had its curriculum online for quite some time. Other universities are following suit. Once the curricular material is available, all that is needed for distance learning are a few teaching assistants to help students over the rough spots, and a foolproof system of delivering examinations so that the preservation of the grading system is provided through a worldwide system. There is a precedent in the Scholastic Aptitude Tests, and Graduate Record Exams. I think we will find that highly paid university professors are no longer needed to deliver their blend of pedagogy and propaganda.