

What Makes an Opinion?

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Note that there is no mention of a system of education in the United States Constitution. Still, educational institutions and the media are our primary sources of information. These are the power centers which serve to affect how that Constitution, as well as the Declaration of Independence, Federalist Papers, and history itself are perceived. Repairing our information system is required in order to repair our ability to think freely and for ourselves. It is only by repairing the education system and the media that we can we become a more informed electorate.

The media and education conglomerate is placed within the same power center because the two together represent information and what passes for knowledge. It is a rather well-established fact that people make decisions based upon what they know. While some have the capacity to learn on their own, most construct opinion based upon what is randomly or purposefully put before them. Some people cull out the absurd and some don't. The media and the educator are the sources of information for almost all of us. As the local newspaper and radio station (media) congealed into massive international information conglomerates, the diversity of information offered to the consumer lessened. With fewer facts available, debate underwent a curious transformation. Debate lessened in many cases because facts were not available upon which to base discussion. Debate increased, and at the same time became more emotional and even violent, when apparently contrary information portrayed as facts was debated without the supporting logic. The reduction in the information available spawned an inability to actually have a debate. Opinions became further apart, more emotional, and often more violently expressed.

The education system fails on multiple levels, most all of which can be traced back to a widespread, but not all encompassing, abandonment of the instruction in the ability to think for oneself. The study of History has degraded into multiple exercises in memorization, without an understanding of why history happened as it did. Mathematics has become nothing more complex than training in what button to push on the calculator or computer. The English language is experiencing an erosion of both use and comprehension. Basics such as the elementary practice of diagramming a sentence have been abandoned. Our educational system is failing as is documented by

the chronically low graduation rates around the nation. It is critical to recognize that it is not failing the entire student population, for there are still those who obtain scholarships and excel at advanced courses. The system is failing those students at the lower end of achievement. The repairs herein are directed at our failure to educate all students to a basic level, not every student to a superior level.

Our opinions, as an electorate and a people, have in many cases become a push button product of vignettes, sound bites, and quips, devoid of substance or derivation.