

# Illiterate Brits

By Samuel Blumenfeld

Jay Leno, in his amusing Jay Walking adventures, interviews young Americans whose appalling ignorance of history, geography and other areas of basic knowledge has become the subject of great hilarity. Many of them couldn't tell you who was buried in Grant's tomb.

But now we learn from across the pond that young Brits have been so dumbed-down that 23 percent of them believe that Winston Churchill was a mythical figure, and 58 percent believe that Sherlock Holmes was a real person. That may account for the confusion among Brits as to what they were voting for in the recent election. A dumbed-down population is bound to be influenced by simple slogans rather than philosophical understanding of what the purpose of government is.

According to the Boston Herald (Feb. 6, 2008), 77 percent of these young Brits readily admit that they don't read history books, and three out of five never watch historical programs on television. Of course, the reason why they don't read history books is because they are functionally illiterate.

In fact, a devastating book, "The Great Reading Disaster," has been published in England exposing the fact that young Brits are taught to read with the dyslexia-producing Whole Language method, which has also become the present ruin of American education.

The authors, Mona McNee and Alice Coleman, write: "Forcing children to read whole words by the look-say method is like telling young piano learners to play a piece in the correct tempo, without being taught the individual notes or the significance of their stave positions. ... It is cruel to inflict such frustration on children, and the cruelty is not restricted to childhood. It is even more cruel and humiliating when it leaves people illiterate for life."

Even Margaret Thatcher couldn't get the educators to change their ways, though she appointed a Committee of Inquiry to investigate the teaching of reading in the schools. Apparently, the progressives were clever enough to pay lip service to phonics, ridiculing their advocates, but meanwhile continuing to support the whole-word method.

We've experienced the same situation here in the U.S. where No Child Left Behind was supposed to change the way reading is taught in American schools. In fact, a special billion-dollar reading initiative was passed by Congress to get phonics back into the schools. But the educators charged the government with having a bias in reading instruction, which was discriminatory against whole-language educators. And from what I have been told by teachers in the field, whole language is still the dominant way reading is being taught in American schools.

The two British authors write: "It took 40 years to produce the first 6 million adult illiterates but only another 10 to increase the total to 9 million. The annual rate has doubled."

And the reason why nothing will change despite the alarm sounded by this excellent book is because of the tight control the progressives have over the entire British education system.

According to the Sunday Telegraph of June 27, 1993, the controlling cabal is called the All Souls Group, which holds its "clandestine thrice-yearly meetings" in an oak-paneled room at Oxford University.

Like the Bilderbergers, no minutes are kept of the meetings, and no papers or public statements ever emerge. The discussions over evening sherry or dinner are protected by Chatham House Rules, which dictate proceedings are off the record. Chatham House is the British equivalent of our Council on Foreign Relations. Membership is by invitation and the criteria are shrouded in mystery.

Does such a secret education establishment exist in the United States? It does. It is called the Cleveland Conference and was organized in 1915 by professor Charles Judd, head of the University of Chicago's School of Education, where Professor William Scott Gray concocted the Dick and Jane look-say, whole-word, reading program. In his book, "Managers of Virtue," David Tyack writes:

[Judd] had a vision that both the structure of the schools and the curriculum needed radical revision but that change would take place "in the haphazard fashion that has characterized our school history unless some group gets together and undertakes, in a cooperative way, to coordinate reforms."

It is easy enough to follow the machinations of the progressives by simply reading the annual yearbooks of the National Society for the Study of Education, founded by the progressives in 1901. This was the gathering place of the educational elite, and their annual yearbooks, with their membership lists, can be found in any large university library.

Contributors to the yearbooks have included such progressive heavy-weights as John Dewey; E.L. Thorndike, William Scott Gray, Carleton Washburne, Ralph W. Tyler, Robert J. Havighurst, John Goodlad, Ruth Strang, Harry Broudy, Benjamin Bloom, Lawrence Kohlberg, Urie Bronfenbrenner, Jerome Bruner, Kenneth Strike, and other members of the educational establishment.

With all of those great progressives now gone to their heavenly rewards, and everything they wanted achieved, the Society's Board of Directors voted on May 30, 2008, to dissolve the Society and transfer the rights for publication of all forthcoming Yearbooks, as well as the assets of the Society, to the Teachers College Record, at that citadel of progressivise education, Teachers College, Columbia University, in New York City.

But for American parents, the only way to free themselves from the stranglehold of the progressive elite is to remove their children from the government schools and either educate them at home or place them in private schools which adhere to traditional principles and teaching methods. As for the Brits, we hope that The Great Reading Disaster's expose will awaken enough of them to break the hold of the All Souls Group. But don't hold your breath. The new "conservative" government is not about to rock this establishment boat.