

JEFFERSON

EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

PROBING EDUCATION

Series Summary and Conclusions (Part Two) *Amazing Ancient Universities and some of their Superstars*

By Rev. Charles Brock
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Editor's note: This Jefferson Publications series examines ancient universities that thrive today – how they have shaped the world and influenced education methods, citizenship, the meaning of government, and cultural life. Today's article offers conclusions and is the last of two parts summarizing the series.

22nd in a Series

Fatima al-Fihri founded the oldest Western university, Fez, which is a Muslim institution in Morocco and is still going strong. The school addresses the “whole student” – body, mind, and soul. Fez's teaching is delivered with students seated in a semi-circle around a sheikh. That beats a lecture hall of 400 students looking at their cellphones.

Ibn Khaldūn's concept of history was about the purposes of civilizations, not a collection of disparate facts without rhyme or reason.

Roger Bacon, Dante Alighieri, and Thomas Aquinas introduced Greek, Roman, and Muslim philosophers into their works. **John Adams and Benazir Bhutto** valued other religions beside their own. She proposed working together and died because of that.

Miguel de Cervantes raised issues about personality and purpose and the windmills of life. What happens when we fail?

Isaiah Berlin concentrated on mega issues – what is freedom? Why can't we agree on values? Can we be realistic about value conflict, or are we doomed to mistakenly smooth things over? Do you want to be a hedgehog or a fox?

John Adams and Thomas Jefferson wanted universities to offer students ways to think and act for the nation and its purposes. They talked about the soul of the nation, not just its mind or body.

Benazir Bhutto offered herself as a sacrifice for learning, equality, and democracy.

The **Congressional Marys** from William & Mary – **Dina Titus, Michele Bachmann, Jennifer Wexton, and Stephanie Murphy** – used their education in governance national, state, and local and did not hide in libraries, labs, or families. They are as different as chalk and cheese, as are the male Johnnies (St. John's College). – Ahmet Ertegun and Ben Sasse.

Ertegun and many others brought American music into circulation which is a worthy object of integrative study.

Sasse says real education is engaging with new ideas, not just transmitting knowledge. And “how will we champion pluralism, curiosity, viewpoint diversity, open debate, and intellectual rigor for our students and faculty, such that our graduates will be prepared to live and work with people of many points of view?”

The ancient universities were **polymathic**. They taught a lot of subjects that all students studied, and they related subjects to each other. St John's still does this, but they are the exception today. Oxford forges ahead with PPE – a return.

The intellectual superstars talked a lot. They listened and learned. They integrated. Job training was secondary.

AN EXAMPLE OF INTEGRATIVE LEARNING FOR TODAY
Debating the Purpose of Government - CLASS OUTLINE
3 credits 30 classes 1.5 hours per class

Taught for six years by Charles Brock and others.
Videos of all classes available.

1. Economics & Government – Who runs America?
 - a. Monetary Power | Charles Brock | Institute on the American Dream | Aug 25
 - b. Practical Power | Kathy Dahlkemper | Former County Executive, Congresswoman | Aug 27
 - c. Inequalities | Balaji Rajagopalan | Director, Business School | Sept 1

2. Race & Society – Is there liberty and justice for all?
 - a. Jim Crow | Gary Horton | Community Development | Sept 8

- b. Jews | Barry Grossman | former County Executive | Sept 15
- c. Immigrants | Sarah Siverd | International Institute | Sept 22
- 3. **Foreign Affairs & Business – What is at stake?**
 - a. Asia | Xin Zhao | Business School - Finance | Oct 6
 - b. Europe | John Gamble | Prof of Political Science | Oct 13
 - c. U.S. neighbors | Val Vlad | Business School - Economics | Oct 20
- 4. **War and the American Mission – Why endless wars?**
 - a. Revolution, Manifest Destiny, World Wars | Charles Brock | Oct 27
 - b. War on Terror, Islam, World Development | Kilic Kanat | Political Science | Nov 3
- 5. **Science – What are our hopes and fears for science and technology now?**
 - a. Climate Change | Darren Williams, Department of Physics | Oct 22 | Nov 5
 - b. Atomics | Jonathan Hall | Department of Physics | Nov 17
 - c. Drones | Ralph Ford | Chancellor | Dec 1
- 6. **Health Care & Community – Why are we the costliest with worse outcomes than Canada, Cuba, and Europe?**
 - a. Medicine | Geoff Dunn & Asif Shakoor | UPMC Hamot | Dec 7

Weekly Wrestle: *One page typed single-spaced paper due one week after the Thursday discussion (no exceptions)*

- 1a No essay but for extra credit: Is it the “United States of Corporate America” and you’d better like salute?
- 1b What is political corruption? Examine the influence of lobbying and Super PACS. How can you find out about what difference these make? *(One-half page due Sept 10)*
- 1c Is income inequality the “defining issue of our age?” (President Obama) *(One half page due Sept 10)*
- 2a What is Jim Crow? How are voting rights being suppressed now? *(Due Sept 17)*
- 2b Pick an American minority and ask if they are finding liberty and justice. What about your family?
- 2c How do we treat immigrants? Give a brief account of your family background.
- 3a Is China beating us militarily, economically, and spiritually?
- 3b Has the EU been fair to Greece?
- 3c Are Canada, and/or Cuba, and/or Mexico threats to our economy? What can we do for Puerto Rico?

- 4a Does America have an international mission? Briefly examine the history and current theories.
- 4b Why do ISIS and other radical Islamic groups hate the West and what can we do about it?
- 5a Why do we only test for two types of intelligence for IQs and SATs – grammar & math?
- 5b What can the United States do about controlling nuclear power?
- 5c Are drones causing more harm than good?
- 6a (Optional essay – extra credit) Why was the U.S. the last developed country to get a national health care insurance plan? What needs changing in American healthcare right away and in the future? *Due on the day of the Final.*

EXTRA CREDIT (*due any time before Finals Week*)

1. *Robotics*: Who needs to limit robots and why?
2. *What nations and the laws can do about global warming?* Frack off?
3. *Poverty in the richest country in the world.* Compare “Blessed are the poor” and “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”
4. *Elections*: Can we ever achieve fair elections? Look at problems with the Electoral College, voting restrictions and procedures, gerrymandering, two party system, and “beauty contests” for judges.
5. *Academia*: What criteria should colleges use on government research contracts? E.g. animal experiments and weapons.
6. *America is run by those with money*: How do you prove or not prove this contentious point?
7. *Nixon in China* or *Dr. Atomic* by John Adams (contemporary opera composer)

TERRIBLE EXAMPLES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS TODAY

7. My graduate school classmate wrote “America is a country that has been around for thousands of years.” It was a group paper on social policy.
8. Our professor was from Maryland and was probably in her early forties. This kid asked her if she was one of the Pearl Harbor survivors. He couldn’t grasp the fact that she was not alive at that time and that Pearl Harbor was not a harbor in Maryland.
9. Yet another wrote in a discussion board about “Lord of the Flies,” “I like how they saved all the flies. That was my favorite part.” If you’ve read the book, you can guess the look on my face.

10. A friend who taught in the politics department received a paper about “gorilla” warfare in South America. It was so poorly written she couldn’t tell if it was a typo, or if they genuinely thought Colombia had been overrun by a Planet of the Apes style revolution.

11. I had a student come in with a research paper bibliography that listed “my mom” as a source several times. When I pressed, she told me her mom looked up everything and sent it to her and she just ... put it in the paper. She told me she had always done it that way.^[1]

12. I have taught numerous students who are unable to read for meaning. They can read the words on a page out loud to you, but ask them to explain what they just read, they will repeat the words on the page.

13. Two students were swapping thoughts on the exam and asked b who she wrote about. B says, “I wrote about Lenin.” A says “Really? I don’t remember him mentioned in the lectures a lot.” B says “Oh I know but I know a lot about him. My mum is a huge fan of his music.” She had written about John Lennon, not Vladimir Lenin, who’s [sic] name was clearly printed on the exam paper.

14. While we’re being taught about the Holocaust and shown pictures of dead inmates, one student said “What diet do you think he was on? I want my ribs to show like that.”

15. Once I had identical twin sisters who turned in identical essays. Both were directly plagiarized from a Google search and received identical zeroes.

16. One student chose to write about instances of Martin Luther King, Jr. visiting college campuses to speak on issues of equality. That’s when the student said that he had won the Nobel Prize in Sports and I just had to stop.

On-screen reporter Courtney Plunk tosses the simplest of questions at random passersby “to see just how much our fellow students know about their country.”

Question: Who won the Civil War? Answers: “The South?” and “The Confederates?”

Question: Who is our vice president? Answers: “I have no idea” and “Is that a trick question?”

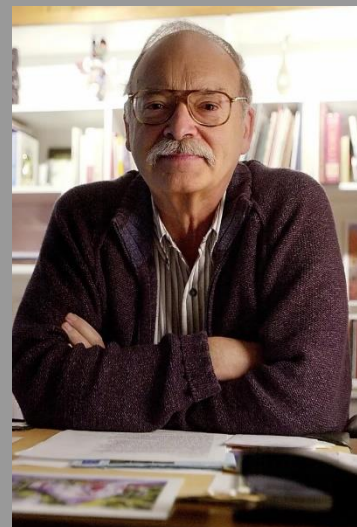
Question: Who did we gain our independence from? Answer: “I couldn't tell you.”^[2]

1, Jacob (no last name given – understandably), [College students so dumb, we're shocked they made it out of high school. In: Humor, Miss College, Idiot, Teachers](#) – online, Mar 7, 2021.

2, LINTON WEEKS, *THE PROTOJOURNALIST*, from NPR, [Who Won The Civil War? Tough Question](#), November 18, 2014 11:11 AM ET

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Charles Brock, an Erie native, is an Emeritus Fellow, Chaplain, and Director of Ministerial Education at Mansfield College, Oxford, UK, where he taught for 35 years. He serves as the Director of the Institute on the American Dream at Penn State Behrend. Rev. Brock is acting minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Girard, Pa., and he is a Founding Member of the Jefferson Educational Society. Rev. Brock serves as the Director of the Brock Institute for Mega Issues Education at the Jefferson and serves as Secretary of the Jefferson Educational Society's Board of Trustees.



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