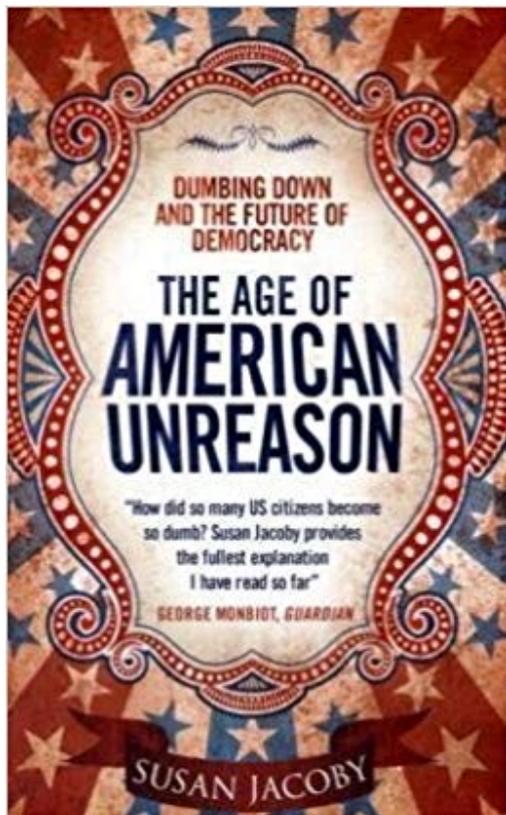


The Age of American Unreason *by* Susan Jacoby



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A cultural history of the last forty years, *The Age of American Unreason* focuses on the convergence of social forces-usually treated as separate entities-that has created a perfect storm of anti-rationalism. These include the upsurge of religious fundamentalism, with more political power today than ever before; the failure of public education to create an informed citizenry; and the triumph of video over print culture. Sparing neither the right nor the left, Jacoby asserts that Americans today have embraced a universe of "junk thought" that makes almost no effort to separate fact from opinion.



Reviews of the *The Age of American Unreason* *by* Susan Jacoby

Funky

Susan Jacoby's smart & scathing study of American anti-intellectualism was starkly accurate when first published in 2009. The intervening years have only demonstrated & proven her thesis with dismaying urgency. If anything, the lack of actual knowledge in context, as well the lack of ability to assemble it into a larger, coherent whole, have both grown worse. Horribly worse. Beyond Theater

of the Absurd worse. America is currently dominated by a mindset that deliberately & willfully rejects unassailable fact, education, complexity, science, art, and thought itself. Worse still, those of that mindset are angrily, sneeringly proud of their self-imposed ignorance. They seem to take pleasure in the tearing down of anyone & anything that even vaguely suggests the slightest hint of maturity & wisdom. And this is what they believe will somehow make our country "great" again?

Well -- if you haven't read this fine (if deeply unsettling) book yet, there's no better time for it. Jacoby is smart, witty, and passionate about the dead-end direction so many Americans are taking today. As for the complaints about her use of anecdotal evidence, this is as much *cri de coeur* as it is thoroughly researched study. It's meant to make you feel as well as think, and then think some more. Civilization can be a thin & fragile veneer, all too easily lost when not enough people uphold & defend it. Start here -- most highly recommended!

Dordred

This amazing intellectual history of the United States shows how we have always had intellectual and anti-intellectual forces combating to shape our society. FDR is presented as one of the few leaders capable of high ideals and the ability to communicate with the common man without condescension. Unfortunately, most intellectuals are incapable of treating those with less learning with understanding while most emotional believers are open to rational examination of their beliefs. I was particularly impressed with Mz. Jacoby's presentation of the development of middlebrow culture after WW II. I did not get far in the book before I was tired of the term intellectual and I think that this is one of the most dreadful titles of any book I've ever read, but the book itself was a treasure. It was published in 2008 as "W" was finishing up his presidency. I would love to see what she would have to say about the past decade and the election of a failed reality TV host to the presidency.

Llanonte

When I look around today, I find people that for the most part do not read, spend most of their time in front of the television or the computer (Internet, specifically), have their ears plugged with an iPod, or have their faces buried in an iPhone, Blackberry, or some similar device. Who is a reader and has not experienced the disdain from at least some surrounding people that they must be a Luddite for resorting to such low-tech means of entertainment or information-gathering? They may question who has time to enjoy a novel or a piece of great literature from the past or present, fiction or nonfiction?

This book touches on that phenomenon, as well as many other subjects that relate to the dumbing down of our culture, including the rise of pseudoscience, the evolution vs creationism debates for science classes, the inequity of education because we have no national education standards as other modern countries do, and so many more subjects of historical interest.

Jacoby does hit the conservatives, even intellectuals, rather hard, but the careful reader will pick up the criticisms against the failures of the intellectual liberals, as well. She seems to have hope that with the realization of economic and foreign policy failures, perhaps a uniting of conservative and liberal intellectual effort can have a positive effect on the future of the nation as a whole.

Our anti-intellectual and anti-rational culture is even more surprising considering our country's roots with the Enlightenment, founded by strongly intellectual men. Even in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, people had a tendency to desire education and even listen to speakers they knew they would disagree with, because they were much more curious about different trains of thought, and were committed to inquiry much more than today.

Susan Jacoby does a great job with this volume, and I recommend it to all the frustrated so-called Luddites that are truly today's great thinkers.

Leyl

Along with Richard Hofstadter's book "Anti-Intellectualism in American Life", Susan Jacoby's updated book "The Age of American Unreason in a Culture of Lies" belongs on every citizen's bookshelf. Both blow away the cobwebs and lay out an excellent review of what we, as citizens, are facing during the current Trump era.

Whilingudw

Excellent. Made me think of why we have so much of a political problem-solving issues in this country. The people (voters) have a lot to answer for; i.e., they don't want to do the hard work of thinking. On the other hand, the media doesn't do anywhere near the job it should and far too many politicians are willing to trade on magical thinking rather than dealing with things as they are.

Thoginn

I think this book rings true and the issues we see today. I recommend this book.

Anen

This book is a must read by any American concerned about this country's ability to be competitive on the world stage. She outlines the historical blueprint that gave rise to the current growing tolerance of anti-intellectualism and irrationality. Ms Jacoby rightfully places the acceleration of this problem on the influential platforms of the internet; social media in particular. Now, just about anyone with a smart phone can become an "expert" on any given subject. Creating instances were there is a blurr between facts and fiction.

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