

## “Losing the Race for Intelligence”

by Leonard Pitts, *Miami Herald*, February 6, 2011

ITEM: Only 28 percent of high school science teachers consistently follow National Research Council guidelines encouraging them to present students with evidence of evolution. Thirteen percent ``explicitly advocate creationism or intelligent design.”

These are among the findings of Penn State political scientists Michael Berkman and Eric Plutzer after examining data from a representative survey of 926 high school biology teachers. Writing in the Jan. 28 issue of *Science* magazine, they report that most science teachers -- 60 percent -- cheat controversy by such stratagems as telling students it does not matter if they ``believe" in evolution, so long as they understand enough to pass a test. Or they teach evolution on a par with creationism and encourage students to make up their own minds.

Once upon a time, there lived a stupid giant.

The giant had not always been stupid. Or, perhaps it is more accurate to say the giant had once revered intelligence, reason and the byproducts thereof. Indeed, the giant was renowned for an ingenuity and standard of living that made it the envy of the world.

But much of the world did more than envy the giant. Much of the world admired and respected it. Its basic decency, along with its strength and intelligence, set it apart. There came a time, however, when, though the giant retained its strength and arguably even its decency, it lost its intelligence.

No one can say exactly how and when the loss occurred. There was no great blast of thunder and lightning to herald it, no sudden instant when the giant's intelligence plummeted dramatically from the instant before.

No, stupidity crept over the giant with the stealth of twilight, a product less of one abrupt moment than of a thousand moments of complacency, of resting on laurels, of allowing curiosity to be teased and bullied out of bright children, of dumbing down textbooks so kids could get better grades with less work, of using ``elite" like a curse word.

And, of behaving as if knowing things, and being able to extrapolate from and otherwise make critical use of, the things one knows, was a betrayal of some fundamental human authenticity -- some need to keep it real.

Stupidity stole over the giant until it could no longer tell science from faith, or conventional wisdom from actual wisdom and in any event, valued ideological purity above them all. Stupidity snaked over the giant until science teachers shrank from teaching science, history books contained history that wasn't history, late-night comics got easy laughs from people on the street who could not say when the

War of 1812 was fought, political leaders told outright lies with blithe smiles and no fear of being caught and you would not have been surprised to hear that someone had fixed mathematics, so that  $2+2$  could now equal 17, thus preserving the all-important self esteem of second-grade kids.

Some regarded the giant's stupidity as a danger. They reasoned that when one is so big that one's merest movement or slightest utterance affects the entire world, it's a good idea if those movements and utterances are animated by something more than autonomic function.

Others saw the giant's stupidity as an opportunity. They learned eagerly until they surpassed the giant's intellect. They grew until they rivaled the giant's size and strength. They did not attempt to match the giant's decency. They considered decency a hindrance.

And the giant? It sat on its haunches in the mud as the world changed about it and new giants rose and shook their fists. The giant did not notice. It was watching *The Jersey Shore* on MTV.

And it lived obliviously ever after.