

## The State of the American Mind: 16 Leading Critics on the New Anti-Intellectualism

**Mark Bauerlein, Editor**

**Adam Bellow, Editor**

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*Mental laziness, overblown belief in self, and indifference to political awareness all serve to enfeeble the American experiment.*

In *The State of the American Mind: 16 Leading Critics on the New Anti-Intellectualism*, editors Mark Bauerlein and Adam Bellow assemble an outstanding collection of essays that discuss the decline in knowledge, political awareness, self-reliance, and civic engagement among American citizens and the consequences this dearth portends for the American system of self-government, which depends on an informed and involved citizenry. Comprehensive and convincing, the collection offers both diagnostic and prognostic analysis from a variety of voices, including intellectuals, academics, social thinkers, writers, and commentators. The causes and conclusions are distressing—all is not well in the state of the American Mind—yet the collection offers an optimistic view that improvement is possible.

The book begins with Bauerlein and Bellow's introduction, in which they define the American Mind as a specific way of thinking established during the founding of the American nation. Characterized by a belief in and understanding of free speech, religious liberty, popular sovereignty, equality, and civic virtue, this mentality was representative of the American Experiment, and citizens dutifully pursued the knowledge necessary for full participation in their newfound democracy.

It is vital to understand this core American identity and how it currently smacks of exclusionism, given the nation's cultural and political shift toward diversity—indeed, it is the starting point of the collection's thesis. Bauerlein and Bellow prudently outline how differentiation unintentionally rejected traditional virtues and principles and Americans withdrew from the body politic. “We cherished the *pluribus* and abandoned the *unum*. The American Mind was one of the casualties,” they write.

Structured in three sections—“States of Mind: Indicators of Intellectual and Cognitive Decline”; “Personal and Cognitive Habits/Interests”; and “National Consequences”—the essays identify the factors to blame and provide a searing portrait of an enfeebled American population.

Written in straightforward prose and eschewing divisive ideology and histrionics, the essays inform and inspire contemplation. Yet their aim is to call out Americans' mental laziness, overblown belief in self, and indifference to political awareness, and each echoes the conclusion that the deterioration of intellectual and civic interest threatens American democracy.

AMY O'LOUGHLIN (Fall 2015)

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