

Book notes

*There has been a war on expertise, reflective of the breakdown in a national consensus that pursuit of knowledge is a good thing. Part of the result is that everyone, or anyone, is an expert, which means no one is.

*Thinking is bad television.

*The USA is often entertained but not engaged, full of information but lacking in knowledge.

*The idea that being able to have a beer with someone is relevant to the question about a president reveals an odd fact about the country. It's an unserious question, taken seriously.

*There is no place for imagination, or considering the utility of imagination, in present-day America.

*Debate helps builders define and create memorials which appropriately honor victims and their memories. However, the benefit is lost if the persistent do not allow for compromise and consensus.

*Masterful cherry-picking forms the core of pseudo-science.

*Attacking notions, plans, or actions that don't exist has a certain benefit - the idea itself must touch a nerve, which is all that matters.

*The Warren Commission failed to see that Americans were not necessarily predisposed to accepting their findings. The events needed an investigation that acknowledged how most Americans, sooner or later, would accept a conspiracy theory as a plausible explanation.

*Iran-Contra was far more extraordinary than any conspiracy theorist could imagine.

*At the core of supply-side economics is the notion that government isn't worth the effort.

*Gut reactions respond better to team logic - and Americans are quite good at choosing up sides.

*A televised expert is in part filling the role because of a skill on television - which means that in comparison to someone else who is actually an expert in the field, the televised expert is likely not as competent.

*The nature of call-in radio, and perhaps other electronic mediums, is the sense of kinship developed when the master seems to agree with the participant, which obscures of course that the agreement goes in the other direction.

*The government that accepts religion invites the form of discord driven by the righteous.

*Calling something “faith-based” is often a way to hide its sectarian character.

*Intelligent design on the surface accepts science, and having created the controversy only asks that schools teach the controversy. Of course, were this true in all regards we would learn about the controversy that aliens built the pyramids.

*The founding of America was based in part on the notion of educated people being capable of self-government.

*There is something odd about a creationist using technology like radio or internet to make a point about scientific progress being the first step toward the doom of modern life. There is a class of American who see religion as both salvation and preservation, at least in the context of a certain lifestyle.

*Television has brought added credibility to those who play “the other side”, as if all issues require reasonable people to consider the nonsense that often comes from rebuttal for its own sake.

*Coastal communities have been receding into the sea for decades due to the effects of climate change.

*In 1995, there were an estimated 25 million climate refugees.

*Over time, the scientific content in public policy issues has increased. The serious issue is that rather than help the public understand the issues, there are more efforts made to confused or muddy the understanding.

*Papers demonstrating the impact of climate change on the Arctic have been attacked by think tanks funded by Exxon-Mobil.

*The people who watch the ice arrive later and later each winter know the reality of climate change.

*There is no mechanism for the USA to run on autopilot - it must be directed by educated citizens.

*Experts who understood that Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein were bitter enemies were effectively locked out of debates regarding the war on terror.

*Most Americans have little interest in foreign policy, so they will accept the story of “us good, them bad”. The media is necessary for challenging and exposing the myth in these narratives.

*Experts struggle with the reality that no one will believe them solely for the merit of being smart.

*The 2008 writers strike also led to reality shows coming off the air. Why not? No one was left to script them.

*National policy topics are often discussed not on their own merits but rather in the way they play a role for niche marketers, offering the concept as a segment of a broader product.