

The Assault on Reason

The ASSAULT
ON REASON

AL GORE

Former United States Vice-President Al Gore is most recently known for his epic crusade against the climate crisis as shown in his keynote presentation, book, and movie entitled *An Inconvenient Truth*. For his efforts, he has achieved incredible international fame and, among other awards, the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize.

Despite his incredibly commitment to the climate crisis, his 2007 book called *The Assault on Reason* draws focus to the lack of public involvement in the governance of people – completely opposite to the principles of democracy for which our governments are supposedly demonstrating. Attached is the first chapter of this book, with which you are to answer the questions below.

1. *Why is it* that three-quarters of American believe that Saddam Hussein was responsible for the attacks of September 11, 2001?
2. Other than the examples listed (O.J., JonBenét, Anna Nicole, etc.), what other “news” has dominated the airwaves over the past decade? From your stories listed, which are actually news versus entertainment?
3. Why is it that the U.S. Senate was able to make “a series of catastrophically mistaken decisions on issues of war and peace” without public outcry?
4. The Founders of the U.S. Constitution (and most other nations’ foundations) relied on a “well-informed citizenry” (mainly through the written word). How does Gore explain the public’s lack of knowledge given today’s dominant communication medium?
5. We are watching a ridiculously high number of hours of television every week. 2005 Canadian statistics peg our average at 22 hours a week. Note that a major exception of Canadian youngsters (under 25) compared to our American counterparts is that the average hours of television viewing a week is *decreasing* (14 hours down to 11 hours between 1998 and 2003). How do you explain the differences between Canadians and Americans in this regard?
6. We’ve gone from the printing press to the television to....? What hopes for democracy does Gore place on this new medium? *Why?*
7. The standards of the journalism profession do not seem to be holding up to the way they were in the 1960s. What recent movie illustrates the courage of journalist Edward R. Murrow? How has journalism been forced to change since?
8. What shocks Gore about the predictability of running targeted campaign ads?

9. What was supposed to have died out with the appearance of democracy? What has happened instead?
10. What must we do to counteract this problem?
11. What triggered the Enlightenment? How did this lead to democracy? Summarize the three characteristics of this exchange of ideas.
12. Democracy thrived because of the Enlightenment, but it is once again in jeopardy. What are some examples of the “causes” of the current democracy crisis. Gore says that there are merely symptoms of what much deeper crisis?
13. Summarize the four key rules of how our public forum now operates (pp16 & 17).
14. Explain how reading and watching television is different in terms of brain activity.
15. Explain in your own words how television is a “cool” medium as labelled by Canadian communications genius Marshall McLuhan. Explain the phrase “the medium is the message”.
16. What happens to people’s brains when a new technology emerges as the primary medium for the sharing of information? Bring the current dominant medium back into perspective with the previous dominant medium in terms of brain development.
17. How does society progress to the next new technology that Gore is so looking forward to? How will this be an improvement of the current situation? What new complications will it bring?
18. Note the themes of the rest of the book described in the last page or so of the chapter. Without having read the rest of the book yet....
 - a. What are the enemies of reason?
 - b. What damage has already occurred as a result of the progressive substitution of raw power and institutionalized corruption for reason and logic in policies important to our survival?
 - c. What can be done to restore the health and vitality of democracies everywhere?