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# We don't need no education; We don't need no thought control

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Evoking Pink Floyd's "Another brick in the wall" lyrics, [conservatives \(http://news.yahoo.com/s/ynews/20090903/pl\\_vnews/ynews\\_pl888\\_1\)](#) have lambasted President Obama's upcoming [Web address \(http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/My-Education-My-Future/\)](#) on education. The President will use the opportunity to speak directly to students across the nation on Sept. 8. But right-wing political leaders and think tanks have dubbed this a lesson in brainwashing and a carefully orchestrated propaganda campaign targeted at America's youth. The Cato Institute even issued a statement saying: "Hey Obama, Leave Those Kids Alone."

While tempting as it is to blog about the irony of the right wing deploying Pink Floyd quotes for social change, let's focus on the larger issue. In the words of the one of the latest [Facebook apps \(http://apps.facebook.com/realpolls/vote/wj5wqz4j0\)](#): "Should President Obama be allowed to do a nationwide address to school children without parental consent?"

The answer is absolutely.

Beyond the convenient First Amendment argument, President Obama is free to broadcast through the Web anything his heart desires. If concerned parents truly believe we've elected a fascist dictator, they can leave their kids at home that day or make arrangements for a study hall in the library. That's what my mom did when my fourth-grade teacher showed "Dances With Wolves" and, albeit embarrassed at the time to be the only kid in the class who was prohibited from seeing a PG-13 movie, I turned out just fine. Besides, his address -- like any presidential address -- is completely optional. Institutions, educators and students can tune into as little or as much as they'd like.

From the onset, Obama made it clear through his campaign that he would speak to the electorate in an unprecedented way. From the unveiling of the new White House Web site, Facebook status updates, the recent declassification of White House visitor logs and town hall style lectures over healthcare reform, he has continued this unusually communicative method of governance.

To be fair, the post-address exercises encouraged in the classroom by the White House do include some weighted questions that elude to Obama as an "inspiring" figure and they invoke a high degree of patriotism. But if the right masters patriotic rhetoric to justify war (9/11 anybody?), why can't the left offer such speech to keep kids in school?

Furthermore, past U.S. Presidents have used non-traditional means of speaking directly to the public. One could argue that President Nixon's infamous "Checkers" speech, which featured his wife, was a means of brainwashing women into trusting him fiscally. And the Los Angeles Times reports that President Bush delivered an anti-drug address to students in 1989, while Ronald Reagan addressed classrooms across the country in 1986.

The attacks on Obama's Web address is nothing more than another mounted effort by the GOP to derail the President's policy initiatives. Whether you agree with the policies championed by this Administration during its first eight months in office or not, the last thing the right wing should be worried about is a President with a [50% approval rating \(http://www.gallup.com/poll/116479/Barack-Obama-Presidential-Job-Approval.aspx\)](#) brainwashing the masses.

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Submitted by [Jason Turcotte \(/user/jmt390\)](#) on Sun, 09/06/2009 - 19:04.



(/user/jmt390)

[Homeworkgate \(/blog/we-dont-need-no-education-we-dont-need-no-thought-control#comment-318\)](#)

Submitted by [Michael Davidson \(/user/mikedavidson\)](#) on Sun, 09/06/2009 - 20:15.



(/user/mikedavidson)

"Homeworkgate" seems to have two underlying threads. First, the right wing of the Republican party has allowed opinion leaders like Glen Beck to set agendas that rarely enter

into an arena of rational discourse. The second thread is what Tom Brokaw referred to today on Meet the Press as a "lack of respect" for the office of the presidency. I agree with Brokaw. Whether it is right or wrong, this lack of respect happens on both sides of the aisle. We live in an age where polemics, vitriole, and partisanship dominate our political discourse. Unfortunately, the faux-controversy around "Homeworkgate" shows that this gap is widening, NOT closing.

[The medium matters \(/blog/we-dont-need-no-education-we-dont-need-no-thought-control#comment-322\)](#)

Submitted by [Lauren Alfrey \(/users/lalfrey\)](#) on Mon, 09/07/2009 - 09:02.



(/users/lalfrey)

What interests me about this whole issue is the medium of Obama's message. Obama's savvy use of web tools allows his engagements to reach beyond the confines of tv sets and adds the opportunity for live interactivity with viewers. The new opportunities that online social technologies provide certainly augments distrust among his dissenters. For some members of the baby boomer generation (and perhaps I'm just using the convenient reference point of my parents), the internet still seems like a sort of "wild west" landscape. Some non-tech savvy parents might feel like they have less control over what their kids watch because they don't use or really understand social web tools. The newness of this medium for a Presidential address no doubt adds fodder to the discussion over why some are freaking out over homeworkgate, and likely other interactive web addresses to come. What do you think, Jason? Maybe I'm letting my CCT status color how I interpret issues that involve Internet technology :)

[the medium \(/blog/we-dont-need-no-education-we-dont-need-no-thought-control#comment-323\)](#)

Submitted by [Jason Turcotte \(/user/jmt390\)](#) on Mon, 09/07/2009 - 16:00.



(/user/jmt390)

Lauren, I hadn't considered that perspective but you might be on to something. The Baby Boomer generation, though slowly starting to have a bigger Web presence, may still feel vulnerable when it comes to the Internet. The TV was the medium of their generation; the Internet is the medium of ours. You're probably safe in assuming that may be causing some of the controversy. I think it's human nature to fear technology (or anything for that matter) we don't understand, even if the message is a positive one. I for one can tell you I'd fear flying a lot less if I understood how aviation worked.

[the medium matters, but to whom? \(/blog/we-dont-need-no-education-we-dont-need-no-thought-control#comment-324\)](#)

Submitted by [Patricia Fancher \(/users/trish\)](#) on Mon, 09/07/2009 - 21:33.



(/users/trish)

Lauren good observation. Although, considering that your parents and my grandparents (Fanchers get started early) are baby boomers, it would be hard to argue that many from this generation are still raising school children. Many times, we assume a basic level of technological comfort and proficiency in younger generations. Time and again, the early adopters hypothesis has proven false. Consider this recent article: [http://www.futurelab.net/blogs/marketing-strategy-innovation/2009/08/early\\_adopters\\_arent\\_always\\_wh.html](http://www.futurelab.net/blogs/marketing-strategy-innovation/2009/08/early_adopters_arent_always_wh.html)

This does not in any way invalidate Lauren's point, the nontraditional medium likely contributes to the negative response. But I do think there are other categories besides age to discuss here. Maybe this conflict is an example of what happens when an (relatively)early adopter President governs a technologically reticent population. Figuring out what demographic consistently resist or avoids adopting new technologies would surely help the President to direct his communications more inclusively.

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