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## Study Finds 47% Of Detroit Residents Are Functionally Illiterate

DOUG MATA CONIS · THURSDAY, MAY 5, 2011 · 24 COMMENTS

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A new study shows the staggering degree to which **public education has failed** in one of the most economically depressed cities in the United States:

According to a new report, 47 percent of Detroiters are "functionally illiterate." The alarming new statistics were released by the **Detroit** Regional Workforce Fund on Wednesday.

WWJ Newsradio 950 spoke with the Fund's Director, Karen Tyler-Ruiz, who explained exactly what this means.

"Not able to fill out basic forms, for getting a job — those types of basic everyday (things). Reading a prescription; what's on the bottle, how many you should take... just your basic everyday tasks," she said.

"I don't really know how they get by, but they do. Are they getting by well? Well, that's another question," Tyler-Ruiz said.

Some of the Detroit suburbs also have high numbers of functionally illiterate: 34 percent in Pontiac and 24 percent in Southfield.

"For other major urban areas, we are a little bit on the high side... We compare, slightly higher, to Washington D.C.'s urban population, in certain ZIP codes in Washington D.C. and in Cleveland," she said.

What's even more shocking is that **a large part of this illiterate population somehow made it through public school:**

The report notes that half of the illiterate population has either a high school diploma or a GED. That's beside the point. Virtually the entire illiterate population has completed elementary school, the level at which reading is theoretically taught. That's seven years of schooling (k-6), at a cost of roughly \$100,000, for... nothing.

Per pupil spending in Detroit as of 2008 was \$13,000, which is higher than some people pay for private schooling in other parts of the country. Clearly, the system has failed and the taxpayers aren't getting their moneys worth. Unfortunately, at least half of them aren't able to read the report (**PDF**) to figure that out.

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About Doug Mataconis

Doug is an attorney in private practice in Northern Virginia. He holds a B.A. in Political Science from Rutgers University and J.D. from George Mason University School of Law. He joined the staff of

OTB in May, 2010 and also writes at **Below The Beltway**. Follow Doug on

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jwest says:

Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 11:15

The only thing we know for sure is that the democrat politicians and the teachers unions in Detroit, Washington D.C., Cleveland (and Baltimore, St. Louis, etc.) are all doing a wonderful job and there is no reason to question the basic educational system.

African Americans should continue to vote democrat, as this practice has worked so well for them so far. Although the ability to read and to make change for a dollar are useful skills, republicans tend to over emphasize the importance of results instead of the self-esteem benefits of social promotion.

Falze says:

Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 11:17

It's probably Sarah Palin's fault.

jwest says:

Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 11:24

Well, according to the liberals, she did burn all the books in Alaska and danced around the fire chanting in tongues while holding snakes.

john persona says:

Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 11:30

47% Of Detroit Residents Are Functionally Illiterate?

Obviously the answer is to hate on liberals.

(This is not to say spending is the answer, but more to note that our first-post knuckleheads didn't really offer anything for the Detroiters. It's all about how we can't, won't, shouldn't, do anything.)



District of Columbia: New Debt Help Program

District of Columbia: Residents Qualify to become CREDIT Card...



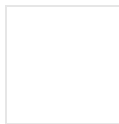
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**Herb says:****Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 11:38**

I don't know if I'd use this to indict the public schools. At some point the pupil must make an effort, too.

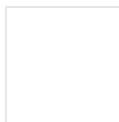
These people are "functionally illiterate" as opposed to "just flat out can't tell an A from a Z" illiterate, which indicates to me that it's a skill they don't use as opposed to a skill they don't have.

**JD says:****Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 11:43**

Well, the first thing that came to mind was to offer \$13,000 vouchers to all students to use at any school of their choosing but for some reason teachers unions aren't big fans of this.

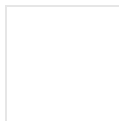
**Bleev K says:****Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 11:51**

jwest, you're from Detroit, right?

**john persona says:****Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 12:03**

Well, the first thing that came to mind was to offer \$13,000 vouchers to all students to use at any school of their choosing but for some reason teachers unions aren't big fans of this.

At that point you'd be better off paying each student for success on a HS equivalency exam.

**jwest says:****Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 13:21**

"Obviously the answer is to hate on liberals."

There's no need to hate liberals, but if the problem is ever to be solved we need to stop listening to them.

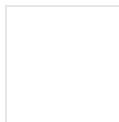
Liberals have evolved the educational industry based on gaining the votes and loyalty of the teachers unions, as opposed to caring about the needs of students. In doing so, they have perpetrated an unspeakable evil on generations of inner-city blacks, depriving them of a basic education while condemning them to lives of ignorance and poverty.

What liberals fail to see or acknowledge is that teaching – the act of conveying information, concepts and ideas to another – is an art that requires a certain talent, not a skill that can be learned by anyone. Because liberals wanted to fit the educational industry into the union model, they needed to ignore this basic fact and allow training and degrees coupled with a seniority system to guide their way. The truth is, certain people just can't teach, regardless of advanced degrees and years on the job.

Concerning the money being the problem, that is true and false.

There is plenty of money being spent in the cities we're talking about. Here's an article that give you an idea of the actual numbers:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp->



[dyn/content/article/2008/04/04/AR2008040402921.html](#)

Plenty of money is available, but it is being wasted in a hopelessly broken system.

By simply issuing vouchers with a state-run testing program once a year, new educational programs could be designed and implemented. First graders learn differently than 10th graders. Why shouldn't one teacher take the same group of 10 kids from kindergarten through 4th grade? There are a million variations and improvements that could be made by totally scrapping today's system and the one undeniable fact is that no matter what, it couldn't do any worse.

**Tsar Nicholas says:**

**Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 13:42**

Given the fact that left-wing Democrats have controlled Detroit for

several decades I'm actually surprised the rate of illiteracy there *only* is 47%. That seems low to me. I presumed a solid majority would be illiterate. Give them another decade, though, and the Democrats should have it above that magic 50% threshold.

**Reading Not All the Rage in Detroit « Hot Air says:**

**Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 13:51**

[...] Mataconis notes that this is another case of a public school system simply melting down. Per pupil spending in Detroit as of 2008 was \$13,000, which is higher than some people pay for [...]

**Blah says:**

**Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 14:56**

I love how people love to turn this into a political debate, taking any chance they have to rage against "Liberals" or "Democrats" for anything they see wrong in the world. Such was the case against the communists and Jews in 1940s Germany.

It has nothing to do with political affiliation, and everything to do with poverty. Poverty and poor education standards go hand in hand. Poverty brought about by the failing steel and automotive/manufacturing industry. Which was actually a result of Republican controlled government lowering subsidies, deregulating industry and shipping jobs overseas to make more profit. Capitalism hard at work for the people.

I mean, take a look at Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Not exactly states known for their learned population, yet the majority of the state are conservative or Republican.

Massachusetts and California are renowned for their education systems and are probably the most liberal states in the US.

Keep grabbing at straws haters.

**Ripped from the headlines: Volume III (People who bully 7-year old girls with terminal illnesses, suicide by crucifixion and Glenn Beck vs... My Chemical Romance? Let the games begin! P.S. For those of you living in Detroit, I'm sorry you can't read th says:**

**Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 15:35**

[...] reason for this could very well be that I was not born and raised in Detroit.

Don't believe me? Well here's your proof. Yeah, it seems the public school system in Detroit isn't doing a very good job of teaching its [...]

**Environ-Mental says:**

**Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 15:56**

Blah writes, "I love how people love to turn this into a political debate..." and then goes on to rip Conservatives. Oh, and Capitalism.

The New Civility on display! If you disagree with Leftism, you're a "hater".

**jwest says:**

**Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 16:17**

Blah is totally wrong. This is solely about politics.

The Faustian bargain struck between the democrats and the teachers unions is the reason these inner-city kids can't read.

Hang your heads in shame, liberals. You've traded the future of generations of African Americans for money and votes. How do you look at yourselves in the mirror?

**More Proof Public Education Is A Disaster « Truth Before Dishonor says:**

**Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 16:57**

[...] Mataconis notes that this is another case of a public school system simply melting down. Per pupil spending in Detroit as of 2008 was \$13,000, which is higher than some people pay for [...]

**Barb Hartwell says:**

**Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 17:12**

Kids are falling through the cracks every where, the main thing is not the schools fault, many of these kids feel little hope in their future, maybe private schools would help, but if they don't get out of their bad environment little will change. Some kids come home to empty houses or drug and alcoholic parents. Social workers have too large case loads to investigate, for some help comes too little too late. We can blame this all on public schools but you all will be fooling yourselves. I don't want to say let's throw blank checks at these people, because I know that will not work. My suggestion is to keep public schools with an option for private, but the public should not pay for wealthy kids to go to school. There should be evaluations and anyone falling behind must be taken out of class and referred to where they need help. We should do something while they are still young before they become future criminals.

**Southern Hoosier says:**

**Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 17:59**

Detroit is 75.7% Black

**An Interested Party says:**

**Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 20:40**

Forget the term "hater"...but anyone who wants to use this news to

indict liberals shouldn't mind if we use results of the educational systems in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana, among other places, to indict conservatives...

Detroit is 75.7% Black

Oh, do tell what your point is...

**Southern Hoosier says:**

**Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 21:50**

An Interested Party says: Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 20:40  
Oh, do tell what your point is...

The point is, you have to identify the problem before you can solve it. If you have a million dollars to spend on a reading program and 75% of you population is Black, where do you spend the money?

Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana

You just named failing education systems that have a large Black population. You are saying that conservatives are the reason for the failing school system. So rather than using funds to educate Blacks, you would spend money on what you see as the problem, Conservatism.

**An Interested Party says:**

**Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 22:39**

Oh? So you are saying that the problem is black people? What, exactly, is the problem with black people? Hmm?

**Southern Hoosier says:**

**Friday, May 6, 2011 at 03:46**

An Interested Party says: Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 22:39

Oh? So you are saying that the problem is black people? What, exactly, is the problem with black people? Hmm?

You don't really care do you? You are just wanting to pick a fight.

**Southern Hoosier says:**

**Friday, May 6, 2011 at 03:50**

The same thing about Rosa Parks. You really don't care about Black history and what the truth is.

**An Interested Party says:**

**Friday, May 6, 2011 at 13:17**

There's no need to be evasive...if you think the problem lies with black people themselves, you should state your case...

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It Doesn't Matter If  
Torture "Works"**



The monster we created-yes, WE-in the 1980s by ARMING, FUNDING, & TRAINING him in the art of terror agnst the USSR, finally had 2 b put down.

**Bin Laden, The  
Afghan  
Mujahadeen, And  
The CIA: The Myth  
That Needs To Die**



**The Politics Of The  
Death Of Osama bin  
Laden**



**Osama is Dead:  
Long Live Al  
Qaeda?**



**Land Rich and Cash  
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