

MEDIOCRITY

Absence diminishes mediocre passions and increases great ones, as the wind blows out candles and fans fires. La Rochefoucauld

Mediocre minds usually dismiss anything which reaches beyond their own understanding. La Rochefoucauld

The surrender of life is nothing to sinking down into acknowledgement of inferiority. John Caldwell Calhoun

Women have to work twice as hard as men to reach the same level in the hierarchy. Fortunately it is not difficult. (Paraphrased) Charlotte Whitton

Compared to a relatively few outstanding figures, both past and present, the bulk of humanity can be considered mediocre. An illustrative sample of giants are, Buddha, Gandhi, Socrates, Moses, Jesus, Galileo, Newton, Darwin, Archimedes, Euclid, Zola, Beethoven, Einstein, Shakespeare, Moliere, Churchill, Lincoln, Freud, Smith, Kant, King, Marx, Mozart, Planck, Edison, Sun Yat-sen, Da Vinci and Michaelangelo. Of course there are many more, yet overall they comprise a very small percentage of humanity from time immemorial to the present.

I do not mean to suggest that, in general, the populace is without some noteworthy abilities. Yet, unlike a certain well known adage, we were not created equal. I have always asserted that the most important credo of any real democracy is, 'All should be provided, at birth, with equal opportunities to make of themselves what they most want and to develop their talents as fruitfully as possible'. Further, it is axiomatic that there will be a wide range of personages who vary in their physical and mental capabilities: at the lowest rung, an indeterminate number will be mediocre.

I know whereof I speak. I happen to be amongst the most mediocre individuals alive. I state this with neither false pride nor modesty. It is a simple fact that I can illustrate.

- First! My physical appearance was such that I was never noticed by anyone. I was the invisible man. In particular, I was bothered by this because members of the opposite sex always ignored me.

- Second! My physical abilities were just about non-existent. Despite being born and raised in a cold climate I could not last on a pair of skates or skis for more than thirty seconds. My aptitude for any other athletic endeavour, sport or game was equally pitiable. I am the only person I know that was beaten in a game of chess by a five-year old child who only knew how the various chess pieces moved.

- Third! My capacity for conversation was nil. Any time I found myself in a position to make a contribution when I should have, in a chat or a one-on-one about even the most trivial of things,

I became completely tongue-tied. It could be because my linguistic skills were sub-par. As a result, nobody ever noticed me, the perennial wall flower during any social get-together.

- Fourth! Having graduated from secondary school and, as one can imagine, at the bottom of my class, I was completely ignorant of just about anything. I never understood world-wide current affairs so that I never bothered with the news media. Equally, subjects such as the various physical sciences like biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, the social sciences such as sociology, political science, social psychology, anthropology, economics and archaeology, together with the humanities that dealt with music, literature, and the visible arts were a total anathema for me. In other words I did not have any intellectual capacity at all, unless one deems comic books and animated movies and TV cartoons appropriate.

I was very fortunate that, I was well-off. I had inherited a trust fund that provided me with just about anything I desired or needed. I resided in a one bedroom apartment. The only thing of any value was my sixty inch high-definition three dimensional TV. I lived a very quiet and modest life with hardly any social interactions.

Then one day my life changed dramatically even though I did not. There was an unexpected knock on my door. I answered it. Two gentlemen, unknown to me, asked if they could come in and relate something that might be of interest. Both were distinguished in appearance and spoke quite eloquently.

“My name is Dr. Alvin Smythe. I am a Social Psychologist. My friend here is Dr. Thomas Burns. He is an Anthropologist. We are both very well known by our peers in our respective disciplines. We are here to ask you to participate in an experiment to test a hypothesis that we have conjured up. We feel that you are the perfect person to use because of your talents or better still lack thereof. We searched far and wide for someone like you. You are the best example that we were able to find, of a mediocre non-entity that retains a sub-par degree of normalcy. Further, you have no immediate family and since your social life is non-existent you have no friends who might interfere.”

Dr. Burns then continued. “It is quite probable, that given your poor analytical skills you will not comprehend what we wish to achieve. However, I will try to explain in as simple terms as possible. Without altering you in any fundamental manner, we want to sell you as a popular public figure with a huge following. You will not be harmed and, in fact, you might get some pleasure out of this endeavour, probably for the first time in your life. Do you wish to participate?”

I did not have a clue about their experiment. Instinctively, I felt that I had nothing to lose. Without giving it any thought, a capacity which I lacked, I agreed. They started by changing my appearance. They discarded my non-descript wardrobe and clothed me in, I suppose, fashionable attire. I was then taken to a men’s stylish hair salon as well as a tanning emporium. My eye glasses were replaced by contact lenses. Literally, I did not recognize my image when I next looked into a mirror. Was I the same person or was this change going to make a difference to my personality and intelligence? I did not think so but I wondered.

Their next efforts were of far more import. I had to learn how to pronounce words that, factually, I had never used and had no notion of what they meant. While this represented a difficulty I managed. After all, there was nothing wrong with my ears. The real trick was my public appearances. Here advanced technology sufficed. They implanted a very tiny device in my ears. All I had to do was to repeat what I heard from it every time I made an address or speech before a wide audience. These spectators were quite varied. My understanding was that each such group was being told exactly what they wanted to hear, although I did not have a clue what I was telling them. In a rather short period of time I became well known as a sage. I was offered all sorts of important positions by both management and labour. In private conversations with just about anybody I wisely nodded but never uttered a word. Then came a big surprise. I became a candidate for leader of my country and won hands down. Of course it is not I who make any decisions of importance. I am nothing more than a puppet on a string, yet I am enjoying myself immensely. My social life, which now includes a beautiful woman as my wife, has become full of activity, something I now appreciate. However, I remain a mediocrity. I have selected a personal motto. "Mediocrity Over Everything! Mediocrity Uber Alles!"

Jack Basuk

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