

ARE WE HEADING TOWARD IDIOCRACY?

The 2016 U.S. Presidential election prompted renewed discussion of the 2006 comedy film *Idiocracy* that suggests the United States is now heading straight for this dystopia. If so, how can we stop it?

Idiocracy is premised on human evolution into "idiots" due to the decline in reproductive rates and eventual eradication of intelligent people. However, the protagonist himself debunks the biology explanation when, towards the film's end, he recommends not that smart citizens reproduce, but that all people use their brains and stay in school; clearly, this "evolution" is actually the effect of a prolonged devolution of sociopolitical values. While a commentary on systemic inequality is likely not the height of comedy, understanding these dynamics is essential for avoiding a certain *idiocratic* future.

The film explains that "dumb" people stimulated evolution through unwanted pregnancies. As [Guttmacher.org reported](#), unintentional pregnancies can cause "adverse maternal and child health outcomes, such as...negative physical and mental health effects for children." Obviously, these issues could alter society if extended over many generations, especially if, simultaneously, "the greatest minds and resources were focused on conquering hair loss and prolonging erections" [3].

The film provides no explanation for why people knew of, but did not use, birth control pills, so viewers are led to believe that contraceptive use is directly linked to intelligence. Perhaps instead, for example, the cost of contraceptives was not covered under their health insurance; perhaps the nearest place to acquire them was a clinic that was closed for providing abortion services; or perhaps they were never taught how to properly use birth control.

While unintended pregnancies in the US affect women from all echelons of society, they occur at a significantly higher rate in women from low-income and rural backgrounds, particularly those without high school diplomas [1]. Similarly, youth who receive no sex education or abstinence-only teaching tend to be from lower-income families, while those who receive comprehensive sex education are often from higher-income families in more urban areas [2]. Importantly, those who receive comprehensive sex education are 50% less likely



to have an unintended teen pregnancy [2]. Put simply, poor people receive less sex education, which leads to more unintentional pregnancies and thus greater financial and emotional strain for posterity.

Guttmacher.org also reported that publicly funded family planning services, like Planned Parenthood, are responsible for recent decreasing rates of unintended pregnancies, unplanned births, and abortions. In 2014, they said, these rates would have been 68% higher without such organizations. By promoting the value of family planning and allowing organizations such as Planned Parenthood to continue offering their services, particularly in low-income and rural communities, unwanted pregnancies can continue to decline.

Idiocracy is not the result of people with lower intellect; rather, it is an issue of education and inequality. To avoid this future, we must value knowledge, provide resources to plan families, and care for children. Interestingly, the current U.S. Republican agenda works against these provisions, desperately attempting to defund the largest providers of affordable reproductive healthcare and inadvertently affect *idiocracy*.

References

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