The True Anti-Intellectuals

Jeff Jacoby at The Boston Globe writes a wonderful piece to start the year, What experts predict, reality will contradict

> *"I think that you listen too much to the soldiers," wrote the British statesman Lord Salisbury to the viceroy of India in 1877. "No lesson seems to be so deeply inculcated by the experience of life as that you should never trust experts."*
>
> *But the experts themselves — often mistaken, but never in doubt — rarely seem to learn that lesson. Their forecasts will keep flowing in the year ahead, undeterred by their egregious blunders in the one just ended.*
>
> *2016! Was there ever such a year for making donkeys out of seers? An entire column could be filled with nothing but the names of sages and savants, supposedly adept in the ways of politics, who confidently assured everyone that Donald J. Trump couldn't possibly win the Republican presidential nomination, let alone be elected president of the United States.*

HKO

Daniel Kahneman has observed that even the most credentialed and intelligent are prone to errors of probability. The more isolated that our academic establishments get from intellectual diversity the greater this error rate will likely become.

History is filled with predictions of an apocalypse that never happened, and missed the travesties that did. (although WWII was widely predicted.)

In a field of great uncertainty the best bet is a regression to the mean. It's as good a bet as always splitting aces or always doubling on a dealer 6.

The greater the certainty and the greater the credentialism of the predictors, the more likely the regression is to be the preferred bet.

The less tolerant the consensus is of dissent or skepticism, the more likely they are to be wrong.

Addressing the limits of the intellect is not to be anti-intellectual. It is the opposite. Knowing the limits allows wiser application, greater respect, and lower risk. This makes intellectualism more acceptable and trustworthy to a wider populace. It is the blind faith in credentialism and consensus that damages the reputation of the intellectuals. The cynicism and demonization of skepticism and true debate is the height of anti-intellectualism.

Even the wide swath of citizens that find policy and ideology boring can be quite animated at the consequences of these ideas. We would be surprised at the value that the addition of humility would bring to the world of ideas.