As an educational outcome, knowledge should be the easiest to measure. If knowledge is regarded as remembering specific facts, general principles, and conventional wisdom (Bloom, B., et al., 1956), the recall of such information should be more readily demonstrated than other intellectual or cognitive skills. The difficulties of measurement should be minor when compared to those involved in the demonstration of comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Most assuredly, the assessment of knowledge should verify student learning more directly than many current efforts to assess competencies, skills, attitudes, values, and moral development. And if value-added concepts of educational achievement are relevant, the knowledge added by classroom instruction should be the most readily verified of all educational benefits and advantages.

A study funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (Cheney, 1987) and bestselling books by Allan Bloom (1987) and E. H. Hirsch (1987) imply that knowledge should be taken more seriously as a measure of educational effectiveness. Each, in its own way, points to the appalling ignorance of high school and college students, and each insists the knowledge of students is not all that it should be. The current generation of students does not know the history of their country, its literary traditions, and its cultural accomplishments. They know even less about the languages and cultures of other nations and other peoples. It appears that knowledge, like competence, has been tested and found wanting.

TESTING FOR IGNORANCE

The problem, according to the critics, is the mistaken belief of educators that process can be taught and measured in the absence of content. High school and college courses are ridiculed as trying to teach students how-to-think without giving them any substance to think about. The SAT and other tests of ability are
scorned because they do not measure the specific facts and principles that students have been taught in school. By its obsession with verbal reasoning and reading comprehension, the SAT obfuscates in a perverse manner the "ideas that have molded us" and the "ideals that have mattered."

The public schools are much to blame. Courses of content have become courses in homemaking and shopwork. History has deteriorated into social studies, English into language arts, and literature into reading courses where students are taught "to recognize relevant details" and "to vary reading rate with purpose." None of these courses emphasizes the mastery of knowledge or provides lasting symbols or images of the nation's great men and their attainments. Indeed the NEH, recalling no doubt The National Commission on Excellence's *A Nation At Risk*, states that by our loss of historical consciousness, we are doing to ourselves what our enemies would gladly do.

Apparently to prove their point, critics of public education are busily assessing the facts, principles, and wisdom that students do not learn in public classrooms. Widely publicized are the findings that only a small minority of seventeen-year-olds "know" which colony the Puritans settled, when the Civil War was fought, or who Senator Joe McCarthy was. From their courses in literature students have not learned who Don Quixote was, who wrote "Democracy in America," and what Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" was all about. In their science and geography courses students have learned even less. They do not know the names of the Great Lakes, where major rivers are located, and the relative sizes of the globe's four oceans.

In their efforts to document national ignorance, the testmakers have relied heavily on what they believe to be the nation's historical and literary traditions. We are reminded in their reports that McGuffey's Readers included sections from Longfellow, Hawthorne, and Alcott. Other textbooks once included "myths, fables, stories from the distant past, and tales of heroes." Much to the regrets of critics, textbooks are written for mass markets and must serve the confused purposes of statewide adoption committees. Reading books contain no literature and, in the name of science, social studies are ahistorical. To free publishers from misguided educationists, teachers and faculties should assign a lesser role to textbooks and require students to read "real works by real authors." Jefferson is cited with great admiration for saying that he found the reading of classical authors (in the original) to be "a sublime luxury." Translations are "valuable" but great texts are more valuable when read in the original and when "words, thoughts, and feelings pass directly from mind to mind" (Cheney, 1987, *passim*). Thus, the historical and literary biases of critics are much displayed. Concepts of cultural pluralism are missing from their notions of cultural memory and/or literacy, and regional differences in the nation's historical development are ignored entirely.