

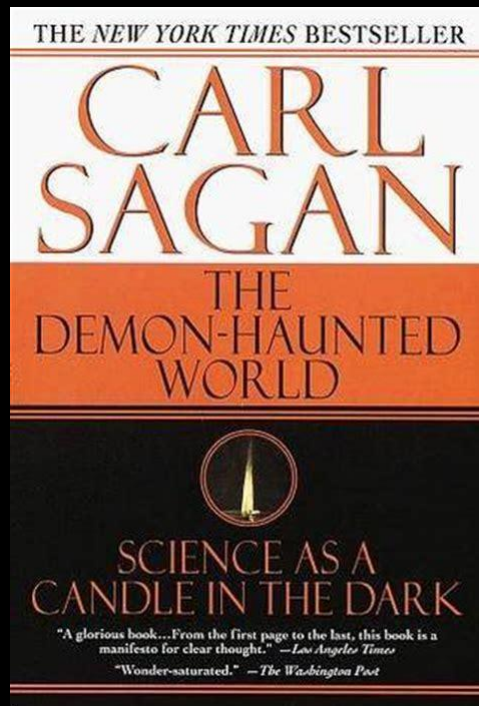
The Tall Poppy Syndrome

I spent 22 years as the resident chemist / molecular modeler at the Molecular & Behavioral Neuroscience Institute at the U of MI School of Medicine. This was a world-class multi-cultural group of ~ 40 researchers, all with multiple degrees and each with our own field of study contributing to the research effort centering around the brain chemistry of learning & memory, drug addiction, mental illness, and pain perception.

One of the most enjoyable features of this multi-ethnic group (every continent but Antarctica was represented) was our non-scientific discussions of world events / books / movies from the view-point of multiple diverse cultures.

While we were discussing the declining state of American education, especially science and math, as described by the then current New York Times best-seller, Carl Sagan's *The Demon-Haunted World*, the Australian in the group said, "American education has become the ultimate example of the 'Tall Poppy Syndrome.'"

Of course, we did not understand the metaphor, so he explained:



1996

A Prize Winning Poppy



**An Australian farmer won the national competition for the best poppy.
The Australian Agricultural Digest wanted to do a story on his prize-winning farm.
The delighted farmer agreed and a photo shoot / interview was arranged.
He and his farm would be the cover story on next quarter's issue.**

The Farmer's Field



When the photographer arrived, he was upset because all of the poppies were of a different height. He explained to the farmer that this would make a poor photo composition for the cover. He asked the farmer for permission to set up a better cover photo quality image. The farmer, seeking fame from a cover story, agreed.

Fixing The Farmer's Field



The photographer took out a chain saw and cut down the taller poppies so that the entire field was at the same height. When he was finished, the photographer explained that the level field of red was the perfect composition for the cover photo.

The Cover Photo



Perfection: Every visible flower is the same height!
This, the Australian said, is what American Education has become:
Chop down the high achievers
Hide the low achievers from view
Set mediocrity as a uniform level of performance

AMERICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM



How some perceive US education

