

THE SCHOOL IN THE UNITED STATES

A Documentary History

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WHO was the first Man ?	Adam.
Who was the first Woman ?	Eve.
Who was the first Murderer ?	Cain.
Who was the first Martyr ?	Abel.
Who was the first Translated ?	Enoch.
Who was the oldest Man ?	Methusalem.
Who built the Ark ?	Noah.
Who was the Patientest Man ?	Job.
Who was the meekest Man ?	Moses.
Who led Israel into Canaan ?	Joshua.
Who was the strongest Man ?	Samson.
Who kill'd Goliath ?	David.
Who was the wisest Man ?	Solomon.
Who was in the Whale's Belly ?	Jonah.
Who saves lost men ?	Jesus Chr. St.
Who is Jesus Christ ?	the Son of God.
Who was the Mother of Christ ?	Mary.
Who betray'd his Master ?	Judas.
Who deny'd his Master ?	Peter.
Who was the first Christian Martyr ?	Stephen.
Who was chief Apostle of the Gentiles ?	Paul.

The Infant's Grace before and after Meat.
Bless me, O Lord, and let my food strengthen
Me to serve thee, for Jesus Christ sake. Amen.
I will e to thank God who gives me Food
I will eat every Day of my Life. Amen.

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND SCHOOLS FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC, 1770-1820

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Introduction

The colonial pattern of schooling was imported from England, as were most colonial institutions. After the American Revolution, citizens of the new nation needed to decide what to keep and what to discard from their English inheritance. Clearly, they intended to keep schools, but they also intended to change them. The *New England Primer's* editorial change, from "Whales in the Sea, God's Voice obey," to "Washington brave his country did save," was symbolic of the changes to come as a new generation sought to create a uniquely American form of education for the young citizens of the new republic.

Thomas Jefferson is certainly the best remembered of the leaders of the revolutionary generation who addressed issues of schooling. The Virginia legislature rejected his proposed "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge" in 1779. However, that document and his subsequent, "Notes on the State of Virginia," written while he was representing American interests in Paris in 1783, represent perhaps the best (and certainly the best known) statement of the demands a democratic revolution places on schooling. When Jefferson argued that the best safeguard against tyranny is "to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large," he articulated the American faith in education as clearly as would ever be done. Of course, students of history recognize the irony that Jefferson's definition of "the people at large" was fairly limited. Jefferson seldom included women in his definition of citizens, and his own role as a slaveholder dramatically undermined all of his democratic rhetoric, including his call for universal schooling. A further irony exists: Although Jefferson was a prime voice for the development of schools for all citizens in Virginia and throughout the new nation, his home state did not adopt any of his recommendations until long after his

death. Indeed, only at the hands of its first post-Civil War government, with the voices of newly freed slaves included in the debate, did Virginia adopt Jefferson's earlier proposals. For all of his failings, however, Jefferson outlined a democratic political vision and system of education in his writings that later generations would embrace far more fervently than the author ever dreamed possible.

Less remembered than Jefferson, but probably more effective in the educational politics of their generation, were two other philosophers of education, Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster. Rush, though he disagreed with much of Jefferson's politics, shared in Jefferson's opinion that a new form of education was needed in the new nation. In a series of lectures that were later published, including "Thoughts Upon the Mode of Education in a Republic" in 1786 and "Thoughts Upon Female Education" in 1787, Rush outlined his version of republican virtues and education, including a specific, if somewhat limited, vision of the educational needs of female citizens.

Noah Webster, best remembered for his dictionary, probably did more to shape the education of the revolutionary era than any of his contemporaries. In his 1790 "On the Education of Youth in America," Webster outlined his goals. In his dictionary, he put these goals into practice, creating a new American form of the language, consciously different from the English of the mother country.

While Jefferson, Rush, Webster, and others wrote about the kind of education the new nation needed, the new political structures began to actually create educational institutions. Each of the newly freed thirteen colonies wrote a new constitution. Many of these earliest constitutions deemed a system of free public schooling essential to democracy. In Massachusetts, for example, John Adams, later to be the second president of the United States, was called on to draft a new constitution in 1780. Adams included in his draft a state mandate for the development of a school system and other means of encouraging a literate citizenry. Adams framed his rationale for schooling in somewhat arcane language, but his basic ideas would be adopted by each succeeding generation of leaders who wanted to expand the role of schooling in the American republic:

Wisdom, and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties; and as these depend on spreading the opportunities and advantages of education in the various parts of the country, and among the different orders of the people . . . [schools should be established] to countenance and inculcate the principles of humanity and general benevolence, public and private charity, industry and frugality, honesty and punctuality in their dealings; sincerity, good-humour, and all social affections, and generous sentiments among the people.

Thus as the new state governments took shape, the school was emerging with a new role: It should not only support literacy, but encourage a quasi-religious morality among citizens.

The federal government also took an early lead in educational issues. While schooling was left to the states, the national government did have a role in maintaining an educated populace. Even before the Constitution was adopted, while still under the Articles of Confederation in 1787, Congress adopted the Northwest Ordinance, setting up a government for the new territories of the northwest (the present states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois). The ordinance included its famous edict that "Religion, Morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the

happiness of mankind, Schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." This link between good government, schools, and morality would continue for long time to come.

Congress and the presidents, from Washington on, also had to address the education of the Indian populations, with whom they were developing a series of treaties. Throughout the nation's history, the government's attitude towards Native American has been ambivalent, but the Civilization Fund Act of 1819 represents one of the earliest efforts to force Indians into the American system of society and government and the use of schools to accomplish the task. Almost without exception, at least until the era of the New Deal in the 1930s, federal policy assumed that schooling for Indians meant schooling that separated them from their cultures—and usually their lands—by making them adopt the culture and ethics of European Americans. Respect for cultural diversity was not on the horizon.

Of course, the issues were more complex than these brief documents indicate. Jefferson understood all too well that women, Native Americans, and African Americans were excluded from the Republic his schools were designed to serve. Who would be included—in the schools and in definitions of democracy—would be debated for the next two hundred years of American history. Attending to the real diversity of the nation's citizens and to the institutionalization of the revolutionary era's dream for schools would be left to later generations. In the field of schooling, the founders' primary contribution was a vision of what they thought schooling should be. Deciding who would be included in this vision, and making it come alive, was left to future generations. It is in the next era—the time of the Common School Movement, between 1820 and 1860—that the issues raised during the revolutionary era first received significant attention, even as schools were becoming a universal part of American society

THOMAS JEFFERSON, A BILL FOR THE MORE GENERAL DIFFUSION OF KNOWLEDGE, 1779

In 1779, in the midst of the American Revolution, a young Thomas Jefferson proposed three interconnected bills to the Virginia legislature: one to make the College of William and Mary more democratic, one proposing a public library system, and the third to create a statewide school system for his newly independent home state. None of the bills passed. Indeed, none of the southern states had a meaningful system of public education in place until after the Civil War. But in his "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge," Jefferson outlined in very clear terms the rationale for a system he believed was appropriate for educating the youth of a new democracy.

Whereas it appeareth that however certain forms of government are better calculated than others to protect individuals in the free exercise of their natural rights, and are at the same time themselves better guarded against degeneracy, yet experience hath shewn, that even under the best forms, those entrusted with power have, in time, and by slow operations, perverted it into tyranny; and it is believed that the most effectual means of preventing this would be, to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large, and more especially to give them knowledge of those facts, which history exhibiteth, that, possessed thereby of the experience of other ages and countries, they may be enabled to know ambition under all its shapes, and prompt to exert their

natural powers to defeat its purposes; And whereas it is generally true that people will be happiest whose laws are best, and are best administered, and that laws will be wisely formed, and honestly administered, in proportion as those who form and administer them are wise and honest; whence it becomes expedient for promoting the publick happiness that those persons, whom nature hath endowed with genius and virtue, should be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens, and that they should be called to that charge without regard to wealth, birth, or other accidental condition or circumstance; but the indigence of the greater number disabling them from so educating, at their own expence, those of their children whom nature hath fitly formed and disposed to become useful instruments for the public, it is better that such should be sought for and educated at the common expence of all, than that the happiness of all should be confided to the weak or wicked:

Be it therefore enacted by the General Assembly, that in every county within this commonwealth, there shall be chosen annually, by the electors qualified to vote for Delegates, three of the most honest and able men of their county, to be called the Aldermen of the county; and that the election of the said Aldermen shall be held at the same time and place, before the same persons, and notified and conducted in the same manner as by law is directed for the annual election of Delegates for the county.

The person before whom such election is holden shall certify to the court of the said county the names of the Aldermen chosen, in order that the same may be entered of record, and shall give notice of their election to the said Aldermen within a fortnight after such election.

The said Aldermen on the first Monday in October, if it be fair, and if not, then on the next fair day, excluding Sunday, shall meet at the court-house of their county, and proceed to divide their said county into hundreds, bounding the same by water courses, mountains, or limits, to be run and marked, if they think necessary, by the county surveyor, and at the county expence, regulating the size of the said hundreds, according to the best of their discretion, so as that they may contain a convenient number of children to make up a school, and be of such convenient size that all the children within each hundred may daily attend the school to be established therein, distinguishing each hundred by a particular name; which division, with the names of the several hundreds, shall be returned to the court of the county and be entered of record, and shall remain unaltered until the increase or decrease of inhabitants shall render an alteration necessary, in the opinion of any succeeding Aldermen, and also in the opinion of the court of the county.

The electors aforesaid residing within every hundred shall meet on the third Monday in October after the first election of Aldermen, at such place, within their hundred, as the said Aldermen shall direct, notice thereof being previously given to them by such person residing within the hundred as the said Aldermen shall require who is hereby enjoined to obey such requisition, on pain of being punished by amercement and imprisonment. The electors being so assembled shall choose the most convenient place within their hundred for building a school-house. If two or more places, having a greater number of votes than any others, shall yet be equal between themselves, the Aldermen, or such of them as are not of the same hundred, on information thereof, shall decide between them. The said Aldermen shall forthwith proceed to have a school-

house built at the said place, and shall see that the same be kept in repair, and, when necessary, that it be rebuilt; but whenever they shall think necessary that it be rebuilt, they shall give notice as before directed, to the electors of the hundred to meet at the said school-house, on such day as they shall appoint, to determine by vote, in the manner before directed, whether it shall be rebuilt at the same, or what other place in the hundred.

At every of these schools shall be taught reading, writing, and common arithmetick, and the books which shall be used therein for instructing the children to read shall be such as will at the same time make them acquainted with Graecian, Roman, English, and American history. At these schools all the free children, male and female, resident within the respective hundred, shall be intitled to receive tuition gratis, for the term of three years, and as much longer, at their private expence, as their parents, guardians, or friends shall think proper.

Over every ten of these schools (or such other number nearest thereto, as the number of hundreds in the county will admit, without fractional divisions) an overseer shall be appointed annually by the Aldermen at their first meeting, eminent for his learning, integrity, and fidelity to the commonwealth, whose business and duty it shall be, from time to time, to appoint a teacher to each school, who shall give assurance of fidelity to the commonwealth, and to remove him as he shall see cause; to visit every school once in every half year at the least; to examine the schollars; see that any general plan of reading and instruction recommended by the visitors of William and Mary College shall be observed; and to superintend the conduct of the teacher in every thing relative to his school.

Every teacher shall receive a salary of _____ by the year, which, with the expences of building and repairing the school-houses, shall be provided in such manner as other county expences are by law directed to be provided and shall also have his diet, lodging, and washing found him, to be levied in like manner, save only that such levy shall be on the inhabitants of each hundred for the board of their own teacher only.

And in order that grammar schools may be rendered convenient to the youth in every part of the commonwealth, Be it farther enacted, that on the first Monday in November, after the first appointment of overseers for the hundred schools, if fair, and if not, then on the next fair day, excluding Sunday, after the hour of one in the afternoon, the said overseers appointed for the schools in the counties of Princess Ann, Norfolk, Nansmond and Isle-of-Wight, shall meet at Nansmond court-house; those for the counties of Southampton, Sussex, Surry, and Prince George, shall meet at Sussex court-house; those for the counties of Brunswick, Mecklenburg, and Lunenburg, shall meet at Lunenburg court-house; those for the counties of Dinwiddie, Amelia, and Chesterfield, shall meet at Chesterfield court-house; those for the counties of Powhatan, Cumberland, Goochland, Henrico, and Hanover, shall meet at Henrico court-house; those for the counties of Prince Edward, Charlotte, and Halifax, shall meet at Charlotte court-house; those for the counties of Henry, Pittsylvania, and Bedford, shall meet at Pittsylvania court-house; those for the counties of Buckingham, Amherst, Albermarle, and Fluvanna, shall meet at Albermarle court-house; those for the counties of Botetourt, Rockbridge, Montgomery, Washington, and Kentucky, shall meet at Botetourt court-house; those for the counties of Augusta, Rockingham, and Greenbrier, shall meet at Augusta court-house; those for the counties of Accomack and Northampton, shall meet