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*The Learning  
of Liberty  
The Educational Ideas of  
the American Founders*

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## 6 • Thomas Jefferson on the Education of Citizens and Leaders

If it was Benjamin Franklin who led the way in articulating the character and curriculum of the new American academy, it was Thomas Jefferson who conveyed most lucidly and compellingly the vision of a system of public schooling for the new republic. While perhaps the most eloquent proponent of the liberal principles on which the country was founded, Jefferson was nevertheless one of the Constitution's less ardent supporters, not only because he wanted a bill of rights, but because he placed relatively little faith in institutional structures to preserve freedom, and took more seriously than most the education and moral temper of the citizens. In a 1787 letter to Madison detailing his assessment of the Constitution, he concludes:

It is my principle that the will of the Majority should always prevail. If they approve the proposed Convention in all it's parts, I shall concur in it cheerfully, in hopes that they will amend it whenever they shall find it work wrong. I think our governments will remain virtuous for many centuries; as long as they are chiefly agricultural. . . . Above all things I hope the education of the common people will be attended to; convinced that on their good sense we may rely with the most security for the preservation of a due degree of liberty.<sup>1</sup>

Earlier, when the struggle to separate from England was only beginning, Jefferson was leading the work of a committee appointed by the Virginia legislature to revise the state's laws and adapt them to the spirit and conditions of a republic; the keystone of his proposed revision was a plan for a comprehensive system of schools and academies for the state. Eventually reaching the floor as the 1779 Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge, this paper is probably Jefferson's most important writing on education.<sup>2</sup> Although it was aimed at the immediate needs of Virginia, the bill, like all of Jefferson's educational efforts, was

also intended to serve as a model for the rest of the country. With its well-reasoned arguments and carefully structured plan, it stands as a permanent testimony to the clarity and subtlety of Jefferson's political theorizing, and as a text in political theory, it elicits and rewards the closest scrutiny.

### *Jefferson's Theory of Civic Education*

In classic Jeffersonian fashion, the bill opens with a preamble that grounds the case for public schooling on fundamental political principles. In this way Jefferson sought to educate the legislature even as he called on it to champion education. If the bill had been passed, the preamble, taken together with the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Declaration of Rights (which are manifestly presupposed in the immediate background) would have stood as the introduction, for all citizens, to republican education and its place in authentic republican government. The preamble sums up clearly the political or civic educational goals that were uppermost in Jefferson's mind and, more nebulously, in the minds of most other Founders.

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 the 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 the wicked.

Jefferson speaks first and foremost of the enlightenment of the mass of the citizenry, so as to instill in them not only an awareness of their individual rights but also a shrewd vigilance against tyranny. It is assumed that legitimate government has its basis in the protection of individuals' natural rights, and this is by implication the primary lesson of civics. As Jefferson later wrote to Joseph Cabell, his friend and collaborator in the campaign for public education, "Equal right . . . is the polar star to be followed."<sup>4</sup> But the threat to natural rights from government, or from "ambition" perverting government, is the second and most urgent lesson. Education in "forms of government," issuing in an appreciative understanding of those institutions that check and balance while yet enabling government, is necessary; but the stress is on the limited safety of even the "best forms," and hence the decisive importance of a spirit of informed watchfulness in the populace at large. In Jefferson's view, that spirit cannot be presumed—as the *Federalist Papers* seems to imply—but must be cultivated and its grounds carefully articulated.

Jefferson therefore delineates with great care the rather complex knowledge or awareness of political theory that is to be the goal of popular education. The end of government is the securing of natural rights that inhere in human beings as individuals, yet the final shield of these rights is the "natural powers" that characterize not individuals as such but individuals gathered in "the people at large." The enlightenment at which education aims is therefore an enlightenment of the people as a whole, or of the individuals gathered into a people. To quote the Declaration, "Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the *People* to alter or abolish it." Yet "the People," though it possesses "natural powers" once it is formed, is never said to be itself a "natural" entity or to possess natural rights above and beyond the rights of the individuals who constitute the people. Jefferson never suggests that the people have an organic unity, or that the people somehow possess one mind or spirit or "general will"; to enlighten the people is to enlighten "their minds," not "its mind." As Jefferson sums up the major goal of his educational proposals in 1810, it is "to enable every man to judge for himself what will secure or endanger his freedom."<sup>5</sup> "The people's" is, then, created by unanimous contractual consent of naturally independent individuals, whose rights as individuals remain the only basic rights and whose consensual combination into a people governed by majority rule never transcends the moral primacy of their distinctive individuality. Taken one by one, the individuals are practically powerless in

the face of government and therefore lack the right to alter or overthrow government—for no one has a right to attempt what is impossible or mad. But once the individuals are made aware of the possibility of deliberately combining their powers, the united individuals can discover "natural powers"—the powers in collectivity governed by the principle of majority rule—that can alter or overthrow government and that therefore allow the emergence of the natural right to alter or to overthrow government.

Institutions are of great importance, but the natural powers of the people constitute the bedrock of healthy society. Yet paradoxically, to become truly effective, these natural powers require conventional law, devised by a superior and unusual individual, that establishes an educational system for the leader's natural inferiors. Only in retrospect, as it were, and under proper guidance, do the people become aware of what they essentially seek and need and hence ought to claim. This first part of the preamble breathes the radical but paradoxically theoretical spirit of Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, with its famous reaching on the right to revolution inherent in the people—i.e., the majority—as a result of their natural rights as individuals, which are known to the people only through the teaching of the philosopher Locke.<sup>6</sup>

Locke never proposes a system of public education, however, and he seems to suppose that the written words of philosophy or of the followers and gentlemen supporters of philosophy will suffice to awaken the mass of men to their natural condition and to the rational behavior in society dictated by that awareness. In addition, Locke has very little to say, even in his treatise on education, about the specific recruitment or training of political leaders who would promulgate his message. Jefferson not only sees government as having an essential role to play in educating the governed to guard against the misuse of government; he sees as the second vital purpose of public education the cultivation, in a spirit reminiscent of the classical tradition, of the "natural aristocracy." As he writes later to John Adams:

The natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature, for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society. And indeed it would have been inconsistent in creation to have formed man for the social state, and not to have provided virtue and wisdom enough to manage the concerns of the society. May we not even say that that form of government is the best which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of these natural aristoi into the offices of government?<sup>7</sup>

Locke's teaching on the radically individualistic and disconnected, not to say antagonistic, state of nature implies that there is no natural political ordering of mankind and no person who is by nature intended to exercise civil rule over an-

other. Hence, it is necessary to maintain ceaseless vigilance as regards those in power, who will inevitably and naturally use the power for their own advantage, and will do so at the expense of others unless they are checked and channeled by the proper rewards and punishments. Jefferson in the preamble does not contradict any of this teaching, but he supplements it with the observation that a few are by "nature" endowed with politically relevant superior capacities for rule, and that these individuals must be recognized and drawn into service in a republic.

One might at first suppose that in the letter to Adams, Jefferson verges on suggesting that some men are by nature intended to rule others. But not only does Jefferson argue that "the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God." He also insists that all political rule, if legitimate, is a form of service—of dedication to guarding the "sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens." The unalienable natural right to liberty would be violated the moment anyone was said to be by nature intended for such servitude: "If were contrary to feeling, and indeed ridiculous to suppose that a man had less rights in himself than one of his neighbors, or indeed all of them put together. This would be slavery, and not that liberty which the [Virginia] bill of rights has made inviolable, and for the preservation of which our government has been charged. . . . [I] think public service and private misery inseparably bound together." Accordingly, among his own relations and in his advice to aspiring young statesmen, he insists on the superiority of the pleasures of the private over the duties of the public life.<sup>7</sup>

Now the virtues of the natural *aristoi* would presumably include a deep patriotism or concern for one's fellowmen, qualities to which the electorate naturally pays special attention in choosing its leaders. Jefferson does seem to trust that nature has endowed mankind as a whole with enough virtue—or, as he writes elsewhere, a strong enough moral sense—to meet the requirements of life in civil society. But as we shall see, it is not clear how far this moral sense may actually go in inducing individuals to sacrifice their own interests.<sup>8</sup> Given Jefferson's unappealing portrait of the political life, it remains a question whether decent men with the wisdom truly to understand what is good for themselves have sufficient motives to devote themselves to politics. Jefferson was always distrustful of the motives of those in power, convinced that any elite, even one based on personal merit, must be watched closely. Nor did he share the classical notion that a proper education, moral and religious, of the most gifted is the best armor against their corruption. After all, on Jefferson's principles, are not the truly wise likely to avoid politics, and does not Jefferson come close to suggesting that those who are gifted and also devoted to politics are necessarily somehow unhealthy or misguided? It is the education of the masses, rather than the educa-

tion of the few, that is the only effective safeguard against the corruption, by temptations to exploitation, of the gifted minority who become political leaders. Not the fostering of the rare virtues of the few, but the instilling of restless vigilance and wariness in the many, even with all their mistaken judgments and lack of information or political experience, is the best guarantee of the morality of the few.

One of the principal aims of the education of the few, then, is to awaken in them a self-knowledge that will allow them to recognize their own dependence, for moral decency or dignity, and in the long run for liberty and security, on the checking and wary watchfulness of the less wise majority of their fellow citizens. The fate that awaits an elite that fails to grasp its own need to be watched by the people was brought home to Jefferson with special force during his service as ambassador to France (1784-1789), when he saw such an untrammelled ruling class firsthand. As he argues in a letter written from Paris during this period:

The people are the only censors of their governors; and even their errors will tend to keep these to the true principles of their institution. To punish these errors too severely would be to suppress the only safeguard of the public liberty. The way to prevent these irregular interpositions of the people, is to give them full information of their affairs through the channel of the public papers, and to contrive that those papers should penetrate the whole mass of the people. The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers, and be capable of reading them. I am convinced that those societies (as the Indians) which live without government enjoy in their general mass an infinitely greater degree of happiness than those who live under European governments. Among the former, public opinion is in the place of law, and restrains morals as powerfully as laws ever did any where. Among the latter, under pretence of governing, they have divided their nations into two classes, wolves and sheep. I do not exaggerate. This is a true picture of Europe. Cherish, therefore, the spirit of our people, and keep alive their attention. Do not be too severe upon their errors, but reclaim them by enlightening them. If once they become inattentive to the public affairs, you and I, and Congress, and Assemblies, Judges, and Governors, shall all become wolves. It seems to be the law of our general nature, in spite of individual exceptions; and experience declares that man is the only animal which devours his own kind; for I can apply no milder term to the governments of Europe, and to the general prey of the rich on the poor.<sup>9</sup>

Jefferson brings to the fore and lays unqualified stress on a feature of republican theory that the classical philosophers keep in the background and hedge in with qualifications. In elaborating his theory of democracy at its best and worst, Aristotle observes that "with regard to equality and justice, though it is very difficult to discover the truth in these matters, it is nonetheless easier to hit upon it than it is to win over those who have the power to take advantage of others; for it is always the case that the weaker people seek equality and justice, while the stronger don't give these things a thought." From this Aristotle draws the conclusion that "to be hemmed in, and not to be able to do whatever one opines, is advantageous; for the capacity to do whatever one wishes does not adequately keep in check what is base in every human being." Yet Aristotle does not for a moment fall into the delusion of supposing that just because the weak always seek justice, while the strong always ignore it, the weak are thereby more noble or disinterested in their attachment to justice than are the strong. The weak always seek justice because it is always in their interest to do so. The populace, or the mass of the weaker citizens, is characterized by its own sorts of oppressive lusts and vices, and needs in turn to be hemmed in by the officeholders and the laws. Aristotle therefore recommends a democracy in which access to office is restricted to the property but officeholders are selected and audited by the populace.<sup>10</sup>

This other dimension, neglected by Jefferson, of the problem of a judiciously tempered democracy was more evident to Jefferson's critics among the Founders. They warned of the dangers in directing the core of public education toward the inculcation of a suspiciously vigilant stance toward authority; they argued that Jefferson, perhaps partly out of his misguided enthusiasm for the French Revolution, was insufficiently aware of these dangers. In the *Federalist Papers*, Madison criticizes Jefferson's recommendation for new conventions to correct deficiencies in the Constitution: "Frequent appeals would, in a great measure, deprive the government of that veneration which time bestows on everything, and without which perhaps the wisest and freest governments would not possess the requisite stability." For the same reason, he opposes Jefferson's radical proposal that, because "the earth belongs to the living," no law should be in force for more than a generation unless expressly renewed.<sup>11</sup>

But Alexander Hamilton provides the most clearly contrasting alternative to Jefferson's position. Before and during the revolutionary war, Hamilton took a courageous stand in defense of the civil rights of unpopular minorities, which in his time were chiefly Tories. As a champion of the freedom of the press, he defended a Tory printer whose shop had become the target of mob fury in 1775. On that occasion he wrote:

In times of such commotion as the present, while the passions of men are worked up to an uncommon pitch, there is great danger of fatal extremes.

The same state of the passions which fits the multitude, who have not a sufficient stock of reason and knowledge to guide them, for opposition to tyranny and oppression, very naturally leads them to a contempt and disregard of all authority. The due medium is hardly to be found among the more intelligent; it is almost impossible among the unthinking populace. When the minds of these are loosened from their attachment to ancient establishments and courses, they seem to grow giddy and are apt more or less to run into anarchy.<sup>12</sup>

The remedy Hamilton calls for is firm adherence by the leaders to the rule of law, upholding rights when it is unpopular to do so and resisting the temptation to act without proper authority. Hamilton hated unchecked majority action precisely because he loved liberty and saw liberty's foundation in the rule of law. To minimize oppressive mob or moblike behavior and secure individual liberty, Hamilton sought to remove government from the close control of the people, while keeping it ultimately dependent on them.

Characteristically, it is George Washington who harmonizes the Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian views on the proper place of public vigilance. In his First Annual Message to Congress, he gives an admirably brief and incisive summary of the civic goal of popular education in a republic, focusing on the problem of balancing vigilance with self-control and forbearance.

There is nothing which can better deserve your patronage, than the promotion of Science and Literature. Knowledge is, in every country, the surest basis of public happiness. In one in which the measures of Government receive their impression so immediately from the sense of the Community as in ours it is proportionably essential. To the security of a free Constitution it contributes in various ways: By convincing those who are entrusted with the public administration, that every valuable end of Government is best answered by the enlightened confidence of the people: and by teaching the people themselves to know and to value their own rights; to discern and provide against invasions of them; to distinguish between oppression and the necessary exercise of lawful authority; between burthens proceeding from a disregard to their convenience and those resulting from the inevitable exigencies of Society; to discriminate the spirit of Liberty from that of licentiousness—cherishing the first, avoiding the last; and uniting a speedy, but temperate vigilance against encroachments, with an inviolable respect to the Laws.<sup>13</sup>

Washington's statement compels us to note with unease the absence, in Jefferson's preamble, of any reference to the virtues of obedience to and reverence for

law. It is a high level of political wisdom that Washington wants to instill in the nation's citizens. Such a moderate, discriminating spirit requires that the people understand well both human nature and the nature of politics. They must comprehend the basis of the rights they cherish, so that they can judge how far individual rights extend and where government can justly assert the rights of the community in limiting individual freedom. In calling for counterweights to popular vigilance, Washington has no disagreement with what we will see to be Jefferson's belief in the value of history in the curriculum; but Washington would use history to teach perhaps deeper lessons about the need for proud obedience, moderation, and sober expectations in politics, as well as the need for resistance to oppression.

#### *Jefferson's System of Education: Elementary Schools*

Because Jefferson relied mainly on the common people to preserve both the country's liberty and the integrity of its leaders, he placed special emphasis on the education of the masses through public elementary schools. This concern was accompanied by a lifelong interest in higher education. Jefferson's 1779 school bill, and a similar measure he introduced in 1817, both included plans for a state university to train the gifted for leadership in all fields. In the event, the only portion of his design that saw fruition in his lifetime was the University of Virginia, the apex of the system and therefore its most constricted element. Jefferson was delighted to succeed in establishing the university, and he welcomed the prospect of being remembered as its founder; but, given the importance of popular enlightenment in the preamble to his initial bill, it is not surprising to find that for Jefferson the most critical aspect of the system always remained not the highest but the lowest level of education. As he wrote late in life to Joseph Cabell, in the midst of the eventually successful struggle to establish the University of Virginia: "Were it necessary to give up either the Primaries or the University, I would rather abandon the last, because it is safer to have a whole people respectably enlightened, than a few in a high state of science, and the many in ignorance. This last is the most dangerous state in which a nation can be."<sup>14</sup>

Jefferson's Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge envisages primary schools in every village or ward of the state, where "all the free children, male and female, resident within the respective hundred, shall be entitled to receive tuition gratis, for the term of three years, and as much longer, at their private expense, as their parents, guardians, or friends shall think proper." The curriculum is to consist of reading, writing, arithmetic, and history. Literacy is important for individuals' economic independence, but it is crucial as a means

of participating in politics. It is indicative of Jefferson's seriousness in this regard that his 1817 proposal includes a provision that "no person unborn or under the age of twelve years at the passing of this act, and who is *compos mentis*, shall, after the age of fifteen years, be a citizen of this commonwealth until he or she can read readily in some tongue, native or acquired." Jefferson entertained the idea of making education compulsory, but he preferred this restriction on the franchise as less coercive and more suited to the spirit of the people.

A question of some doubt might be raised on the latter part of this section as to the rights and duties of society toward its members, infant and adult. Is it a right or a duty in society to take care of their infant members in opposition to the will of the parent? How far does this right and duty extend?—to guard the life of the infant, his property, his instruction, his morals? The Roman father was supreme in all these; we draw a line, but where?—public sentiment does not seem to have traced it precisely. Nor is it necessary in the present case. It is better to tolerate the rare instance of a parent refusing to let his child be educated, than to shock the common feelings and ideas by the forcible transportation and education of the infant against the will of the father. What is proposed here is to remove the objection of expense, by offering education gratis, and to strengthen parental excitement by the disfranchisement of his child while uneducated. Society has certainly a right to disavow him whom they offer, and are not permitted to qualify for the duties of a citizen. If we do not force instruction, let us at least strengthen the motives to receive it when offered.<sup>15</sup>

It is not, however, a sufficient guarantee of liberty that children be taught to read. They must acquire habits of choosing useful and edifying books, and habits of attending thoughtfully to public affairs. Partly because he conceives the fundamental purpose of the schools to be laying "the principle foundation of future order," Jefferson rejects the time-honored practice of using the Bible to teach children to read "at an age when," as he puts it, "their judgments are not sufficiently matured for religious enquiries." Most Christian parents, following the biblical injunction to "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it," taught biblical readings and catechisms before the child was old enough to understand them fully, so that the habit of faith might take deep root and the child would not be left with only his fallible reason to guide him. Locke advocates teaching only as much of the Bible as is suited to a child's interest and capacity—such as the stories of Joseph and David—but Jefferson prefers to wait until the powers of judgment are developed before introducing the Bible at all. He recommends that a young person should first have some acquaintance with history and science before confronting the miraculous

claims of the Old and New Testaments. Jefferson maintains that the speeches of Jesus contain sublime moral truths, but argues that these teachings have been so mutilated and disfigured in transmission, so interlaced with the sophistical subtleties of his followers, that the whole is far beyond a child's capacity to evaluate fairly. Such an evaluation he does encourage in his seventeen-year-old nephew Peter Carr, whom he enjoins to "fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion." But in the schools, especially the primary schools, Jefferson's desire to minimize religious teaching extends (in his 1817 version of the school bill) to prohibiting ministers of the gospel from serving as "visitors" to the schools and forbidding teachers to give any religious instruction that is contrary to the beliefs of any sect—in effect limiting religious teaching to the most simple tenets of deism.<sup>16</sup>

What reading material, then, does Jefferson consider most suitable for children? Both to train the judgment and to impart the knowledge most essential for citizens, he proposes that the books used to teach reading "shall be such as will at the same time make them acquainted with Graecian, Roman, English, and American history." These volumes will give examples not only of republics in full flower but of republics being subverted, corrupted, and overthrown. They will acquaint students with the sources of their own political tradition and with the rights and liberties for which their revolutionary leaders fought. Above all, by availing the people of "the experience of other times and other nations," history "will qualify them as judges of the actions and designs of men; it will enable them to know ambition under every disguise it may assume; and knowing it, to defeat its views."<sup>17</sup>

Yet Jefferson knew that there was always a cost in getting one's knowledge secondhand: specifically, the biases and distortions that are especially dangerous to unformed minds. To minimize these distortions, he recommended the study as much as possible of primary sources—and of authors of a liberal or republican outlook. Jefferson worried a great deal about what he saw as the unfairness of John Marshall's *Life of Washington*, and he sought to persuade Joel Barlow to write a Republican history of the period to answer it. He was likewise chary of David Hume's *History of England*, which he urged should be among the last histories of England to be read: "If first read, Hume makes an English Tory, from whence it is an easy step to American Toryism." Hence Jefferson advised that even the university use a bowdlerized version. At times he expressed despair at ever getting to the truth in history, when he saw how much falsehood was being written about his own country even by men close to the facts and how readily it was believed abroad. Yet he continued to recommend the study of history, under the guidance of soundly republican teachers, and in his 1817 school bill, he paired history with geography as a subject particularly appropriate for the children of a diverse and growing nation.<sup>18</sup>

Over time, however, there appeared a certain change in Jefferson's way of describing the proper aims and course of study for the elementary schools. Especially when one compares his 1779 school bill to Franklin's educational writings, one cannot help but be struck by how highly charged is its political tenor, and how correspondingly silent it is about vocational or professional education. In 1818, when Jefferson headed a commission that met at Rockfish Gap to lay the groundwork for the University of Virginia, he took the opportunity to restate his educational aims for primary and secondary education as well. In the report he drafted, Jefferson spoke more specifically about elementary schooling, in terms that brought to the fore its vocational aspects. The goals of elementary education as he conceived them were:

To give to every citizen the information he needs for the transaction of his own business;  
 To enable him to calculate for himself, and to express and preserve his ideas, his contracts and accounts, in writing;  
 To improve, by reading, his morals and faculties;  
 To understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge with competence the functions confided to him by either;  
 To know his rights; to exercise with order and justice those he retains, to choose with discretion the fiduciary of those he delegates; and to notice their conduct with diligence, with candor, and judgment;  
 And, in general, to observe with intelligence and faithfulness all the social relations under which he shall be placed.<sup>19</sup>

The fact that Jefferson dropped the original preamble in his revised education bill of 1817 and in this 1818 report substituted a less strictly political description of the aims of education, gives pause. Could Jefferson have regarded the first statement as too political, a product of the noble but extreme fervor of the Revolution? Or did he simply sense a practical need, two generations after the Revolution, to adjust his rhetoric to the temper of a Virginia grown less generous and less civic-spirited? It seems likely that, in the course of his unsuccessful struggle for public education, Jefferson was chastened by the discovery that stinginess, religious and regional parochialism, envy, and plain sloth in the vast majority were all but intractable obstacles to what he saw as the obvious need to create new republican educational institutions.

Nevertheless, Jefferson's 1818 summary of the aims of elementary education is more than an accommodation to grim political realities. In this carefully articulated statement, Jefferson's stated aims ascend from the minimally required economic knowledge, to a more capacious economic self-reliance (rooted in arithmetic and literacy), to a personal enrichment, and thence to civic duty,

culminating finally in the understanding of individual rights and the virtues needed for the proper exercise and defense of those rights; Jefferson then concludes with a summary stressing the social character of human existence. This progression of goals helps illuminate the connection between economic self-reliance and liberty that lies at the heart of Jeffersonian republicanism. Jefferson's observations of Europe and the United States convinced him that only independent-minded, self-reliant people could make good citizens in a liberal republic. Those who were poor and dependent, unaccustomed to thinking or acting for themselves, could only become the pawns of the rich and powerful, or else break loose as a destructive mob.<sup>20</sup> Jefferson wanted the majority of citizens to support themselves as competent managers of their own farms or businesses, because this was equally good for prosperity, for individual dignity, and for public liberty. Thus even the most apparently private aspects of education, such as the basic mathematics needed to keep one's accounts, have a political function also, in promoting the habits of prudence and forethought that successful democracy requires. Perhaps by 1818 Jefferson saw that there was more work to be done in laying the vocational and economic foundation for liberty, and in teaching citizens the connection between their own well-being and the political health of the country, than he had hitherto realized.

This same effort to encourage self-reliance is even more evident in the device Jefferson proposed for organizing elementary schools in Virginia: the establishment of "wards" or "hundreds" throughout the state. Jefferson's plan was to divide every county into smaller wards, each of which would have enough men for one company of the militia and enough children for one school. Each section would be in effect "a little republic within the republic of the country." It would first be called together to build a schoolhouse and appoint a school board. Jefferson hoped that eventually each ward might also establish its own police, provide juries and a judge for the county court, and take responsibility for warrants, roads, and provisions for the poor. "Divide the counties into wards," he wrote. "Begin them only for a single purpose; they will soon show for what others they are the best instruments." These wards or hundreds were clearly modeled in part after the New England townships that Jefferson admired (but also found alarmingly effective in opposing his policies as president). By using the old English term *hundred*, Jefferson also harks back to the Anglo-Saxon tradition of local self-government, later appealed to by Whigs as the source of English liberties in their struggle against what they regarded as the encroachments of the monarchy after the Norman Conquest. Jefferson found, in this rural model of self-government, an inspiration more congenial to American conditions than that offered by the urban, martial, and largely aristocratic republics of Greece and Rome. He never succeeded in implementing this part of his plan, but his defense of it was unflagging. In 1814 he wrote that ward government and educa-

tion were two subjects he would try to further as long as he lived: "I consider the continuance of representative government as absolutely hanging on these two hooks."<sup>21</sup>

Why was this project of political subdivision so necessary when all of these functions were or could be performed adequately at the county level? Jefferson contends, first of all, that decentralization is the key to safe government.

What has destroyed liberty and the rights of man in every government which has ever existed under the sun? The generalizing and concentrating all cares and powers into one body. . . . Where every man is a sharer in the direction of his ward-republic, or of some of the higher ones, and feels that he is a participator in the government of affairs, not merely at an election one day in the year, but every day; when there shall not be a man in the State who will not be a member of some one of its councils, great or small, he will let the heart be torn out of his body sooner than his powers be wrested from him by a Caesar or a Bonaparte.<sup>22</sup>

But Jefferson does not even concede that this arrangement means sacrificing wise and efficient management for the sake of security against oppression, so great is his confidence in the abilities of ordinary people to handle serious matters. "My partiality for that division" into wards, he writes to Governor Nicholas in 1816, "is not founded in views of education solely, but *infinitely more as the means of a better administration of our government*, and the eternal preservation of its republican principles" (italics added). Or as he writes to Cabell, "If it is believed that these elementary schools will be better managed by the governor and council . . . than by the parents within each ward, it is a belief against all experience. Try the principle one step further, and . . . commit to the governor and council the management of all our farms, our mills, and merchants' stores."<sup>23</sup> The safest and most effective government comes from dividing responsibility, giving to each body the functions it is competent to perform and delegating as little as possible to the central authorities, who must be elected and held responsible.

But Jefferson believed in the decentralization of power for yet another reason, which includes safety and competence but goes beyond them. The autonomy that he strove to promote was, for him, utterly essential to human freedom and dignity. Although Jefferson described political service as drudgery and was always suspicious of men who had an ambition to rule, he had nothing but respect for the public-spiritedness that shows itself in local initiative and collective self-reliance. His goal in allocating maximum powers to the smallest local bodies is not merely to frustrate schemes for tyranny but to change the lives of individuals, involving all citizens in public affairs and so expand their lives and visions. Thus Jefferson's



school bills are designed to serve a double purpose: teaching literacy and history to the children through the schools and teaching civic-mindedness and collective self-reliance to the adults through the wards. This same desire to maximize free and rational self-direction lies behind Jefferson's defense of state sovereignty and of a sharply limited federal government with only expressly delegated powers, as articulated in his Kentucky Resolutions of 1798. It is likewise the philosophy that prompted him, when asked to give some practical rules for daily life to a young namesake, to emphasize self-discipline and self-reliance and to put high on the list the maxim, "Never trouble another for what you can do yourself."<sup>24</sup> That advice he might just as easily have given to a fellow planter, a town, or a state government. Such independence at every level was good not only because it brought safety but because it would give the new nation and its citizens a greater dignity, a fuller happiness, and the capacity for unfeathered advancement.

### *The Academies*

In the same commission report in which Jefferson spells out his more practical goals for elementary education, he elaborates the aims that should govern the training of the few destined for positions of leadership in society.

To form the statesmen, legislators and judges, on whom public prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend;

To expound the principles and structure of government, the laws which regulate the intercourse of nations, those formed municipally for our own government, and a sound spirit of legislation, which, banishing all arbitrary and unnecessary restraint on individual action, shall leave us free to do whatever does not violate the equal rights of another;

To harmonize and promote the interests of agriculture, manufactures and commerce, and by well informed views of political economy to give a free scope to the public industry;

To develop the reasoning faculties of our youth, enlarge their minds, cultivate their morals, and instill into them the precepts of virtue and order; To enlighten them with mathematical and physical sciences, which advance the arts, and administer to the health, the subsistence, and comforts of human life;

And, generally, to form them to habits of reflection and correct action, rendering them examples of virtue to others, and of happiness within themselves.

These objectives were to be fully attained only at the university, but the groundwork for them must be laid at the intermediate level of education—the regional

grammar schools or colleges, whose curriculum was to be primarily classical. Some such academies were already scattered throughout Virginia; they were woefully uneven in quality and served almost exclusively the sons of well-to-do planters. Jefferson's plan was to establish better ones under state auspices, "one within a day's ride of every man's door," and to open them to all who could afford to pay as well as to a small number of promising students who could not.<sup>25</sup>

This project of winnowing out talent was dear to Jefferson's heart and a key part of his plan to disestablish what he called the "artificial aristocracy" that rested only on wealth and birth. Through revised laws of inheritance and broader access to education, Jefferson hoped to bring more power to the "natural aristocracy" of virtues and talents, so that it might be able to "defeat the competition of wealth and birth for public trusts." Jefferson's rather exaggerated expectations for a fluid class structure are seen in a letter to Cabell in which he explains why the rich should be willing to bear a major part of the cost of maintaining ward schools: when their own descendants become poor, which in the absence of a law of primogeniture "they generally do within three generations," they too will benefit from free public education.<sup>26</sup>

In order to help society's most worthy members rise to the top as the fortunes of their unenterprising cousins sink, Jefferson's proposals stipulate that two or more boys from the primary schools in each collegiate district should be chosen for their "promising genius and disposition" and sent on to the grammar school at public expense, with a smaller number of these to be continued at the university. "By this means," he explains in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, "the best geniuses will be raked from the rubbish annually." Accommodating to the parsimony he had discovered in the Virginia public, his later plans provide for considerably fewer students to be schooled at public expense. But surely Jefferson also counted on these scholarships to excite emulation and interest in education that would spread their benefit beyond their immediate recipients. Looking for ways to reward merit at minimal cost, he added to his 1817 Bill for the Establishment of District Colleges and a University a clause calling on the academies' visitors to examine the students and award honors that might "encourage or excite to industry and emulation." And Jefferson was always hopeful that as the ideas of free schools and scholarships for advanced study gained ground, others would build upon any slender beginnings that he could make.<sup>27</sup>

Despite his love of progress and his constant concern with utility in education, Jefferson expected the core of the curriculum at the academies to remain Latin and Greek. To this extent he was consciously more conservative than Franklin. As he argues in *Notes on the State of Virginia*:

The learning Greek and Latin, I am told, is going into disuse in Europe. I know not what their manners and occupations may call for: but it would

be very ill-judged in us to follow their example in this instance. There is a certain period of life, say from eight to fifteen or sixteen years of age, when the mind, like the body, is not yet firm enough for laborious and close operations. If applied to such, it falls an early victim to premature exertion; exhibiting indeed at first, in these young and tender subjects, the flattering appearance of their being men while they are yet children, but ending in reducing them to be children when they should be men. The memory is then most susceptible and tenacious of impressions; and the learning of languages being chiefly a work of memory, it seems precisely fitted to the powers of this period, which is long enough too for acquiring the most useful languages ancient and modern. I do not pretend that language is science. It is only an instrument for the attainment of science. But that time is not lost which is employed in providing tools for future operation: more especially as in this case the books put into the hands of the youth for this purpose may be such as will at the same time impress their minds with useful facts and good principles.

Elsewhere, Jefferson defends the study of classical languages for their contribution to a clear and pure English style, for the "elegant luxury" of "reading the Greek and Roman Authors in all the beauties of their originals"—an especially charming and comforting recreation for one's declining years, he observes—and for "the stores of real science deposited and transmitted us in these languages." When he describes classical reading as a luxury, he does not mean to suggest that there is anything frivolous in it but, rather, that it is one of the pleasures that make a private and leisured life sublimely enjoyable. At the threshold of old age, Jefferson was to write, "I thank on my knees him who directed my early education, for having put into my possession this rich source of delight, and would not exchange it for anything I could then have acquired, and have not since acquired."<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, on one occasion Jefferson seems to have shown great impatience with the classical grammar-school education, scoffing at

the petty *academies*, as they call themselves, which are starting up in every neighborhood, and where one or two men, possessing Latin, and sometimes Greek, a knowledge of the globes, and the first six books of Euclid, imagine and communicate this as the sum of science. They commit their pupils to the theatre of the world with just taste enough of learning to be alienated from industrious pursuits, and not enough to do service in the ranks of science.<sup>29</sup>

Did Jefferson at some point change his mind and determine that the traditional curriculum was useless or even dangerous? While he always conceded that a classical education was not for everyone, his quarrel here seems to have been with the spirit of snobbery without excellence, which regards a modicum of knowledge as an end in itself rather than as a foundation for proficiency in the sciences that will be truly useful. Jefferson unapologetically defended what he called luxury in learning, yet he always believed that this luxury should take its place in a life that strove to be of service to others, and in which the learned languages would also create a foundation for other, more practical studies, preferably at the university.

In order to insure that students would learn some of what is useful as well as beautiful and, just as importantly, would learn to seek applications for their knowledge, Jefferson added several modern subjects to the traditional academy fare of Latin, Greek, and mathematics. His 1779 bill added only English grammar, but his proposals of 1817 and 1818 included other modern languages, as well as geography, surveying, and navigation. Indeed, in an 1814 letter to Peter Carr, Jefferson described a "college" curriculum that would begin where the primary schools left off and encompass ancient and modern languages and history, grammar, belles-lettres, rhetoric and oratory, higher mathematics, several branches of modern science, philosophy, government, and political economy. But as Roy Honeywell has persuasively argued, this plan was specifically intended for "our institution," Central College, of which Carr and Jefferson were both trustees and which they hoped to set on the way to becoming the state university.<sup>30</sup> Jefferson thus outlined in this letter the first four professorships that he thought most appropriate for an expanded grammar school that might attract statewide attention and patronage. When the Virginia legislature eventually approved funds to transform Central College into the University of Virginia, Jefferson reverted to his three-tiered plan of primary schools, grammar schools focusing on language instruction, and a full-fledged university.

It is striking, however, given the prominence of political concerns in both Jefferson's 1779 preamble and his 1818 statement of aims for the education of the elite, that politics and history receive almost no mention in his simpler plans for the academies.<sup>31</sup> Jefferson of course expected that many of the Greek and Latin works studied would be histories and would be taught so as to support republican principles. But since a major justification for state-supported academies and universities was that they would train leaders, it is odd that Jefferson had nothing to say about how the grammar-school students might be encouraged to revere political heroes and to aspire to lives in public service. Apparently he simply assumed that there would be no lack of ambition for high office among talented youths or that the moral sense would suffice to draw good people into

the nation's service, and that consequently, no special cultivation of future leaders was necessary.

Jefferson's discussions of the academy always remained sketchy, and he gave few specific suggestions of any kind as to how the hearts and minds of the students were to be cultivated. Of the three levels of education in his system, this was the one that engaged him the least. In contrast to the primary schools and the university, he did not see the academies as offering instruction that was immediately essential for the country's happiness. While classical studies were personally delightful to Jefferson, they never fired his imagination in quite the way that securing liberty or the progress of the sciences did. And he was aware that the academies, supported as they would be by wealthy parents, were the part of his system least in need of public funding.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, he always valued them as an integral part of his carefully structured framework. By drawing talented youths out of the local schools, sending the best on to higher education, and preparing some of their own less talented graduates to become teachers themselves, the academies could help fill what all acknowledged to be a serious shortage of worthy instructors for the young, and thereby help to produce a population more literate and learned than that of which any other nation could boast.

## 7 • The Unfulfilled Visions for a System of Public Schooling

Jefferson's educational plans, comprehensive though they were, did not represent his ideal of republican popular education. Although the success of free government was to rest on people of ordinary means and talents, his proposals allow only three years of free schooling for this majority—a span that scarcely seems sufficient for achieving true literacy, let alone mastering the science, history, and moral principles that Jefferson thought citizens needed to become independent and judicious supporters of republican government. The record of Jefferson's dogged and, within his lifetime, fruitless struggle to secure at least a minimal public education for all confirms that he did not consider his scheme an optimal arrangement, but only the best that could be wrung out of a start—and, as his hopes grew more dim, the best that could be wrung out of a stingy and short-sighted legislature. Jefferson's school bills therefore describe the bare skeleton of an education comprising only those elements that he thought most necessary. To this extent, his writings are more politic, and hence less revealing of their author's full thought, than the more speculative and theoretical proposals that were made from time to time by others in the years after Jefferson drafted his 1779 bill. Through essays and through texts that they wrote for students, men such as Noah Webster, Samuel Knox, and Samuel Harrison Smith fleshed out their more elaborate visions of a common education for Americans. In so doing, they carried on from Franklin and Jefferson the debate as to what should be the core of education for all citizens and who should be responsible for ensuring that it was taught.

### *Vocational versus Liberal Education*

One of the early republic's most tireless champions of education was the young teacher, essayist, lecturer, editor, author of schoolbooks, legislator, reformer, and

philologist, Noah Webster. His interests were as far-ranging as Franklin's and Jefferson's, although his mind was not as deep. A youthful acquaintance described him as hopelessly dull and unoriginal, but hardworking and sure to make his mark; it is no accident that his most lasting achievement was his painstakingly compiled, monumental *American Dictionary of the English Language*, finished toward the end of a long life of scholarly and patriotic labors. Much earlier, in 1787, Webster wrote an influential essay that helped win ratification for the Constitution. In that piece he stressed the relatively high level of education, especially in civics, that was already present and that needed to be sustained in the American citizenry. In the same year, he began a series of essays laying out his views on the kind of educational system required by the new nation.

It is an object of vast magnitude that systems of education should be adopted and pursued which may not only diffuse a knowledge of the sciences but may implant in the minds of the American youth the principles of virtue and of liberty and inspire them with just and liberal ideas of government and with an inviolable attachment to their own country. It now becomes every American to examine the modes of education in Europe, to see how far they are applicable in this country and whether it is not possible to make some valuable alterations, adapted to our local and political circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

Two generations after Franklin first proposed curricular changes in American schools, Webster lamented the tenacity of traditional programs of study that failed to teach boys the sciences they would need in life and instead burdened them with languages that most would forget as soon as they left school.

What advantage does a merchant, a mechanic, a farmer, derive from an acquaintance with the Greek and Roman tongues? . . . This absurdity is the subject of common complaint; men see and feel the impropriety of the usual practice, and yet no arguments that have hitherto been used have been sufficient to change the system or to place an English school on a footing with a Latin one in point of reputation. . . . there is scarcely an institution to be found in the country where the English tongue is taught regularly.

Webster adds that it is not his wish "to discountenance totally the study of the dead languages," that in fact he hopes to "urge a more close attention to them among young men who are designed for the learned professions." "But my meaning is that the dead languages are not necessary for men of business, merchants, mechanics, planters, etc." He argues for a common elementary educa-

tion in English and arithmetic, followed by diversification according to the different employments the young people are destined to pursue.<sup>2</sup>

Webster's own experience as a country schoolmaster made him keenly aware of the frustrations, boredom, and idleness with which most students' lives were fraught. In keeping with his desire to make education as useful as possible, he argues that the students' programs can be so individually tailored, and the organization of the whole school so arranged, that learning may progress much more efficiently for everyone. While still a teacher, he wrote several essays on American country schools, deploring the false economy that kept schools unhealthy and poorly equipped. In place of the harsh discipline that was traditionally used to drive students forward, he made it his motto that "the pupil should have nothing to discourage him."

In his later essay "On the Education of Youth in America," Webster points out three major defects in the organization of schools, beginning first with the practice of bewildering students with material unsuited to their age. "The principles of any science afford pleasure to the student who comprehends them. . . . Examples should be presented to the senses, which are the inlets of all our knowledge." But unfortunately, schools are all too often

putting boys into difficult sciences while they are too young to exercise their reason upon abstract subjects. For example, boys are often put to the study of mathematics at the age of eight or ten years and before they can either read or write. . . . those sciences a knowledge of which is acquired principally by the reasoning faculties should be postponed to a more advanced period of life.

In the second place, he criticizes the practice of having the same person teach different subjects.

For suppose the teacher to be equally master of all the branches which he attempts to teach, which seldom happens, yet his attention must be distracted with a multiplicity of objects and consequently painful to himself and not useful to the pupils. Add to this the continual interruptions which the students of one branch suffer from those of another, which must retard the progress of the whole school. It is a much more eligible plan to appropriate an apartment to each branch of education, with a teacher who makes that branch his sole employment.

Third, Webster suggests that greater leeway be given for students to progress at their own pace from grade to grade, both as a recognition of distinctive talents and as a spur to competition and hence greater achievement: "Classing is neces-

sary, but whether students should not be removable from the lower to the higher classes as a reward for their superior industry and improvements is submitted to those who know the effect of emulation upon the human mind."<sup>3</sup>

Such flexibility will allow youngsters to proceed more quickly to the completion of their common elementary studies and thence to preprofessional or pre-vocational education. In this regard, Webster advocates a sharp distinction between those students destined for the university, viewed strictly as a preparation for one of the learned professions, and those more numerous youths headed for farming, trade, and business.

There are some arts and sciences which are necessary for every man. Every man should be able to speak and write his native tongue with correctness and have some knowledge of mathematics. . . . But besides the learning which is of common utility, lads should be directed to pursue those branches which are connected more immediately with the business for which they are destined.

It would be very useful for the farming part of the community to furnish country schools with some easy system of practical husbandry. . . .

Young gentlemen designed for the mercantile line, after learning to write and speak English correctly, might attend to French, Italian, or such other living language as they will probably want in the course of business. These languages should be learned early in youth, while the organs are yet pliable; otherwise the pronunciation will probably be imperfect. These studies might be succeeded by some attention to chronology, and a regular application to geography, mathematics, history, the general regulations of commercial nations, principles of advance in trade, of insurance, and to the general principles of government. . . .

Such a system of English education is also much preferable to a university education, even with the usual honors, for it might be finished so early as to leave young persons time to serve a regular apprenticeship, without which no person should enter upon business. But by the time a university education is completed, young men commonly commence *gentlemen*; their age and their pride will not suffer them to go through the drudgery of a counting house, and they enter upon business without the requisite accomplishments. Indeed it appears to me that what is now called a *liberal education* disqualifies a man for business. . . . the mind may contract a fondness for ease, for pleasure or for books, which no efforts can overcome. . . .

The method pursued in our colleges is better calculated to fit youth for the learned professions than for business. But perhaps the period of study required as the condition of receiving the usual degrees is too short. Four years, with the most assiduous application, are a short time to furnish the

mind with the necessary knowledge of the languages and of the several sciences. . . . it may be worthy of consideration whether the period of academic life should not be extended to six or seven years.<sup>4</sup>

Why is Webster's focus so strictly vocational? He is not only concerned to provide young men with the best possible means to earn a livelihood; he also has moral reasons for wanting all men, including those of independent means, to establish from their youth habits of industrious labor and so follow a trade or profession when grown.

We are all the creatures of habit; a habit of *acquiring* property should always precede the *use* of it, otherwise it will not be used with credit and advantage. Besides, business is almost the only security we have for moral rectitude and for consequence in society. It keeps young people out of vicious company; it operates as a constant check upon the passions. . . . it strengthens the mind by exercise, and puts a young person upon exerting his reasoning faculties. In short, a man bred to business loves society, and feels the importance of the principles that support it. On the other hand, mankind respect him; . . . the ladies uniformly despise a man who is always dangling at their apron strings, and whose principal excellence consists in singing a good song.<sup>5</sup>

One may wonder whether there is any place left in Webster's scheme for what Milton would call a liberally educated young citizen. Education is to prepare the young for their various walks of life; but is there any way of life, any genuine art of leadership, whose purpose it is to guide and unify their disparate existences? Moreover, the question arises whether the tracking Webster advocates might not introduce too early and rigid a classification of the young—denying to many the exposure, during adolescence, to alternative opportunities to try out their talents; sequestering the intellectually gifted in professional schools removed from the practical life of their fellow citizens; and rendering the majority of citizens ignorant of crucial skills required in an increasingly scientific age.

The Irish clergyman, pamphleteer, and academy principal Samuel Knox begins to confront the last of these considerations in his prize-winning essay, as he takes up the subject of mathematics instruction. He expresses some worry about the increasing distance between the specialists who comprehend the modern mathematics underlying so much of science and its products, and the vast majority, even among the literary, for whom the path toward higher mathematics was never opened: "One great deficiency in modern education, it must be allowed, is that as the sciences have been enlarged and improved, especially such as depend on mathematical knowledge, a proportionable attention to a prepara-

tory introduction by mathematics has been, too generally, either dispensed with altogether or at best inculcated in a very superficial manner." Instruction, Knox concedes, ought "to be well accommodated to every different genius whether classical or mathematical. . . . It will be found, however, that there are few who have good natural abilities for one species of literature who may not also make competent proficiency to whatever part of it the mind may be directed. All, then, who should be considered as liberally educated ought to be well instructed in the mathematical sciences."<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, few who commented on American education were more concerned than Samuel Knox about the dangers of religious, ethnic, regional, and class diversity (fostered, possibly, by economic growth), and few looked more avidly to the public schools to introduce a countervailing, homogenizing force within the republic. Knox not only argues strenuously for a national system of education, with standardized textbooks, curricula, and requirements; he also contends that in substance the nation's education should include a common liberal core that will imbue all those educated beyond elementary school with some experience of and taste for "that refined and sublime knowledge on which the improvement of genius, science, and taste, rather than worldly circumstances, chiefly depends." Knox heartily agrees that "it is certainly laudable to pay due regard to those sciences that tend to enlarge the sphere of worldly interest and prosperity and without which the various and complicated business of human life cannot be transacted." But he insists that too much will be lost if the older ideals of reading works in the classical languages and cultivating the mind for its own sake are jettisoned. These older notions are essential, not only for the elevation of the human spirit but for the establishment of a shared sense of national dignity and pride on which alone an enlightened patriotism and a national dig- community can grow, welding together the otherwise competitive and potentially conflict-ridden populations of the states. "To confine" education, Knox warns,

to a system that comprises only the knowledge of mechanical, commercial, or lucrative arts; or even a knowledge of the world as far as it can be attained by literary accomplishments, would be to view its advantages in a very narrow and illiberal light. The nation that would conceive such a system as sufficiently entitled to its patronage could neither be considered as enlightened in itself nor as meriting the refined improvement of a liberal and cultivated course of education. In proportion, then, as a nation hath formed a just sense of its own dignity and importance, in proportion, also, as it hath formed just conceptions of the importance of virtue and science, founded on the enlightened improvement of the human mind, so must

that nation be influenced to patronize or establish such a system of literary education as may bid fairest for the acquisition of these important ends.

. . . it might be justly observed that a narrow or illiberal system of education from lucrative views would not ultimately tend to the prosperity or happiness of any nation. Were the human soul taught to cultivate only the sordid dictates of avarice or the knowledge of lucrative speculations, soon must that community lose a taste for whatever is most excellent in science or best calculated to refine and improve the faculties of the mind. Where such a taste hath become prevalent in any state, it is rather an evidence of its degeneracy than reformation and is commonly the forerunner of whatever may tend to enervate the patriotism, corrupt the virtue, or contaminate the morals of the community. . . .

It is remarked, with concern, that in this country, at least in some considerable share of it, such a false taste in education becomes more and more prevalent. The study of the English language only by those means it affords of itself, a smattering of French, arithmetic, and those branches connected with it, are considered by many as an abundant competence of literary acquisition.<sup>7</sup>

#### *The Training of Citizens*

If Webster failed to support liberal education, he was nevertheless wholly sympathetic to Knox's concern for civic education, and in his numerous schoolbooks he worked to provide a common core of moral, political, and historical lessons for Americans. To be sure, it is Webster who discounts the political importance of morals in his "Examination into the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution."

*A general and tolerably equal distribution of landed property is the whole basis of national freedom: The system of the great Montesquieu will ever be erroneous, till the words property or lands in jee simple are substituted for virtue, throughout his Spirit of Laws.*

Virtue, patriotism, or love of country, never was and never will be, till men's natures are changed, a fixed, permanent principle and support of government. But in an agricultural country, a general possession of land in fee simple may be rendered perpetual, and the inequalities introduced by commerce, are too fluctuating to endanger government. An equality of property, with a necessity of alienation, constantly operating to destroy combinations of powerful families, is the very soul of a republic.

Yet these rather abrasive words ought not to be taken out of their context. Webster immediately adds a most pregnant "but":

But while *property* is considered as the *basis* of the freedom of the American yeomanry, there are other auxiliary supports; among which is the *information of the people*. In no country is education so general—in no country have the body of the people such a knowledge of the rights of men and the principles of government. This knowledge, joined with a keen sense of liberty and a watchful jealousy, will guard our constitutions.

Thus it is also Webster who, in his contemporaneous educational essays, quotes approvingly Montesquieu's corollary to his assertion that republics rest on virtue: "In a republican government, the whole power of education is required." Though Webster does not agree with Montesquieu that republicanism requires devotion to the point of constant and painful self-renunciation, he still concedes the necessity of that degree of civic devotion that is entailed in the people's knowing and loving the laws. And in contrast to the passage quoted above, Webster writes a few pages later in the essay that "education, in a great measure, forms the moral characters of men, and morals are the basis of government. Education should therefore be the first care of a legislature, not merely the institution of schools but the furnishing of them with the best men for teachers."<sup>8</sup>

In denying that virtue is the basis of freedom, then, Webster does not mean that republics ever can or should be indifferent to the morals of the citizenry. Rather, he is indicating, with perhaps misleading or excessive emphasis, the distance between the modern and the ancient conceptions of republican morals. Instead of demanding a Spartan self-sacrifice, Webster seeks to cultivate a gentler, more rational, and more interested devotion to the laws. Like Franklin and Jefferson, he sees in the new vocational bent of education the promise of a new and firmer foundation for civic health. Commerce and science are to liberate humanity from the blinders of religious sectarianism, peasant obtuseness, and aristocratic sloth, illuminating for all men their common neediness and mutual advantage in pacific trade. The new attentiveness to self-interest is to be enlightened by an awareness of the importance of fidelity to the collective interest, to the institutions and laws of representative government that are the best defense of the deepest interests shared by all individuals. The pride of the individual as a self-reliant and independent being is to be softened and civilized by his awareness of the dignity that arises from the sense of being in good repute with fellow-citizens whose respect he values because he looks upon them as respectable equals. No one expresses the moral goal of the new trend in education more eloquently than the young Jeffersonian Samuel Harrison Smith, in describing the

hoped-for "enlightened conviction of the intimate connection between duty and interest."

The citizen, enlightened, will be a free man in its truest sense. He will know his rights, and he will understand the rights of others; discerning the connection of his interest with the preservation of these rights, he will as firmly support those of his fellow men as his own. Too well informed to be misled, too virtuous to be corrupted, we shall behold man consistent and inflexible. Not at one moment the child of patriotism, and at another the slave of despotism, we shall see him in principle forever the same. Immutably in his character, inflexible in his honesty, he will feel the dignity of his nature and cheerfully obey the claims of duty.<sup>9</sup>

#### Noah Webster's Schoolbooks

What, specifically, could the schools do to cultivate such an outlook? Noah Webster believed that much could be accomplished by producing a carefully crafted series of texts that would, as Jefferson recommended, teach moral and civic lessons in the course of teaching English. Through the numerous schoolbooks that he wrote, and especially through his best-selling "blue-backed speller," Webster did more than perhaps any other American to give a distinctive tone and substance to the young nation's education. His spelling book first appeared in 1783 under the lofty title *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language, Part I*, and was followed shortly thereafter by parts two and three, a grammar and a reader. Declaring in his introduction a cultural independence from a Europe "grown old in folly," Webster set out in his slender spelling book to purify and standardize the American language, to fill children's minds with virtuous precepts, and in so doing to promote national unity and strength. While the grammar and reader both sold reasonably well, the speller was an instant and phenomenal success. It quickly supplanted all rivals to become for a time the most common book in the United States after the Bible. It went west with the settlers and was often the first work to be printed by the small presses of frontier towns. Even intense political opposition to Webster and his Federalist party was unable to dislodge it from the schools, so that by the end of the nineteenth century it had sold as many as 100 million copies.<sup>10</sup>

Such popularity was possible for a spelling book because, at the time Webster's became established, spellers were the chief texts used to teach children to read. Novice readers were instructed to spell each word out aloud and then to pronounce it, and they were expected to learn long tables of words by rote before they ever encountered them in prose selections. Webster's book was an im-

provement over its most popular predecessors, Daniel Fenning's *Universal Spelling Book* and especially Thomas Dilworth's *A New Guide to the English Tongue*, mainly in terms of its organization and syllabic division of words and in the attention given to pronunciation. To Webster, however, such things were far from trivial. "It is important that all the people of this country should follow one dictionary & Spelling book, that all may speak & write alike," he wrote late in his life. "This is a matter of national importance." He wanted to foster a uniformity of language that would help eradicate divisions and prejudices based on region and class.<sup>11</sup>

Webster took the speech of the people at large as his standard for dictionaries and spellers, rejecting alike the novelties of stylish affectation and the abetting of ignorance. Similarly, in his grammar, he broke with the practice of imposing Latin rules on the English language and instead sought to describe English as it was actually spoken and written. He believed that the American people, with their generally high level of education, already used an exceptionally pure and correct form of English, but he also argued that the early period of our national life was the time for further improvements, when many conventions were in flux and people were receptive to change. In particular, Webster, like Franklin, proposed reducing all English spelling to a simple phonetic system. He saw advantages not only in the ease with which English could then be learned by both natives and immigrants but also in the spur to indigenous publishing and writing that would come from having a nationally distinct language. In later life he reversed himself, accepting the tenacity of custom and seeking instead to unify the language of Britain and the United States. His more radical spelling innovations he prudently kept out of his schoolbooks, but he did introduce there those modest changes that he thought most valuable, which endured and which distinguish American English to this day.<sup>12</sup>

Along with their tables of words, previous English spellers had included lists of English place-names and short selections in prose and verse. Webster substituted a list of American place-names; and while he adopted many readings directly from Dilworth and Fenning, he replaced those that supported English monarchic patriotism with others more appropriate to America. He also cut back somewhat on the religious material of his predecessors, eliminating most references to the name of God. The reasons he gives for this are curious, however, and reveal an outlook quite different from that of Jefferson or Franklin.

Nothing has a greater tendency to lessen the reverence which mankind ought to have for the Supreme Being, than a careless repetition of his name upon every trifling occasion. . . . To prevent this profanation, such passages are selected from scripture, as contain some important precepts of morality

and religion, in which that sacred name is seldom mentioned. Let sacred things be appropriated to sacred purposes.

In the preface to the first edition of his reader, Webster likewise objects to the nearly universal practice of using the Bible as a schoolbook, both because of its archaic language and because such a use seems to prostitute divine Scripture to secular purposes. This argument shocked the pious Benjamin Rush, among others, and was deleted from later editions. It does fit Webster's pattern of introducing each book with a denunciation of all competitors, but even so there is little reason to doubt the sincerity of his professed concerns. Though not in the 1780s as religious as he was later to become, Webster was always a faithful communicant of the Congregational church. This same delicacy or fastidiousness regarding language was to reappear in the absence of coarse words in his dictionaries and most strikingly in a bowdlerized version of the Bible that he produced late in life. Yet even as he preserved the sacred name from careless use, Webster fell in with a broad secularizing trend in eighteenth-century thought—a trend away from viewing religion as the only thing that ultimately mattered to man, and toward viewing it as an excellent, perhaps indispensable support of human morality.<sup>13</sup>

The change in tone that Webster helped bring to American schoolbooks is best seen by examining the first great American reading book, *The New England Primer*, in the light of Webster's speller and other elementary texts, including his own revision of the primer. Beginning in 1690, *The New England Primer* had been the first reading book for generations of American children. With its unwavering seriousness, it embodies the heart of the Calvinist teachings and the single-minded piety of the early Puritans. Frequent quotations from the King James Bible lend the work a certain stern beauty, but its message of sin and predestination is nonetheless a threatening one. Together with the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Apostle's Creed, and the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the book contains many brief verses, beginning with (for the letter "A") "In Adam's Fall / We Sinned All," and includes numerous references to death, even explicitly the death of children: "I in the Burying Place may see / Graves shorter there than I." It is hard to imagine the child who could study such a text and remain wholly untroubled by it.<sup>14</sup>

Webster, by contrast, makes more attempts to appeal to childhood's delights. He uses occasional descriptions of apple pie and animals to engage children and delivers constant reminders of all the good things that virtue will bring. While his speller still contained many scriptural passages, especially those with a moral teaching, he added short moral precepts and, after 1787, when the title was changed to the simpler *American Spelling Book*, several popular fables with woodcut illustrations. The flat morality tale of Tommy and Harry, though not wholly



original with Webster, typifies his approach. Dutiful Tommy is heaped with love, respect, and property; his disobedient, truant, gaming, and swearing brother Harry meets with every conceivable earthly disgrace. In dialogues intended for pupils to read aloud, Webster puts into children's mouths such unlikely utterances as "I believe that thousands ruin their constitutions by idleness," "I hope that we shall both take pains to correct our faults," and, after one child has heard another describe his parents' unremitting strictness, "It would be well for us all, if we were kept in such subjection to our parents."<sup>15</sup> In answer to *The New England Primer's* Calvinist catechism, Webster appended to his 1794 speller a "Moral Catechism." Going through each of the Beatitudes, he here explains the Christian virtues in terms of both duty and worldly advantage, softening the most difficult demands of Jesus to allow some fighting on one's own behalf, some resentment of injuries, and some prudent constraints on charity. Webster's own revision of *The New England Primer* similarly makes a much more worldly case for virtue than the Puritan version had done. His last major reworking of his spelling book went further. Introduced in 1829, *The Elementary Spelling Book* was designed to replace the now old-fashioned-looking *American Spelling Book*; despite his own deep piety, Webster reduced the religious content from around half to perhaps 10 percent, as part of a successful bid to recover his dwindling share of the market. The new speller, whose main strengths lay in the skillful teaching of orthography, had few stories to captivate children but more information on nature that would be of interest to them. Nonetheless, he managed to work his rather stifling moralisms into nearly every paragraph. Also in abundance are such pithy sayings as the following:

Seek a virtuous man for your friend, for a vicious man can neither love long nor be long beloved. The friendships of the wicked are conspiracies against morality and social happiness.

More persons seek to live long, though long life is not in their power, than to live well, though a good life depends on their own will.<sup>16</sup>

Webster wrote two other short "catechisms" for use by beginning students that are of special interest. One is his "Federal Catechism," first included in a 1790 grammar text and later in *The American Spelling Book*, which gives a simple account and defense of the Constitution, of federalism, and of representative government. Webster clearly differentiates a representative republic from democracy, which he, like the *Federalist Papers*, treats as a defective form of government. The catechism justifies both property qualifications for voters, as a way to exclude irresponsible vagabonds, and salaries for representatives, so that others besides the wealthy may serve. Taken together, the catechism's simple explanations constitute the first American civics text.

In the same year, Webster produced an introductory reading book called *The Little Reader's Assistant*, to which he added "A Farmer's Catechism," aimed at supporting republican virtue by keeping citizens on the farm and giving them the first agricultural lessons that they would need to prosper there. It begins:

Q. What is the best business a man can do?

A. Tilling the ground or farming.

Q. Why is farming the best business?

A. Because it is the most necessary, the most healthful, the most innocent, and most agreeable employment of men.<sup>17</sup>

Webster goes on to attribute the innocence of farmers to their freedom from temptations and bad examples, and he also extols what Jefferson does not stress in his praise of farming—the power of nature's beauty, harmony, and purity to lead the heart to God. But important as these little works were, the main thrust of Webster's civic education came in his more advanced text, the reader that completed his original trilogy of schoolbooks.

Webster's reader of 1785, part three of *A Grammatical Institute*, was the first book of its kind, directed toward putting a collection of extracts from great writings and speeches in the hands of children. Beginning with instructions for reading aloud, it continues with many pages of sententious, edifying statements from Swift, Shakespeare, Johnson, Pope, Bacon, Dryden, Addison, and Franklin, and a variety of longer English and American selections, especially dialogues for practice in oral reading. An expanded edition of 1787, renamed *American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking*, has a far more political purpose: the promotion of American patriotism and the new national government then being framed. In every edition Webster includes a substantial amount of Shakespeare, thereby introducing the great dramatist's poetry to common folk who otherwise would have little exposure to him; but many passages are taken out of context so as to give more unambiguous support for virtue and piety than the plays themselves do. Among the stories Webster includes is one about a philosopher named La Roche, which contrasts the life of a proud and somewhat selfish philosopher with the greater happiness of those who are simple but moral and religious. Equally disapproving of learning for its own sake is the aphorism, "To endeavour all one's days to fortify our minds with learning and philosophy, is to spend so much in armour, that one has nothing left to defend." These ideas correspond with the moralistic, rather authoritarian, and less emphatically intellectual definition of "education" given in Webster's 1828 dictionary:

The bringing up, as of a child: instruction; formation of manners. Education comprehends all that series of instruction and discipline which is in-

tended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, and form the manners and habits of youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations; to give children a good *education* in manners, arts and sciences, is important; to give them a religious *education* is indispensable; and an immense responsibility rests on parents and guardians who neglect their duties.

Many other selections in the reader celebrate, in one way or another, the simple virtues, from Rousseau's description of the modest and captivating Sophie in *Emile* to Webster's own, utterly cloying portrait of "Juliana." In general, however, the volume maintains a high tone, and several excerpts from ancient authors in defense of republican liberty add to its dignity.<sup>18</sup>

What is most distinctive about editions after 1787, however, is not the ancient selections but the copious political material about the United States. On the title page is a quote from Mirabeau: "Begin with the infant in the cradle: let the first word he lisps be Washington." With his unflagging nationalism, Webster was one of the first to recognize the importance of preserving and teaching American history. He saw history lessons as an indispensable means to convey the political principles, love and respect for the country, and the sense of a common past that might bind together the disparate people of the several states who so recently had looked up chiefly to England and had regarded one another almost as foreigners. As editor of the *American Magazine* in 1787 and 1788, he reprinted portions of significant early American historical records and urged his readers to collect others. Here he also published his educational essays, which called for much more of the kind of instruction he was promoting in his reader.

Every child in America should be acquainted with his own country. . . . As soon as he opens his lips, he should rehearse the history of his own country; he should lisp the praise of liberty and of those illustrious heroes and statesmen who have wrought a revolution in her favor.

A selection of essays respecting the settlement and geography of America, the history of the late revolution and of the most remarkable characters and events that distinguished it; and a compendium of the principles of the federal and provincial governments should be the principal schoolbook in the United States. These are interesting objects to every man; they call home the minds of youth and fix them upon the interests of their own country, and they assist in forming attachments to it, as well as in enlarging the understanding.<sup>19</sup>

Webster's reader was especially influential in building the country's historical consciousness because it set the pattern for many others that followed—even if

the imitators that supplanted it by 1800 responded to the waning of patriotic fervor by including rather more literary and less political material. Webster's text contained accounts of the discovery and settlement of North America and the revolutionary war; Washington's farewell orders to the army; a number of other famous American orations and state papers, including the Declaration of Independence; and Webster's own "Remarks on the Manners, Government, Laws, and Domestic Debt of America." In this essay he calls for industry, frugality, and self-respecting American independence from Europe in fashions, language, and manners. He also voices his lifelong concern for the restoration of a proper deference toward authority; though conceding that this was rightly disrupted by the Revolution, he emphasizes the need for stable laws that can restore trust in government. For a time Webster also had in his reader a unit on the geography of the United States, and he contributed a synopsis of American history to Jedediah Morse's more complete 1789 *American Geography*. After 1795, when Morse's text attained widespread adoption, Webster removed the geography section from his own book. He later expanded his treatment of American history and geography into two more-advanced volumes, as part of his four-volume series for academy students entitled *Elements of Useful Knowledge*. These works, like the reader, had only a brief popularity but a wide influence, spawning many imitators. Altogether, as his chief biographer has plausibly argued, Webster's collection of schoolbooks played a decisive part in creating a unified American culture and spirit, and they "shaped the destiny of American education" far into the future.<sup>20</sup>

As the final stage of a thorough civic education for young Americans, Webster advocated travel within the United States. Like other patriots, he deplored the practice of sending youth abroad for their education, where they would contract foreign vices and foreign attachments. Ever the champion of national unity, Webster was also anxious to see young men move beyond their parochial circles to gain an understanding of the conditions and institutions of other states, so that regional jealousies might be removed and a stronger federal union might ensue.

But such travel, like the reading of history, was intended to serve a deeper purpose than the mere fostering of unity. This goal was adumbrated by Webster and others, but it was most clearly delineated by John Adams, who saw the knowledge of one's own country as the basis of a new species of self-respect. As he wrote in a 1785 letter on education:

The people must be taught to reverence themselves, instead of adoring their servants, their generals, bishops, and statesmen. . . . If Thebes owes its liberty and glory to Epaminondas, she will lose both when he dies, and it would have been as well if she had never enjoyed a taste of either. But if

the knowledge, the principles, the virtues, and the capacities of the Theban nation produced an Epaminondas, her liberties and glory will remain when he is no more. And if an analogous system of education is established and enjoyed by the whole nation, it will produce a succession of Epaminondas.<sup>21</sup>

No one can suppose that when John Adams speaks here of the people learning to have reverence for themselves he could mean their learning to be satisfied with themselves, much less their learning to enjoy flattering themselves or hearing themselves flattered. For the people to reverence themselves, the people must be capable of reverence: They must learn from history to avoid the extremes of worship of authority and simplistic or resentful egalitarianism. The people must look up to themselves—i.e., to the “better angels of our nature,” in Abraham Lincoln’s indelible phrase—which means that the people must maintain, as democrats, a sense of rank, an awareness of higher and lower, of noble and base, of what is to be admired and what is to be despised, within themselves. In short, the people must be democrats who do *not* believe that all kinds of people, all ways of life, and all outlooks are equal. They must be democrats who have not lost the fundamental and predemocratic human capacity for shame, for self-control—and hence for aspiration and self-overcoming.

We must pause and wonder, however, whether the tone that Webster set in his schoolbooks, and especially in his best-selling spellers, was one truly conducive to such noble self-reverence. *The New England Primer*, despite its faults, did teach awe toward God, and hence a seriousness about one’s soul, but Webster’s elementary books are as likely to teach moral smugness as reverence. These texts are rife with sound advice, useful facts, and well-headed warnings. But, particularly in the speller, Webster appeals mainly to a child’s fear of failure and disgrace, to the quintessentially American desire to get ahead, win approval, and be well-liked. Timid children may read such books and congratulate themselves on their obedience and diligence, but high-spirited youths can find in Webster’s writings no models of passionate individuals who wrestle with hard questions and overcome real temptations and obstacles to make something splendid of their lives. Nowhere in Webster do we find the erotic longing for human excellence that Milton expressed so eloquently, in a passage cited earlier, when he discusses the classics and Scriptures that he thought students should read.

But here the main skill and groundwork will be to temper them such lectures and explanations, upon every opportunity, as may lead and draw them in willing obedience, inflamed with the study of learning and the admiration of virtue, stirred up with high hopes of living to be brave men and worthy patriots, dear to God and famous to all ages; that they may despise

and scorn all their childish and ill-taught qualities, to delight in manly and liberal exercises: which he who hath the art and proper eloquence to catch them with, what with mild and effectual persuasions, and what with the intimation of some fear, if need be, but chiefly by his own example, might in a short space gain them to an incredible diligence and courage, infusing into their young breasts such an ingenious and noble ardor as would not fail to make many of them renowned and matchless men.<sup>22</sup>

A strictly practical education, with practical moral, civic, and vocational training, however important, is not enough to infuse this valiant spirit. In American society, with its economic preoccupations and its rather prosaic political principles, what is required to nourish a noble spirit of self-reverence is precisely a *liberal* education in something like Milton’s sense, an education that brings students to the finest examples of American leadership and thought—but also to challenging alternatives beyond them. Those who will eventually set the tone for society need to be given the leisure to ponder, and to be touched by, the examples of Achilles and Socrates, of Abraham and David, of Joan of Arc and Napoleon. Only then can they acquire a self-reverence that is not self-satisfied, a reverence that takes justifiable pride in our nation’s virtues but one that is qualified by the knowledge of how hard political and moral questions really are, and how high above us the greatest human beings have stood.

Webster’s marked lack of enthusiasm for liberal education goes with his rather pedestrian spirit, but it also reflects an unusual awareness of the dangers of learning—especially “a little learning.” If Webster did not understand the soul’s need for great books to rouse its highest aspirations, he did have at least an inkling of the classical understanding of how problematic it can be to try to make intellectuals into good citizens.

Far more typical in the Founding era was the outlook of Samuel Harrison Smith, who wrote confidently that “knowledge itself cannot possibly be too extensively diffused.” Smith makes the case for the utility of all knowledge, even that which seems at first purely speculative. He trusts that reason will teach the perfect convergence of our social duty and our natural interest, that an “enlightened understanding” will create a spirit of universal philanthropy and brotherhood, even though, with a confusion characteristic of his day, he also concedes that natural man “scarcely merits the epithet of a social being.” Smith felt but never fully grasped the challenge to the Enlightenment posed by Rousseau, who had published a perverse and astounding work called, in its English translation of 1761, *A Discourse upon the Origin and Foundation of Inequality among Mankind*. In that work and its companion, the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, Rousseau dares to take the side of sentiment against reason and science, and dares to argue that in all but the rarest individuals science or enlightenment corrupts vir-

tue and debases liberty. Smith, while calling Rousseau "a philosopher of great distinction," regretted what he saw as the "inexplicable feelings" powering his admittedly "noble intellect." The American polity, built on reasoned arguments, could not reject reason without undercutting itself. Fortunately for the political unity and vigor of the new republic, few Americans appreciated the magnitude and the radicalness of Rousseau's attack on the Enlightenment.<sup>23</sup>

### *Obstacles to an Adequate System of Education*

If the American people were mostly unaware of the deepest arguments against liberal education, neither were they enthusiastic supporters of it. Thoughtful writers such as Webster and Knox might debate the relative merits of liberal and vocational studies, but they recognized that the immediate challenge was far more rudimentary. Most of the country still had no public schools at all, and the ones that existed were often woefully neglected and staffed by ex-convicts, alcoholics, and other unsavory characters who commanded little respect and hence often had to rule the students by brute force. The quality of teachers rarely observed during his unsuccessful battle to establish public schools in Virginia, "My hopes however are kept in check by the *ordinary character* of our state legislatures, the members of which do not generally possess information enough to perceive the important truths, that knolege is power, that knolege is safety, and that knolege is happiness."<sup>24</sup>

In their protracted struggle for universal, quality schooling, the champions of education confronted one of the deep paradoxes of democracy. While they believed in the people and their judgment, this belief was not a blanket trust that whatever the people decided was bound to be good. The Founders were cautiously hopeful that the people, given education and given a social order that supported their natural decency, would by and large exercise good judgment. But who was to be relied upon to ensure that the people themselves received adequate education? If state legislatures proved intractably short-sighted and eloquent appeals such as Jefferson's 1779 preamble and Webster's several essays were unavailing, what more could be done?

Smith and Knox, in their 1797 prize-winning essays for the American Philosophical Society, looked for ways to take some of the power over education out of the hands of miserly state legislatures and incompetent teachers. Smith, perhaps too readily conceding that the country would never be able to afford brilliant teachers, puts his hopes in a system of prescribed textbooks that might guarantee a high quality of instruction, and he suggests offering large rewards for books that can teach "plain and undeniable truths" while avoiding "preju-

dices or falsehoods." He proposes, moreover, that a board of literature and science be established, consisting of prominent scholars, to form and oversee a national system of compulsory schooling and a national university. Its duties would include awarding prizes for worthy writings and discoveries, founding libraries, governing the university, and assigning the works to be studied at all levels of education, including the highest. Knox, by contrast, stresses the importance of paying sufficient salaries to attract "instructors of the first reputation," and he prefers to allow university professors the discretion to choose their own textbooks. Nevertheless, he too calls for a uniform system of schools, academies, and colleges with prescribed curricula and texts, as well as a university to be established by federal law and to be overseen by a national board of education.<sup>25</sup>

Such centralization, though it might have circumvented the recalcitrant state legislatures, was impossible alien to the spirit of American republicanism. Knox himself seems quickly to have realized that his national proposal was unlikely to succeed in the foreseeable future and that the nation was still no more prepared than were the states to impose a plan from above. In hopes of making a start of some kind, he offered his ideas to the legislature of his own state with a preface calling for rewards to local initiative that might spur emulation. Instead of urging the legislature to create a school system over the opposition of the counties, he suggested that it would be better to grant state aid only to those communities that valued education enough to first build their own schools; natural rivalry might then prompt backward counties to catch up with their more progressive neighbors.<sup>26</sup>

James Madison likewise hoped that the American resistance to centralized authority might be turned to the advantage of education, by encouraging a healthy and productive competition between states. He noted with satisfaction the country's "general ardor and emulation . . . in establishing schools and seminaries of every grade for the diffusion of knowledge." He regarded this as a fruit of America's "free and confederate system" and as a proof of the merits of popular government. In championing federalism in the sense of extensive state autonomy, he had no wish to heighten sectional differences, much less disagreements on basic principles. Madison saw the federal system rather as a laboratory that allowed controlled experiments in fields like education, limiting the scope of failures and encouraging friendly rivalry in reaching common goals. Yet despite the opportunity presented by federalism, he was forced to acknowledge to Kentucky's lieutenant governor in 1822 that Virginia itself had little to offer its neighbors by way of example in public education; Madison referred him instead to the New England states as models. Here, however, the well-developed system of schools had been established not on liberal republican principles, but as a key part of a deliberate effort to form Christian communities. Madison was hopeful

that decentralization and clear-sighted self-interest alone would lead to excellent education, but experience suggested that something more was needed.<sup>27</sup>

Jefferson, too, saw some benefit to be gained from state competition, although he was less sanguine than Madison. In an 1820 letter to Cabell, he voiced optimism that the excellent example of New York's educational progress under Governor Clinton might finally shame Virginia into taking action on public schooling. Realizing that the people were not sufficiently aware of their need for education, he wanted to combine local control with the visible, inspiring leadership of men such as Clinton and himself. But in the last year of his life, he confessed to Cabell:

I have been long sensible that, while I was endeavoring to render our country the greatest of all services, that of regenerating the public education, and placing our rising generation on the level of our sister states, which they have proudly held heretofore, I was discharging the odious function of a physician pouring medicine down the throat of a patient insensible of needing it.<sup>28</sup>

In the end, the Founders' argument that the nation's civic health depended on good public schools was simply ineffective in persuading the country to build them; most areas remained without a system of public schools until well into the nineteenth century. Why was this? John Adams pointed to the suspicion or even outright hostility toward education that the love of equality on the one hand and the haughty airs of the learned on the other had engendered in many Americans. "Liberty," he wrote, "has no enemy more dangerous than such a prejudice." Adams himself wondered whether this was not a fatal flaw in democracy. He favored a mixed form of government that would include an aristocratic senate patterned after England's House of Lords, and he argued that without such a senate, composed of learned men who respected education, "it is a serious question, whether there is one people upon earth so generally generous and intelligent, as to maintain schools and universities at the public expense."<sup>29</sup>

Jefferson refused to give up hope, but in his correspondence with Adams he suggested another reason for the persistent apathy toward formal schooling—an attitude to which he and Franklin, with their focus on self-reliance, may have inadvertently contributed. "All knowledge which is not innate is in contempt, or neglect at least. Every folly must run its round; and so, I suppose, must that of self-learning, and self-sufficiency; of rejecting the knowledge acquired in past ages, and starting on the new ground of intuition." A spirit of independence and suspicion of authority also tended to be accompanied by popular resistance to taxes of any kind. Even the federal government, which at the outset placed little burden on the people and subsisted mainly on small import duties and the sale of

lands, was considered extravagant by many. School taxes were doubly unpopular among the wealthy, who would pay a disproportionate share, even though they sent their children to private schools. This was what thwarted Jefferson's original school bill when it was finally passed in 1796: The legislature left it to the court of each county to decide when the act should be implemented, and the justices, being wealthy men, took no action.<sup>30</sup>

An even more insuperable problem was simply the sparseness of the population throughout most of rural America, which by itself would have defeated Jefferson's goal of building an elementary school for every hundred families that would be within all the children's daily reach. The pressures of farm life also made it hard for schools to keep children in attendance during much of the year. Ironically, as Clarence Karier has pointed out, the very agrarian economy that Jefferson valued as a foundation for a virtuous republic may have thus been a major reason for the rejection of his educational plans. Later, with the onset of the urbanization and social class tensions that Jefferson had feared as the harbinger of corruption, public school systems proliferated, as Americans increasingly felt the need for workers with new skills, for some suitable occupation for children and adolescents, and for a common education to promote unity and economic mobility in an increasingly immigrant society.<sup>31</sup>

Absent strong religious or economic motives, the need for well-informed citizens did not in itself prove a sufficiently compelling reason to create schools. Jefferson's excellent political arguments for the ward system could not reproduce in Virginia the vigorous civic life that had been set in motion by religious conviction in the townships of New England. But education for citizenship remained a gnawing concern for thoughtful Americans. Through the work of Horace Mann and others, beginning in the 1830s, a version of the Founders' dreams of universal education gradually materialized. In the schools that were created, though true liberal education was often not achieved or understood, civics would long hold an honored place.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, until such time as Americans were ready for their ideas, the best the Founders could do was to keep setting an example by their own advocacy and patronage. Most tireless among them was, as always, Jefferson. In his final years he turned his attention to founding the University of Virginia, so that Virginia and its neighboring states might feel the solid benefits of learning, and so that learning itself might win wider respect.

(1794-1796), exemplifying the most radically anti-Christian strain of the Enlightenment, sounded an alarm at women's control over early education, on account of the female tendency to support biblical faith and, perhaps worse, biblical morals rooted in love rather than justice, feeling rather than reason, and infantile longings for security rather than mature individual independence and acceptance of the natural world: see McWilliams's "Civil Religion in the Age of Reason," 472-83.

18. Benjamin Rush, "Thoughts upon Female Education," in Rudolph, *Essays on Education*, 27-32; cf. Linda K. Kerber, "Daughters of Columbia: Educating Women for the Republic 1787-1805," in Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, eds., *The Hofstadter Age: A Memorial* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 36-59; and also Kerber, *Women of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 265-88. On the need for practical studies for women as future wives or widows, see *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1964), 166. Franklin's proposals on the academic education of youth do not refer to school education for women, although on other occasions he indicated its importance and in 1732 he embarked on an essay on the education of women; that essay was never finished, and no trace of it has thus far been found (see *Papers* 1:254-55). On women and reading, see also Jefferson to Nathaniel Burwell, 14 March 1818, *Works* 12:91.

19. See Anne Firor Scott, "The Ever-Widening Circle: The Diffusion of Feminist Values from the Troy Female Seminary, 1822-1872," in McClellan and Reese, eds., *Social History of American Education*, 137-59.

20. Noah Webster, "On the Education of Youth in America," in Rudolph, *Essays on Education*, 57 and 59 (consider the context); cf. Simeon Doggett's "Discourse on Education," in *ibid.*, 160. For a survey of unflattering descriptions of teachers in American literature in the years after the Founding period, see Blinderman's *American Writers on Education before 1865*, 9-10, 25-26. As Clarence Kariyer has pointed out, the establishment of separate institutions for teacher training was to bring its own problems, providing technical expertise in teaching methods but denying students an intellectually rigorous education, and so perpetuating the status of teachers as something less than true professionals. This problem persists today, even though schools of education have moved into the university (*The Individual, Society, and Education*, 62-63).

#### Chapter 6. Thomas Jefferson on the Education of Citizens and Leaders

1. Jefferson to Madison, 20 December 1787, *Papers* 12:442. There is no satisfactory and complete critical edition of Jefferson's writings; the Boyd edition (*Papers*) will be such if and when completed, but after forty years of editorial labor it now reaches only to 1791 and is not rapidly nearing completion. For a good brief account of the merits and demerits of the various printed collections, see Frank Shuffelton, "Bibliographic Essay," in Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson: A Reference Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1986), 453-56. The least reliable edition is that of Henry Washington (*Writings*, 1853-1854) and we have used it as sparingly as possible.

2. Jefferson, *Papers* 2:526-27. In a letter of 13 August 1786 to his fellow committeeman George Wythe, Jefferson calls this proposal "by far the most important bill in our code" (*Papers* 10:244).

3. Jefferson to Joseph Cabell, 14 February 1826, *Early History of the University of Virginia as Contained in the Letters of Thomas Jefferson and Joseph C. Cabell*, ed. Nathaniel Francis Cabell (Richmond, Va.: J. W. Randolph, 1856), 373.

4. Jefferson to John Tyler, 26 May 1810, *Life and Selected Writings*, 604.

5. See John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chaps. 10 and 19.

6. Jefferson to John Adams, 28 October 1813, *Adams-Jefferson Letters* 2:388.

7. Jefferson to Roger Weightman, 24 June 1826, *Life and Selected Writings*, 729-30. Cf. Jefferson's First Inaugural: "Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself: Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others? Or have we found angels in the forms of kings to govern him?" (*ibid.*, 323); "A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge, *Papers* 2:527; Jefferson to James Monroe, 20 May 1782, *Life and Selected Writings*, 364-65. On his assessment of public versus private life, see Jefferson's letters to James Madison (9 June 1793), to John Adams (25 April 1794), to Francis Pickens (6 February 1795), and to William Short (6 October 1819), *ibid.*, 522-25, 527-28, 530, 693-97.

8. See chapter 13 below; the most important statements of Jefferson's view of the moral sense are his letter to Thomas Law of 13 June 1814, *Life and Selected Writings*, 636-40, and his letter to Peter Carr of 10 August 1787, *ibid.*, 430-31.

9. Jefferson to Edward Carrington, 16 January 1787, *Life and Selected Writings*, 411-12.

10. Aristotle, *Politics* 1318b1-1319a6.

11. *Federalist Papers*, no. 49 (p. 314f); Jefferson to Madison, 6 September 1789, *Life and Selected Writings*, 488-93; Madison to Jefferson, 4 February 1790, *Papers* 16:146-54; see also Jefferson to John Cartwright, 5 June 1824, *The Complete Jefferson*, ed. Saul Padover (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1943), 296. Contrast, however, Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, 12 July 1816, *Works* 12:11-14: "I am certainly not an advocate for frequent and continued changes in laws and constitutions"; and *Notes on the State of Virginia*, query 17, p. 161.

12. Hamilton to John Jay, 26 November 1775, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett et al., 27 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961-1987), 1:176-77.

13. Washington, First Annual Message, 8 January 1790, *Writings* 30:493.

14. Jefferson to Joseph Cabell, 13 January 1823, Jefferson and Cabell, *Early History of the University of Virginia*, 267-68. It seems to us that Joseph Kett, in his generally very helpful essay "Education" (in Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson*, 243) is mistaken in asserting that for Jefferson after 1816 "primary and higher education were no longer conjunctive ideals in his mind" but were rather "competing alternatives, and in the competition his preference was clearly for higher education." Kett, like a number of other scholars, seems to have been misled by Roy Honeywell, *The Educational Work of Thomas Jefferson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 13-22, and Charles Finn Arrowood, *Thomas Jefferson and Education in a Republic* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1931), 33-36, who claim that Jefferson opposed, and his friends led by Cabell in the legislature defeated, an 1817 plan by the Federalist Charles Fenton Mercer to establish first elementary schools, then academies, colleges, and a university, out of state funds. In fact, Cabell voted for the bill, and Jefferson seems to have had nothing to do with the opposition to it. It is true that once the construction of the University of Virginia was in fact under way, Jefferson wanted to use all the available state money for it, postponing another effort on the part of primary education until the university was launched; but this was simply prudent allocation of resources. See Philip Alexander Bruce, *History of the University of Virginia 1819-1919: The Lengthened Shadow of One Man*, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1920-22), 1:81; Jefferson to General James Beckenridge, 15 February 1821, *Writings* 15:314-18; Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time*, 6 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948-1981), vol. 6, *The Sage of Monticello*, 252-53 and 271 n. 16; see also 234, 237, 245, 248, 251, 267-69.

15. Jefferson, "A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge (1779)," *Papers* 2:528; An Act for Establishing Elementary Schools (1817), *Complete Jefferson*, 1075; *ibid.*, 1074-75n.; see also Jefferson to Chevalier De Onis, 1814, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*,

ed. Henry A. Washington, 9 vols. (New York: Riker, Thorne, 1853-1854): 6:342, and Jefferson to Dupont de Nemours, 24 April 1816, *Writings* (ed. Lipscomb and Bergh), 14:491-92.

16. Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, query 14, p. 147, Prov. 22:6. See, e.g., Cotton Mather's comment on catechizing children: "And what though the Younger little Things may not fully apprehend the import of what they Repeat? We must not call this a *Taking of God's Name in Vain*, albeit they have not such Reverent Apprehension of God, as the Elder people have. The Repetition which they make of Divine Things is an *Introduction* and a *Preparation* to the further Acknowledgments of God, which they will one Day make with more of Reverence" (*Cares about the Nurseries*, in Smith, *Theories of Education*, 16). Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, sec. 159; Jefferson, "Syllabus of an Estimate of the Merit of the Doctrines of Jesus, Compared with Those of Others," and An Act for Establishing Elementary Schools, *Complete Jefferson*, 949, 1072, 1076; Jefferson to John Adams, 12 October 1813, *Adams-Jefferson Letters* 2:383-84; Jefferson to Peter Carr, 10 August 1787, *Papers* 12:15.

17. Jefferson, A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge, *Papers* 2:528; *Notes on the State of Virginia*, query 14, p. 148.

18. On Jefferson's response to Marshall's biography, see Albert Beveridge, *The Life of John Marshall*, 4 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916-1919), 3:228-29 and 265-69. On Hume and the unreliability of history in general, see Jefferson's letter of 25 October 1825 to an unnamed member of the University of Virginia faculty, *Complete Jefferson*, 1096, and his letter of 29 August 1787 to the editor of the *Journal de Paris*, *ibid.*, 74.

19. Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Fix the Site of the University of Virginia (the Rockfish Gap report), *Complete Jefferson*, 1097-98.

20. See especially Jefferson to Adams, 28 October 1813, *Adams-Jefferson Letters* 2:391.

21. Colonel Coles, Jefferson's private secretary, to Cabell, 17 July 1807, in Jefferson and Cabell, *Early History of the University of Virginia*, 18n; Jefferson to Cabell, 2 February 1816, *Life and Selected Writings*, 660-62; on the New England townships, see Jefferson to Governor Tyler, 26 May 1810, *Writings of Jefferson*, ed. Washington, 5:525-26; on Anglo-Saxon self-government, see Jefferson to John Carrwright, 5 June 1824, *Complete Jefferson*, 293-95; on wards as essential for self-government, see Jefferson to Cabell, 31 January 1814, *Works* 11:382. Part of Jefferson's opposition to Hume stemmed from Hume's lack of respect for Anglo-Saxon England and its rude, simple farmers: see Jefferson to an unnamed member of the University of Virginia faculty, 25 October 1825, *Complete Jefferson*, 1095-96.

22. Jefferson to Cabell, 2 February 1816, in Honeywell, *Educational Work*, 229.

23. Jefferson to Governor Wilson C. Nicholas, 2 April 1816, *Writings* (ed. Lipscomb and Bergh), 14:454; Jefferson to Cabell, 2 February 1816, in Honeywell, *Educational Work*, 228. According to Bruce (*University of Virginia* 1:79) quoting an unpublished letter by Jefferson to Cabell, 28 November 1820, "there was an additional reason now, and a highly characteristic one, too—why Jefferson advocated the ward school: it would keep elementary education out of the hands of fanatical preachers, 'who, in the country elections,' he said, 'would be universally chosen, and the predominant sect of the country would possess itself of all its schools.'"

24. "Kentucky Resolutions," *Complete Jefferson*, 128-34; Jefferson to Thomas Jefferson Smith, 21 February 1825, *ibid.*, 1038.

25. Rockfish Gap report, *Complete Jefferson*, 1098; Jefferson to Governor Nicholas, 2 April 1816, *Writings* 14:452.

26. Jefferson to Adams, 28 October 1813, *Adams-Jefferson Letters* 2:388-90; Jefferson to Cabell, 14 January 1818, *Works* 12:85-86.

27. A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge, *Papers* 2:532; *Notes on the*

*State of Virginia*, query 14, p. 146; Bill for the Establishment of District Colleges and a University (1817), *Complete Jefferson*, 1080. By Honeywell's calculation, Jefferson's 1779 plan would have resulted in 153 annual scholarships, as against 18 in his 1817 plan (*Educational Work*, 30). Although neither the grammar schools nor the scholarship competition was open to girls, Jefferson did provide for his own daughters a modified classical education using modern translations, and he sent them to a convent school when they were in France. Even his 1779 proposal for coeducational elementary schools was somewhat ahead of its time, coming ten years before Boston opened its public schools to girls (*ibid.*, 22-23). Mercer's defeated educational bill of 1817 made provision for academies for girls: see Malone, *Jefferson and His Time*, vol. 6, *The Sage of Monticello*, 252.

28. Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, query 14, pp. 147-48; Jefferson to John Brazier, 24 August 1819, *Complete Jefferson*, 1087; Jefferson to Joseph Priestley, 27 January 1800, *Works* 9:103.

29. Jefferson to Adams, 5 July 1814, *Adams-Jefferson Letters* 2:434.

30. Jefferson to Peter Carr, 7 September 1814, in Honeywell, *Educational Work*, 222-27; *ibid.*, 42-43.

31. History is not listed as a separate course of study for the academies in Jefferson's 1779 school bill, or in his 1817 Bill for the Establishment of District Colleges and a University, or in the Rockfish Gap report, although he does mention it as part of the curriculum in a letter of 25 November 1817 in which he describes his plans to George Ticknor (*Works* 12:78).

32. Jefferson to Cabell, 13 January 1823, Jefferson and Cabell, *Early History of the University of Virginia*, 267.

#### Chapter 7. The Unfulfilled Visions for a System of Public Schooling

1. Harry R. Wartel, Noah Webster: Schoolmaster to America (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 42; Webster, "An Examination into the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution Proposed by the Late Convention Held at Philadelphia. With Answers to the Principal Objections that Have Been Raised against the System," in Paul L. Ford, ed., *Pamphlets on the Constitution of the United States Published during Its Discussion by the People, 1787-1788* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: n.p., 1888), 57-58; Webster, "On the Education of Youth in America," originally published 1787-1788, revised 1790, and reprinted in Rudolph, *Essays on Education*, 45.

2. Webster, "On the Education of Youth in America," in Rudolph, *Essays on Education*, 46-48.

3. *Ibid.*, 49-52, 54; Wartel, *Noah Webster*, 37-39.

4. Webster, "On the Education of Youth in America," in Rudolph, *Essays on Education*, 55-57.

5. "A Letter to the Author, with Remarks," in Webster, *A Collection of Essays and Fugitive Writings* (Boston: Thomas Andrews, 1790), 248.

6. Samuel Knox, "An Essay on the Best System of Liberal Education," in Rudolph, *Essays on Education*, 371.

7. Knox, *ibid.*, 312-14.

8. Webster, "On the Education of Youth in America," in *ibid.*, 64, and "Examination into the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution," in Ford, ed., *Pamphlets on the Constitution*, 59-61; Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, bk. 4, chap. 5.

9. Samuel Harrison Smith, "Remarks on Education," in Rudolph, *Essays on Education*, 180, 220-21.

10. Webster, *Grammatical Institute*, pt. 1, 14. For various estimates of the cumulative sales of the speller, see Warfel, Noah Webster, 70-71; Richard Rollins, *The Long Journey of Noah Webster* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 34-35; and E. Jennifer Monaghan, *A Common Heritage: Noah Webster's Blue-Back Speller* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Press, 1983), 11-12, 31.
11. Webster to William Webster, 9 November 1835, as quoted in Monaghan, *A Common Heritage*, 207; *Grammatical Institute*, pt. 1, 5-6; Warfel, *Noah Webster*, 128-29.
12. Webster, *A Grammatical Institute, of the English Language, Comprising an Easy, Concise, and Systematic Method of Education, Designed for the Use of English Schools in America*. In *Three Parts*, pt. 2 (Hartford, Conn.: Hudson and Goodwin, 1784; facsimile reprint, Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1968), 3-6; Warfel, *Noah Webster*, 79-81, 126-29, 136, 140-41.
13. Webster, *Grammatical Institute*, pt. 1, 12; Warfel, *Noah Webster*, 86; cf. Webster, "On the Education of Youth in America," in Rudolph, *Essays on Education*, 49-50, and Benjamin Rush, "The Bible as a School Book," in Runes, *Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush*, in Webster's edition of the Bible, see Monaghan, *A Common Heritage*, 158, and Warfel, *Noah Webster*, chap. 18.
14. See Ford, ed., *The New England Primer*.
15. Webster, *Grammatical Institute*, pt. 1, 113-18, 110, 111, and 112. Richard Rollins presents Webster's early speller as advocating "youthful rebellion" and "antiauthoritarianism" (*The Long Journey of Noah Webster*, 36). Although Webster does explicitly call for Americans to break free of the shackles of a corrupt Europe, a look at his discussions of children and parents in his first speller shows how carefully qualified Webster's rejection of authority was even in his youth. Rather than attend to such subtleties, Rollins imposes psychological stereotyping on a rather complex man. The change from the young more republican and hopeful Webster to the old, disillusioned and authoritarian Webster is not as stark as Rollins's book suggests.
16. "A Moral Catechism," in Webster, *The American Spelling Book* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1794), 145-53; Noah Webster's *Elementary Spelling Book, with a Facsimile of the 1831 Edition*, ed. Henry Steele Commager (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1958), 124. For a comparison of *The Elementary Spelling Book* with Webster's earlier spellers, see Monaghan, *A Common Heritage*, 129-30, 202-4.
17. Webster, *American Spelling Book*, 154ff.; *The Little Reader's Assistant* (Hartford, Conn.: Babcock, 1790), 1-2 of appendix.
18. Webster, *An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking* (Philadelphia: David Hogan, 1810); aphorism is from 19. Webster's dictionary definition of "education" is quoted from Rollins, *The Long Journey of Noah Webster*, 137.
19. Warfel, *Noah Webster*, 92-93; Webster, "On the Education of Youth in America," in Rudolph, *Essays on Education*, 64-65.
20. Webster, *American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking*, 214ff.; Warfel, *Noah Webster*, 184.
21. Webster, "On the Education of Youth in America," 72-77; Adams to John Jehb, 10 September 1785, *Works* 9:540.
22. Milton, *On Education*, 63-64. Cf. the thoughtful and thought-provoking reflections of Brann, in *Paradoxes of Education*, 42-43, 53-54, 101-2.
23. Webster, "On the Education of Youth in America," in Rudolph, *Essays on Education*, 47; Smith, "Remarks on Education," in *ibid.*, 178-79, 176, 175, 185, 189.
24. Jefferson to George Ticknor, 25 November 1817, *Works* 11:78, emphasis added; cf. Jefferson to Adams, 27 May 1795, *Adams-Jefferson Letters* 1:258.

25. Smith, "Remarks on Education," in Rudolph, *Essays on Education*, 194, 212-16; Knox, "An Essay on the Best System of Liberal Education," in *ibid.*, 291, 317-25.

26. Knox, *ibid.*, 291-94.

27. Madison to Richard Rush, 22 July 1823, and to George Ticknor, 6 April 1825, *Letters and Other Writings of James Madison*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lipincott, 1865), 3:337 and 486. For a good brief survey of the depressing lack of support for education in all the states, including New England, in the decades after the Founding, see David Madison, *Early National Education 1776-1830*, 88-92.

28. Jefferson to Joseph Cabell, 28 November 1820, *Works* 12:170; presumably Jefferson is referring to De Witt Clinton, who became governor in 1817. Jefferson to Cabell, 4 February 1826, quoted in Bruce, *University of Virginia* 1:82.

29. Adams to J. D. Sergeant, 21 July 1776, and to Joseph Hawley, 25 August 1776, *Works* 9:425-26, 434; *Defence of the Constitutions*, in *ibid.* 6:198; cf. letter to Samuel Adams, 18 October 1790, *ibid.* 416.

30. Jefferson to Adams, 5 July 1814, *Adams-Jefferson Letters* 2:434; Jefferson to Cabell, 24 January 1816, Jefferson and Cabell, *Early History of the University of Virginia*, 48.

31. Clarence J. Karier, *The Individual, Society, and Education*, 32-33, 45-46; Michael B. Katz, *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), chap. 1; Yrack, *Turning Points in American Educational History*, 92, 121-25, 130-33. Yrack elsewhere argues that a public-spirited religiosity, rooted in evangelism and Victorian moralism, seems to have been an important part of the impetus behind the nineteenth-century public school movement: "The Spread of Public Schooling in Victorian America: In Search of a Reinterpretation," *History of Education* 7 (1978): 173-82.

32. See especially Edward Everett's "Importance of Education in a Republic" (1839), in *Orations and Speeches on Various Occasions*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1878), 2:316-21. Everett stresses in particular the need for education to prepare citizens to participate in elections, to serve in the military and on juries, and to act as competent local magistrates; but Everett also, characteristically, makes mention of the cultivated use of leisure.

#### Chapter 8. Higher Education

1. For a detailed chronology of college foundings, with denominational affiliations, see Donald G. Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities before the Civil War: With Particular Reference to the Religious Influences Bearing upon the College Movement* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1932), table 4, pp. 32-35; for the training of ministers as the chief purpose of almost all the colleges founded before the University of Virginia, see the discussion and documentary evidence assembled at *ibid.*, 58-62 and 78-82. The Harvard charter, along with other early charters and accounts of purpose, in particular of the College of New Jersey and of King's College, may be found in Hofstadter and Smith, *American Higher Education*, vol. 1, pts. 1 and 2; see esp. 1:10, 81, 92-94, 99-111, 114-15, 145.

2. For a discussion of the traditional liberal arts curriculum that the American colonists inherited from Europe, see Morison, *Intellectual Life of Colonial New England*, chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 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987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000.