SOCIAL SCIENTISTS, SCHOOLING, AND THE ACCULTURATION OF IMMIGRANTS IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICA*

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I

The last several years have witnessed a remarkable outpouring of criticism of the American system of public education. While the usual attacks on the quality of the instruction, the character of the curriculum offerings and the cost efficiency of its operations continue to be the concern of many, several critics have begun to challenge the very fundamental character and purposes, the very legitimacy, of the traditional public, or common schools1. Considering its almost total monopoly over the use of public funds, and its control over roughly 90% of the school age children, some critics see the public schools as an actual or potential instrument of corporate capitalism, of the educational bureaucracy, of an increasingly manipulative State; some see them as instruments of social, cultural and moral homogenization, designed to weaken and even destroy racial, ethnic, religious and personal cultural diversity. Some believe that though the public school ideologists have consciously intended to use the school to promote new values and for social control of the diverse masses, the schools have not in fact been able to do so. Others feel the system to be so corrupt that they advocate "deschooling"; the abolition of the schools as social institutions, or at least their separation from the State. As the distinguished elder statesman of American education, Robert Hutchins, cried:

Nobody has a kind word for the public school, the institution that only the other day was looked upon as the foundation of our freedom, the guaranty of our future, the cause of our prosperity and power, the bastion of our security, and the source of our enlightenment12.

In preparing for a defense of the public school system, Hutchins tried to find the basic justification for the continuance of the public school monopoly and came to the conclusion that:

The purpose of the public schools is not accomplished by having them free, universal and compulsory. Schools are public because they are dedicated to the maintenance and improvement of the public thing, the res publica; they are the common schools of the commonwealth, the political community. They may do many things for the young; they may amuse them, comfort them, look after their health, keep them off the streets. But they are not public schools unless they start their pupils toward an understanding of what it means to be a self-governing citizen of a self-governing political community.

The distinguished Russell Professor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, Dr. R. Freeman Butts, agrees with Hutchins and is even more explicit as to the full significance of the public schools as an instrument of the State:

...to achieve a sense of community is the essential purpose of public education. This work cannot be left to the vagaries of individual parents, or small groups of like-minded parents, or particular interest groups, or religious sects, or private enterprisers, or cultural specialties ... I believe the chief end of American public education is the promotion of a new civism appropriate to the principles of a just society in the United States and a just world community ... We require the renewal of a civic commitment that seeks to reverse and overcome the trend to segmented and disjunctive "alternatives" serving narrow or parochial or racist interests13.

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Hutchins' and Butts' subordination of the individual's right to total freedom in the content and means of his education seems to mock the libertarian traditions of American democracy and the reality of the culturally pluralistic character of American society. It seems more spiritually akin to Plato's Republic or modern totalitarianism than to the individualism and racial, religious and cultural diversity that characterize the reality of American daily life. Yet the fact is that Hutchins and Butts are more closely allied to, and representative of, an ideology that can be traced to the earliest days of the American Republic, to some of the most important and influential of the Founding Fathers, principally to Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush and Thomas Jefferson, all three signers of the Declaration of Independence, and fathers of the American Republic and of the American system of common schools.

II

The passion for homogeneity in race, religion and culture was very strong among American colonists; the history of the colonial period is replete with ethnic and religious conflicts; the multi-cultural character of New York and Pennsylvania were accidents of history or due to the influence of the Quaker founders of the latter state. New England was particularly unfriendly to aliens, religious dissenters, or anyone who did not conform to the official sense of propriety. The preference for a homogeneous society took on greater significance, however, after the American revolution had united the disparate colonial societies into one nation with a common government and citizenship. Although the most cosmopolitan of men, Franklin, Rush and Jefferson shared their contemporaries' dislike and fear of a heterogeneous culture in America.

Franklin himself had founded, and of which Jefferson and Rush were later active members. It is significant that it was in this pamphlet, outlining his vision of an American union, that Franklin chose to argue against any further immigration of non-English peoples into the American colonies. His specific target was the German settlers in Pennsylvania who had thwarted Franklin's efforts to create military defenses in the colony by joining the Quakers in refusing to vote a military bill in the assembly. Franklin demanded of his readers:

Why should the Palatine boors be suffered to swarm into our settlements and, by herding together, establish their language and manners to the exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of aliens, who will be so numerous as to Germanize us, instead of our Anglifying them?!

But this outburst was more than a mere fit of pique; it was part of a conscious hostility to the multi-ethnic character of Pennsylvania society which the New England born and raised Franklin could not wholly accept. It was also a reflection of his Anglo-Saxon racism which was expressed so clearly in the same pamphlet:

The number of white people in the world is proportionately very small. All Africa is black or tawny; Asia chiefly tawny; America (exclusive of newcomers) wholly so. And in Europe the Spaniards, Italians, French, Russians and Swedes are generally of what we call a swarthy complexion; as are the Germans also, the Saxons only excepted, who with the English make up the principal body of white people on the face of the earth.

Franklin concluded by asking why America should

... in the sight of superior beings darken its people? Why increase the sons of Africa by planting them in America where we have so fair an opportunity, by excluding all blacks and tawnyts, of increasing the lovely red and white? But perhaps I am partial to the complexion of my country for such partiality is natural to mankind!

Thomas Jefferson, writing more than 30 years later, in the midst of the Revolution, expressed equal concern for the effects of possible large scale European colonization in the new American republic. He equated political unity with cultural homogeneity and doubted if non-English immigrants were compatible with the successful
development, or survival of an American republic.

It is for the happiness of those united in society to harmonize, as much as possible, in matters which of necessity they must transact together. Civil government being the sole object of forming societies, its administration must be conducted by common consent. Every species of government has its specific principles. Ours are perhaps more peculiar than those of any other in the universe. It is the composition of the freest principles of the English constitution, with others derived from natural right and natural reason. To these nothing can be more opposed than the maxims of absolute monarchies. Yet from such we are to expect the greatest number of emigrants. They will bring with them the principles of the governments they leave, imbibed in their early youth; or if able to throw them off, it will be in exchange for an unbounded licentiousness, passing as usual from one extreme to another. It would be a miracle were they to stop precisely at the point of temperate liberty. These principles, with their language, they will transmit to their children. In proportion to their numbers, they will share with us the legislation. They will infuse into it their spirit, warp and bias its direction, and render it a heterogeneous, incoherent, distracted mass.

Jefferson's views, as expounded in the above lengthy passage from his Notes on Virginia, succinctly summarize the fears and analytic elements which would appear again and again throughout the 19th and 20th century whenever the question of immigration and naturalization of aliens was a subject of public discussion. Ethnic, religious or cultural pluralism was viewed as a threat to political community. Jefferson's foreboding was frequently quoted. The anti-foreign views of Washington, Adams, and other founding fathers were similarly used. The notion that Europe was a cesspool of vice, corruption, ignorance and despotism was a commonplace of American mythology, and Europeans who came to America were viewed as carriers of these evils.

Jefferson's views on the place of blacks in American society also prefigure the thought of later generations. While Franklin clearly opposed further importation of black slaves for racial and cultural reasons, and personally preferred to have white rather than black servants in his household, towards the end of his life he supported the abolition of slavery also. Yet he was apparently convinced that free blacks could not be trusted to be free of some white supervision, for the program he presented as President to the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery in 1789 included recommendations that the society assume legal guardianship over all free black apprentices, superintend the school instruction of younger free blacks and form a "committee of Inspection who shall superintend the morals, general conduct, and ordinary situation of the free Negroes . . .".

While Franklin supported the suppression of the slave trade and abolition, Jefferson went further and advocated the removal of all Negroes from American society. He believed that the "deep divisions" between blacks and whites would, if they were left in the same society, produce civil convulsions that would never end "but in the extermination of the one by the other race". This potential violence was due to "the deep rooted prejudices entertained by whites, ten thousand recollections by the blacks of real injuries sustained" and such "real distinctions" which nature had made, i.e. color, figures, hair, odor and sexual characteristics. While Jefferson thought that blacks were equal to whites in ability to remember things, he believed they were inferior to whites in reasoning power, and "dull, tasteless and anomalous in imagination". Though Jefferson carefully added that the question still required further scientific examination, he advanced "the suspicion" that blacks were inferior to whites in body and mind, a view that would increasingly take hold of the American imagination in the course of the 19th century.

Benjamin Rush (1745–1813), a physician, chemist, protegé of Franklin, politician and educational reformer, shared the enthusiasms of Franklin's later life. His own view of the Germans in Pennsylvania was somewhat more conscious of their virtues, but he too saw their predilection for their native German language as a serious problem in their acculturation to American ways. Echoing Franklin and Jefferson, Rush declared that "Freedom can exist only in a society of knowledge. Without schooling mankind is incapable of knowing their rights and where learning is confined to a few people, liberty can be neither equal nor universal." In a plan submitted to the
legislature of Pennsylvania in 1786, Rush proposed the establishment of a state-wide system of publicly supported free schools in each township, four "colleges" which would be located at Philadelphia, Carlisle, Lancaster and Pittsburgh, and a state university to crown the system. At first, he urged that instruction be in the English language; but in a later edition of his plan he accepted a bilingual curriculum and the designation of one college, at Lancaster, for the Germans, recognizing that this was necessary if any progress was to be expected in educating the dissident cultured people. This was required in order that "our schools of learning by producing one general and uniform system of education will render the mass of the people more homogeneous and thereby fit them more easily for uniform and peaceable government". Rush's plan for Pennsylvania was similar in purpose and structure to Jefferson's earlier Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge presented to the Virginia legislature in 1779. But whereas Jefferson's plan specifically excluded blacks from its benefits, reflecting his view that they were unassimilable 111.

The assumption that a free society could not endure without an educated citizenry was to become a commonplace of all later discussion of democracy and education in American society. 112 It was explicit in the writings of Jefferson and Rush, of Franklin and almost every other person interested in public affairs. Nor was it really new in the late 18th century, though one would think from its continuous repetition that each writer thought he had made a great new discovery. The writings of the 17th century English Puritans, the Commonwealthmen, are full of such notions. The free primary education was one of the demands of the Levellers; James Harrington in his The Commonwealth of Oceana (1650) urged that free schools be opened for all youth between nine and fifteen years of age under the direction of the magistrates rather than parents for the future health of the state; John Molesworth, an Irish admirer of John Locke, insisted that good learning was a "great antidote against the plague of tyranny" and linked good government with the learning of the people. Molesworth's views circulated widely in the colonies and his work was read by Jefferson shortly before he introduced his education plan to the Virginia legislature 113.

The stress on the connection between republican or "good" government and a system of widely diffused education among the citizenry opened the way for the emergence of the baneful appearance of Spartan-Platonic conceptions of the State's role in education. Rush urged that

Next to the duty which young men owe to their Creator, I wish to see a SUPREME REGARD TO THEIR COUNTRY, inculcated upon them .... Our country includes family, friends and property, and should be preferred to them all. Let our pupil be taught that he does not belong to himself, but that he is public property. Let him be taught to love his family, but let him be taught, at the same time, that he must forsake and even forget them, when the welfare of his country requires it. He must watch for the State as if its liberties depended upon his vigilance alone .... He must be taught how to amass wealth, but it must be only to increase his power of contributing to the wants and demands of the State .... I am satisfied that the most useful citizens have been those youth who have never known or felt their own wills till they were one and twenty years of age, and I have often thought that society owes a great deal of its order and happiness to the deficiencies of parental government, being supplied by those habits of obedience and subordination which are contracted at schools 114.

In 1797 the American Philosophical Society conducted a contest for the best essay on the best system of education "adopted to the genius of the government of the United States". One of the two winners of the contest, Samuel Harrison Smith, displayed views similar to the admirer of the Lacedamarians, Benjamin Rush. Smith boldly argued that "society must establish the right to educate and acknowledge the duty of having to educate all children". Smith noted that while many state constitutions already recognized this right and obligation, few had in fact done much to put the principle into practice. As for the rights of parents to educate their children, Smith argued that

... Error is never more dangerous than in the mouth of a parent ... and that prejudices are as hereditary as titles; (education) was so momentously important (that it) must not be left to the negligence of individuals .... By education remote from parental influences, the errors and vices of the parents may cease to be entailed...
upon the child... The most solemn attention must be paid to avoid instilling into the young mind any ideas or sentiments whose truth is not unquestionably established by the undissenting suffrage of the enlightened and virtuous part of mankind

The latter were to be ensconced in a national board of education, according to Smith, composed of fourteen members elected for life by the faculty of the national university, with the task of creating and administering a national system of public schools, choosing the teachers, curriculum and all texts. Smith was undoubtedly influenced in part by the debate in the French National Assembly on the creation of a national system of education, for he quotes approvingly one French legislator who succinctly captured Smith's own viewpoint in saying: "It is proper to remind parents that their children belong to the State, and that in their education, they ought to conform to the rules which it prescribes." 2

Another early American nationalist, Jeremy Belknap, a minister, historian and educator, a founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society, also adopted the Spartan model, arguing that

That sentiment of Lycurgus that "children belong to the State more than to the parents" ought to be deeply engraved on the heart of every person who is concerned in making or executing the laws...

He specifically called attention to the need for public support for educating the poor, for "if it is the duty and interest of the State to avail itself of the capacities of all its citizens, it is then its duty and interest to cultivate their capacities". This theme was echoed by Archibald DeBow Murphey in his proposal to establish a complete system of free public schools in the state of North Carolina in 1817. Urging the need to utilize the "capacities" of the poor, he argued that

Poverty is the school of genius... from which school generally come forth those men who act the principal parts upon the theatre of life... But it is a school which if left to itself, runs wild; vice in all its depraved forms grows up with it. The State should take this "school" under her special care, and nurturing the genius therein given to it an honorable and profitable direction. Poor children are the peculiar property of the State, and by proper cultivation they will constitute a fund of intellectual and moral worth which will greatly subserve the public interest.

Rush summarized the view of many of his contemporaries in a peculiarly mechanistic metaphor. The system of free public schools was necessary, he said, to "convert men into republican machines. This must be done if we expect them to perform their parts properly in the great machine of the government of the State". The wills of the people must be "fitted to each other by means of education before they can be made to produce regularity and unison in government"

Rush had one great fear, however, that "the establishment of nurseries of virtue and knowledge in every part of the state", and the "attempt to give the minds of our citizens a virtuous and uniform bias in early life", would be vain if the State continued to admit and confer equal privileges of citizenship on the "annual refuse of the jails of Britain, Ireland and our sister States". The identification of foreigners with the criminal class of Europe was to have a long history in American folklore, and the vision of an essentially homogeneous society is hidden behind Rush's cry to the legislature of Pennsylvania: "Can nothing be done to preserve our morals, manners and government from the infection of European vices?"

Still another problem that was to loom large in the minds of the early exponents of public education and republican education, was the diversity of religious sects and the tradition that education was the responsibility and the right of parents and the churches. Jefferson, as befitted the champion of disestablishment of the church from the State and complete religious toleration for all sects, proposed that all sectarian doctrines be forbidden in the curriculum of the schools, and that morals and theology were the prerogatives of the home, the Church or private study at institutes convenient to the university. His attitude was almost wholly rejected by Jefferson's contemporaries, though it would in the 20th century tend to become the norm in public schools. Franklin, like Jefferson, was essentially a Deist who publicly espoused Christian morals, if not Christian theology. His morals were, like everything else in his life, arrived at by reason and utilitarian criteria. The schools he founded were non-denominational in curriculum and government, with little more than some formal reading in ethics. Benjamin
Rush, however, deliberately challenged the notion of religiously neutral schools. He rejected the notion that religious training of youth would prejudice their minds, and ought to be left until the later stages of their education. He condemned the "fashionable" liberality which refused to associate with any specific sect, and urged parents and teachers to use their influence to ensure sectarian loyalty among the children in their charge. Rush insisted that the Bible be among the books studied in school, and prophesied that if it were neglected in the schools, it would soon be read only in the churches, and eventually only in the courts of justice. The religion he recommended was Christianity, that of the New Testament, for "all its doctrines and precepts are calculated to promote the happiness of society and the safety and well-being of civil government. A Christian cannot fail of being a Republican".

In New England with its largely homogeneous religious allegiance, and on the western frontier where the scattered settlement patterns left all the established churches weak in numbers at any spot, the public schools became true common schools in which a non-sectarian but definitely Protestant morality based on Bible reading became the norm. In states with considerable diversity of religious sects, the appearance of public nonsectarian schools was delayed until the 1830s; church schools, frequently with some state subsidies, remained dominant, as they had been in colonial times.

Thus, within the lifetimes of the founding fathers of the American republic, certain attitudes on the relationship between the schools, education and republicanism had developed which would be reflected time and again in later speeches, books and debates. Hostility toward, and fear of, racial, ethnic or cultural diversity characterized the writings of Jefferson, Franklin, Rush and their contemporaries. A view of Europe and Europeans as identical with all kinds of political, personal and social vice and ignorance expressed itself in opposition to the emigration of non-English peoples to America, and in the view of schooling as the principal agent of acculturation of foreign elements into a homogeneous American society which was seen as the repository of all the virtues and the hope of mankind. Education was to be the means by which the new political society was to be created; a republican education which was morally non-sectarian, Protestant and culturally Anglo-American in character, deliberately stripped of the cosmopolitanism of the classical Latin and Greek oriented curriculum, and boldly utilitarian and scientific in orientation. The confident belief that republican, non-sectarian and American education could effect a moral, political and cultural change upon the children of the dissident immigrants was based on the widely held view that man's character is determined by his experience or environment. Based on Lockean psychological theories, the American educators were determined to create a cultural environment of their own choosing, even if it meant forcible removal of children from "foreign" cultural influences, or the suppression by law of such corrupt European vices as drinking beer and whiskey, or dancing and gaming on the Sabbath. The school would train and police youths.

III

Considering the prestige and great political skills of Franklin, Jefferson and Rush, it is somewhat surprising that their ideas on public education did not fully come to fruition until the late 1830s and 1840s. Jefferson's plan for a system of public education in Virginia did not materialize; Rush's plan for Pennsylvania also was abortive, as was Murphey's for North Carolina; in New York the state government set up a common school fund between 1795 and 1800, and again from 1825, but left the initiative to local towns which had to match the state's funding; if this system proved haphazard upstate, the city of New York was left without any true public school system until 1841, private and church schools serving the needs of its heterogeneous inhabitants. Despite the recommendations of every President until Jackson, Congress never established a national university. Even in New England where a system of tax-supported schools could be traced back into the 17th century, public support of common schools was weak and the laws were frequently ignored. In the late 1820s Boston,
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which spent more for its schools than all the other towns in the state, enrolled less than half of all the school aged children. In the South, no system of public education existed at all. It was not until the 1830s that the educational theories of the founding fathers reappeared to give a new impetus, vigor and effectiveness to a movement for the establishment of a free public school system.

It is not accidental that the revival of the public school reform movement coincided with a sudden upswing in the numbers of immigrants arriving from Europe, especially from Germany and Ireland. Between 1790 and 1810 the number of immigrants has been estimated to have averaged less than five thousand annually; the Napoleonic wars reduced it even further until 1816–1817. Even so it did not exceed 20,000 until 1828 and averaged about 22,000 until 1832, when it suddenly jumped to more than 60,000. By the period 1836–1837 it averaged 76–80 thousand. By 1841 it renewed its rise and hit an all time record of 104,565 in 1842. All this took place before the great exodus from Ireland during the potato famine; in the years of 1845–1850 over 1.3 million aliens passed through American ports seeking a new life in America. In the decade between 1845 and 1854, 1.2 million Germans and 1.5 million Irish entered the United States. Generally speaking, about 80% of these immigrants were beyond school age and thus not subject to acculturation through the schools. Under the easy laws of the time, federal citizenship could be acquired after five years of residence; there were no literacy or educational requirements, and frequently local politicians were said to generously waive even the existing minimal requirements in order to swell the number of electors who could vote for them.

This new wave of immigration was not welcomed by the conservative native Americans. The Irish were traditionally a despised subject race, and were for the first time overwhelmingly Catholic peasants; the Germans were very diverse, some Roman Catholics, others Old Lutherans, or other persecuted dissident sects, and even a sizeable body of German Jews. While the bulk of the Germans moved into the new lands in the West, the Irish were generally so poor and so unskilled even at farming that they huddled together in the cities and towns of the East, creating a desperately impoverished urban proletariat. Worse still, from the viewpoint of the native Americans, the Irish soon learned to use their vote as a lever in political and economic struggle, creating the very image of the ignorant, vice-prone alien that the founding fathers had so feared.

In 1835 Lyman Beecher (father of the novelist Harriet B. Stowe) expressed the general hysteria that claimed so many native Americans during this period; he thought the crisis for American society lay in the future cultural character of the West (the Ohio, Missouri and upper Mississippi valleys), the focus particularly of the German immigrants. The West would determine the future of the whole nation; the influx of aliens to the West, “the greater part unacquainted with our institutions, unaccustomed to self-governmen, inaccessible to education, and easily accessible to prepossessive and inveterate credulity and intrigue” and “easily embodied and wielded by sinister design” would overpower the American population. Beecher especially feared the Catholic clergy and their influence on the masses. “While the Protestant clergy were congenial to liberty, the Catholic system was adverse to it.” Beecher's solution? “Educate!”

The integrity of the Union demands special exertions to produce in the nation a more homogeneous character and bind us together by firmer bonds. A remedy must be applied to this vital defect of our national organization. But what shall that remedy be? The consolidation of the state governments would make a despotism. But the prevalence of pious, intelligent, enterprising ministers through the nation, at the ratio of 1 to 1000, would establish schools and academia and habits and institutions of homogeneous influence. These would produce a sameness of views and feelings and interests which would lay the foundation of our empire upon a rock.

The scientist, painter and inventor, Samuel F. B. Morse, became convinced that the immigration was the vanguard of a plot by the Czar, the Emperor of Austria and the Pope to destroy America, the last bastion of liberty. The Catholic immigrants, “hard-working, mentally neglected and poor”, however well disposed they might be to the country that protects them, were not fitted, in Morse’s opinion, to act with
political judgment in a new country. He argued that

Every unlettered Catholic immigrant that comes into the country is adding to a mass of ignorance which it will be difficult to reach by any liberal instruction.... Republican education were it allowed freely to come in contact with their minds would doubtless soon furnish a remedy for an evil for which in the existing state of things, we have no cure[29].

Morse was here alluding to the fact that Catholics were not attending such public schools as already existed, and after the great New York school conflict of 1841, the Catholic Church would attempt with great success the difficult task of creating its own Catholic parochial school system financed entirely without public taxation. The public school system would be rejected not only because it was Protestant in fact, but also because it was non-sectarian in theory, hence contrary to Catholic traditions of education[28].

In Boston in 1835 H. Bockum reported to the American Institute of Instruction that the German population of America lacked "moral excellence", were ignorant, superstitious and prone to treat with levity or indifference the high moral conceptions characteristic of American womanhood. He claimed that the older German immigrants, from the 18th century, were not only deprived of the light their fathers enjoyed, but were excluded from the intelligence and virtue of the American people. Worse still, they were extremely hostile to any system of common schools which "they suspect will exclude or be unfriendly to their language and customs." (They were right in their suspicions; the Pennsylvania legislature which established the state public school system in 1834 mandated the use of English alone as the language of instruction.) Bockum believed, however, that in 50 years, the Pennsylvania Germans would be absorbed by the English speaking population, as were the Dutch in New York. But he thought the division by language and feeling of the Germans in the West would continue with all its evil consequences unless "we attend carefully to the intellectual wants" of the immigrants. If education were compulsory, progress would be assured; but as free and voluntary action was required by American liberalism, the future was in the hands of the virtuous and intelligent leadership[29].

Beecher, Morse and Bockum were signaling the opening of a new phase in American intellectual and social history. The task of saving America's moral and cultural values by education of the poor, the foreigners, their children, the ignorant and vicious, was about to be accomplished through the instrumentality of free public schools. And the principal manipulators of the instrument of acculturation were to be the true custodians of American culture and values — the sons of New England. In 1834 Caleb Cushing sounded the tocsin for the American Institute for Instruction; as the union of intellectual and moral instruction was the only true basis of public education, he took particular pride in the moral and intellectual heritage of New Englanders whose Puritan ancestors began the system of schools which were the means of creating a literate, intelligent and moral people whose influence was already uplifting American society elsewhere[30]. The following year, to the same audience, R. Parks claimed that "of all the blessings transmitted by our forefathers of New England", none was more important than the common schools; to them New Englanders were indebted for their civic and religious liberty and "the general diffusion of knowledge, competence and contentment" that made New Englanders "more intelligent and happier than any other people on the globe[31]".

The new civilizing mission was grasped with enthusiasm by the New Englanders; hundreds of missionaries were sent to the West to establish churches and schools, academies and colleges; New Englanders played prominent roles in all the legislatures of the Western states in creating their respective state-financed public school systems and universities; ministers, their wives and daughters frequently served as school masters and mistresses; they served as the cadre for every conceivable social reform movement, from abolition of slavery to prohibition of alcoholic spirits and imposition of strict sabbath laws. But the foundation of their cultural mission was acculturation of the immigrants[32].

Prof. E. D. Mansfield, a specialist in constitutional law, warned the College of
Teachers in Cincinnati in 1835 that so long as immigrants remained a "distinct social race, their children will grow up to maturity, come to the polls, with the same notions, prejudices and peculiar views which their fathers entertained". The only efficient way to prevent this was education. "Let us take their children then, and educate them in the same schools with our own, and thus amalgamate them with our community". Further, Mansfield declared

It is altogether essential to our national security, strength and peace, if not even to our national security that the foreigners who settle on our soil should cease to be Europeans and become Americans; and as our national language is English, and as our literature, our manners, and our institutions are of English origins, and the whole foundation of our society English, it is necessary that they become substantially Anglo-Americans ... . We must become one nation[32].

Another speaker addressing the same professional society spoke for most of his fellow native Americans, saying

(Our) community is not a compound but an unconsolidated mass; and to acquire uniformity, it must be subjected to the crucible and the schoolmaster is the chemist who can burn out fine gold from crude and discordant materials. It is only, Sir, on the children and youth of our immigrant population that we can act with effect. The feelings, modes of thinking and customs of the parents are so fixed that they can at most be slightly modified, and if their vernacular tongue is different from our own, they will prefer to use it still. As native Americans, it is our duty to prevent the entailment of these upon our children and the hereditary establishment among us of a distinct race of foreigners[34].

His parting shot was the reminder that "Pennsylvania by not attending in due time, is compelled to cherish in her bosom an exotic population".

Thus, we see again that, in the early years of the creation of the free public school system through the Middle Atlantic and Mid-western regions, the link between the need for an educated citizenry in a republican political community, and the need for a culturally homogeneous society to sustain that republican political system, clashed with the existence of multi-ethnic, multi-religious immigrant communities, and gave to the public school system the task of acculturation or "amalgamation" in the name of national security, order and morality.

IV

William Torrey Harris dominated American education from the Civil War into the Progressive Era. It was Harris who built the structure of bureaucratic public education on the foundations established earlier in the century by the pioneer exponents of government education. Soon after moving from Connecticut to St. Louis in 1857, Harris became a school principal and a disciple of Hegel (through contact with German immigrants in St. Louis). Harris became superintendent of schools in St. Louis in 1868, and from 1889 to 1906 he was United States Commissioner of Education. The National Education Association, of which he was a founder, became a major transmitter of his ideas across the country. Harris became a leading opponent of the ideas of Herbert Spencer, and founded in 1867 the Journal of Speculative Philosophy (which he edited for 22 years) to put forward the Hegelian viewpoint. He considered the libertarian ideas of Spencer to need the correction of the authoritarian support for the existing order expressed in Hegelianism. The existing order was buttressed, as were the existing order's authorities, by the concept of inevitability in Hegelianism. Hegelian philosophy "subordinated the individual to existing social institutions by maintaining that his true, spiritual self, which was constantly in conflict with his natural or physical self, could be realized only by adjusting himself to the divinely appointed environment and institutions that were in actual existence". Central to Harris' thinking was the necessity for the individual to subordinate himself to the state, official religion, etc. Education had the role of subordinating the natural self to the spiritual self. Harris felt that the state was the greatest human institution because the state was the carrier of culture[36].

In the Hegelian unfolding of history, Harris saw the American state as having a special mission as successor to the Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, and English. The bureaucratic public school, the introduction of which to America was so much the work of Harris, was the central instrument for education of people in the aims and duties of the state. For Harris, the American constitution was the central part of
American history, and he proposed that colonial history, up to the writing of the American constitution should form history instruction and end there. Civics would concentrate on discussion of the constitution. Great national heroes who created the American state formed a significant part of history instruction. Since a major problem for the success of the American state was the immigrant population in the cities, education was to be the means by which the immigrant populations were deprived of their own cultures and their natural selves, and given an American or spiritual self. Education would provide the discipline and proper habits that would make the immigrant accept and obey the existing institutions and political authorities. The cultural differences of the immigrants were viewed as criminal behavior, and without the schools to assimilate and Americanize them, the children of immigrants would continue in their parents’ culture, and thus be criminals too. In the great domestic political crises of the 1870s and 1890s, in which immigrants played a leading part in the militancy of labor, the bureaucratic public school was viewed as the instrument by which the future dangerous populations of the cities, the children of immigrants, would be civilized — i.e. disciplined, silenced, habituated to regularity.

The rise of the cities in America, filled as they were by immigrants, created fears for the stability of the state. Effective compulsory education, mainly directed at the cities, according to Henry J. Perkinson, in *The Imperfect Panacea*, was the response. In New York, the compulsory education laws applied to New York City and Brooklyn only; in Maryland, to Baltimore; and in Missouri, to St. Louis. Compulsion reflected the refusal to allow Americanization to occur naturally and by the selection of the citizen.

The earlier abolition of the freedom of the citizen, by imposition of compulsory monetary support of schools, prefigured the abolition of the freedom of parents or children to be free from imposed, organized schooling. The argument was made that it was only right after denying the freedom of the citizen to support or not support education, to then deny the freedom of those for whom the citizen’s money was taken for the goals of education. Since the citizen was compelled to pay for the joint protection of his person and property — for such was the justification of the school system — the state had the obligation to reciprocate by forcing the attendance of those who were to be educated in respect for authority and political institutions. The ultimate in compulsory attendance was the reform school, for the habitual reluctant to attend public school. Perkinson noted:

Compulsory education laws exploded school enrollments. The number of five- to eighteen-year-olds enrolled in school rose from six and a half million in 1870 to fifteen and a half million by 1880; a rise from 57 percent to over 72 percent of the age group. Compulsory education laws not only brought more children to the schools but keep them there for longer periods of time.

The bureaucratic public school thus required a system of administration and supervision for the larger number of teachers, truant officers, and clerks. “In addition to truant officers the policy of the city required a vast amount of paper work: age certificates, school certificates, working papers, and employment tickets had to be designed, filled in, and issued. To handle the myriad forms and affidavits the superintendent acquired a number of assistant superintendents, replete with clerical staffs. Increasingly superintendents became preoccupied with money. Schoolkeeping was becoming big big business.”

In late 19th century America, politics was the growth business. The expansion of the federal government was matched by the expansion of the state and city governments. There was an explosion of bureaucratic personnel in America. Public education provided a major part of that explosion of bureaucracy and later of the personnel for the other sectors of bureaucracy.

Michael B. Katz, in *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools*, has indicated the need in the history of American education for a thoroughgoing revision of the official view that the public school system was the moral and progressive necessity modern educational historians present. Katz noted that the core of the public school system is bureaucracy, and with bureaucracy, a class system in education, as bureaucracy causes class division in all areas of compulsory activity. Bureaucracy in education was not considered
necesary by many Americans in the 19th century. Then, as now, there were men who believed that there were other ways to conduct life in modern society. Katz notes:

It is thus difficult to accept the proposition that bureaucracy is the only means through which social tasks can be accomplished ... bureaucracy is inevitable only when men confront certain problems with particular social values and priorities. It is not industrialization that makes bureaucracy inevitable but the combination of industrialization and particular values. It is because of the mix of setting and priorities, not because of the setting alone, that we have bureaucracy as the dominant form of social organization.

Katz describes how the victory of public education in the 19th century blacked out the historical reality that the voluntary education model was thought to be the form in which education would develop. The early nineteenth century American movement to reject mercantilism — in tariffs, government banks, government roads and government education — led to the emergence of a strong liberal policy to develop voluntary education. Government restrictions and subsidies were removed from human activities so that voluntary effort could reach its fullest manifestation.

Edward Hitchcock, president of Amherst College, stressed that voluntarism provided the necessary basis for the “flexibility of essentially private institutions and the variability of American conditions”. Katz continues:

“Freedom from governmental interference with our literary institutions” as a basic principle underscored the right of the parent to select his child’s education, which, in turn, found expression in the establishment of academies of varying types, suited to varying tastes. To exchange this mild anarchy for a state system of secondary schools would produce a “treadmill system” that was nothing but a “wretched substitute”. The other line emanating from the original premise related the individuality of the American character to the varied degree of civilization across the country. Both arguments called for an educational system that could sensibly reflect and adequately provide for personal and cultural idiosyncracies.

The rise of the American city was the excuse frequently used to replace voluntarism with the bureaucratic public school. The American city tended to be populated with immigrants, who, as all immigrants, moved to improve their economic condition. These immigrant urban people continued to be viewed as the causes of immorality — i.e. different cultural attitudes. Schools would be the means to upgrade the city’s culture and reduce the tensions due to economic differences in society. “In that setting, the first problem of the schools became, very simply, to ensure the regular attendance of all children upon a prolonged, systematic, and carefully structured formal education.” The rule of the parent was negated. In place of the parent was a bureaucratic structure to conduct classes, keep rolls, investigate absences, and administer the whole system.

Bureaucratic education’s purpose was to inculcate values and habits in young people who had different values and different habits. The values were set by clergymen, men of letters and employers. All wished the urban population to be orderly, respectful, compliant, docile, punctual and submissive. Centralization, public superintendents of education, systematization, and professionalism, based on tax support and compulsory attendance, were the means to these ends because voluntarism permitted the parents or private school administrators to choose and select these values instead of the dominant group in society. The class basis of bureaucratic school systems was reflected in the habits and values inculcated. Katz, after detailing the status and moral anxiety of the bureaucratic school advocates, adds:

Herein lies an irony: Schoolmen who thought they were promoting a neutral and classless — indeed, a common — school education remained unwilling to perceive the extent of cultural bias inherent in their own writing and activity. However, the bias was central and not incidental to the standardization and administrative rationalization of public education. ... [Their rejection of decentralization] stemmed equally ... from a gut fear of the cultural divisiveness inherent in the increasing religious and ethnic diversity of American life. Cultural homogenization played counterpoint to administrative rationality. Bureaucracy was intended to standardize far more than the conduct of public life.

... It was, after all implicit in the “common” of “common school” that education should forge social unity by blurring cultural distinctiveness — the familiar idea of the melting pot. What is less obvious, although closely related, is the racist implication of such a point of view. If an attitude that considers one group to be different from and inferior to another in some basic and essential fashion can be labelled racist, then we are forced to the conclusion that racist sentiment scarred the origins of public education. For it is in precisely those terms — difference and inferiority — that school people perceived lower-class children ... . It approached this
task from a racist perspective on its clientele. Thus racism, like antisexuality, is integral, and not incidental, to the very structure of public education. It was partly to deal effectively with the problem of the urban poor that bureaucracy developed as the mode of organizing urban schools. The racism thus integral to bureaucratic structure became even more deeply entrenched.

The challenging, radical social science in 19th century America was the work of Herbert Spencer. Spencer’s philosophical anarchism was reflected in his first book, *Social Statics* (1850). It was directed at the positivism of Benthamism. Spencer emphasized natural rights based on the ethics of the right of each man to do as he pleased as long as he did not violate the equal rights of another man. Spencer opposed the injustice of historical land ownership, and supported rights of women and children as well as the universal right to ignore the state. Spencer saw society moving from a barbarian or military phase to an industrial or pacific phase. The industrial society was based on contract and the elimination of status, which was due to the existence of legislation. Through contract and the elimination of legislation, the rights of life, liberty and property were secured, and a new type of character emerged which was peaceful, independent, kindly and honest. The movement of society from status to contract would make possible the growth of the human mind. The homogeneity of status society would give place to the heterogeneity of contract society. In a society based on contract, not only would the injustices caused by the imposition of status disappear, but the replacement of voluntary for compulsory relations would emphasize individual responsibility and altruistic attitudes. Concerning public education, Spencer, in his *Principles of Ethics* (I, p. 545), said:

> We have fallen upon evil times, in which it has come to be an accepted doctrine that part of the responsibilities are to be discarded not by parents but by the public — a part which is gradually becoming a larger part and threatens to become the whole ... . The political ethics now in fashion makes the unhesitating assumption that while each man, as parent, is not responsible for the mental culture of his own offspring, he is, as citizen, along with other citizens, responsible for the mental culture of all other men’s offspring!

In the 1860s a leading disciple of Spencarian social science, Edward Livingston Youmans, arranged for D. Appleton and Company to found *Appleton’s Journal* in 1867. The journal ran a large number of articles on Spencer’s thought, as well as popularizers of Spencer such as Youmans. In 1872 Youmans founded the *Popular Science Monthly* which sold eleven thousand copies per month. Its early issues contained, in serial form, Spencer’s *The Study of Sociology*, which was published as a book in Appleton’s International Scientific Series. *The Study of Sociology* presented Spencer’s conception of the practical value of social science. The book was a landmark for the development of sociology in the U.S. Spencer emphasized a science of sociology which would teach men to think of social causation in a scientific way. Spencer emphasized the increasingly heterogeneous nature of industrial society and the great complexity of social relations. For Spencer, it was absolutely impossible to have the benefits of modern industry if attempts were made to interfere with the natural, and very complex, relations which existed in society. In justices which remained from status society created a problem of how best to redress them, but he wished to emphasize that compulsion and control would interfere with progress and make prosperity impossible. A science of society should indicate the social behavior which interfered with progress, starting with attitudes of social control, compulsion, status and the bases of status, legislation. For Spencer, sociology showed that legislation damaged the new character and new human nature, and restored the retrogressive attitudes of status society — aggression, egoism, injustice. Spencer felt that sociology showed that legislation or any state financial aid for education, poverty, or privileged professions was as unjust as legislation for tariffs, state authorized banks, or other privileged groups. From this perspective, Youmans attacked the recently created American Social Science Association for failing to undertake and present a “strict and passionless study of society from a scientific point of view”. Instead of a scientific perspective, the association was recommending legislation, compulsion instead of contract, and causing havoc in social relations by restoring attitudes of status.
The Spencerian position was called “so utterly progressive” even though its insistence on abstinence from state action has been called conservative; its “chief conclusion was that positive functions of the state should be kept to the barest minimum, it was almost anarchical, and it was devoid of that center of reverence and authority which the state provides in many conservative systems”. The Spencerian view of a contract society was presented by Yale professor, William Graham Sumner, in What Social Classes Owe to Each Other:

The social structure is based on contract, and status is of the least importance. Contract, however, is rational — even rationalistic. It is also realistic, cold and matter-of-fact. A contract relation is based on a sufficient reason, not on custom or prescription. It is not permanent. It endures only so long as the reason for it endures ... .

Whether social philosophers think it desirable or not, it is out of the question to go back to status or to the sentimental relations which once united baron and retainer, master and servant, teacher and pupil, comrade and comrade.148.

Three times Sumner put his academic position in peril due to his support of Spencerian views. First, he tried to use Spencer’s The Study of Sociology as the text in a course. Yale’s president objected, and a public controversy ensued, in which Sumner sought to resign. Later, he was threatened with removal because of his stand against the status legislation of protective tariffs which gave profits to industrialists at the expense of the ordinary consumer. Finally, his leadership in opposition to the Spanish–American war and American conquest of the Philippines brought the most serious threat to Sumner’s position at Yale. Sumner and other American Spencers were committed to the Jeffersonian–Jacksonian tradition of voluntarism and equality before the law. Taxation and state interference introduced compulsion and bureaucracy which was the foundation of class147.

Spencer had predicted in 1882 that immigration to America would bring an intermixture of European peoples to produce a finer type, more able to surmount difficulties than existed formerly. John Fiske, another disciple of Spencer, was optimistic about the immigrants’ role in American life because the decentralization and localism of America provided opportunities to adopt American customs without surrendering whatever immigrants wished to keep of another culture. But, the growth of radicalism, generally associated with immigrants, and increasing conflict by organized labor, created an attitude of despair, and fear that the immigrant would not be able to adapt to American institutions. Of course, a major problem was the emergence of contradictory institutions in America; the tradition of individualism and diversity was being challenged by the growth of uniform institutions and a larger state bureaucracy based on centralization. The immigrant could easily fit into the traditional America of diversity, but not very easily into the new emerging America of uniformity. Much of the scholarly base of this new viewpoint came from American graduates of German universities. Many younger Americans went to Germany to study the emerging social sciences, and returned to fill the posts at the blossoming universities and to found new scholarly societies, like the American Economic Association and the American Historical Association, in the 1880s.

The influence of the German Historical School on American historical, economic and sociological studies was immense. Defending big government and native, organized labor, these younger social scientists saw the immigrant as an opponent of centralization and uniformity, and as undermining the traditional respect for authority and standard of living of American workers. For them, the primitive homogeneity that Spencer spoke about was to be the norm for modern societies, rather than Spencer’s heterogeneity. Under the inspiration of German-trained economists such as Richard T. Ely, the American Economic Association was founded on the credo: “We regard the state as an agency whose positive assistance is one of the indispensable conditions of human progress.” Edmund J. James, Edward W. Bemis and Richard Mayo-Smith, leading economists, emphasized the necessity of cultural homogeneity for a modern developed state. In 1888, the American Economic Association offered a prize for the best essay on “The Evil Effects of Unrestricted Immigration”. Mayo-Smith, in Emigration and Immigration, called attention to
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the discord threatening America due to lack of homogeneity in a nation of immigrants. He believed that immigration in the midst of the social and economic crises in which America found itself was "endangering America's free, self-reliant, orderly culture, the unique economic well-being of its working people, and the prestige of industrial pursuits". In 1890 the president of the American Economic Association warned that a new tide of "races of . . . the very lowest stage of degradation" was arriving.\(^{481}\)

Lester Ward,\(^{1491}\) a scholar-bureaucrat in the federal government, was the author of Dynamic Sociology (1883) which challenged the laissez-faire concepts of Spencerian and Sumnerian sociology. Ward favored the German system of tariffs, state ownership of industry, compulsory education, etc. He viewed laissez-faire as unproductive because it permitted human nature to go its own way rather than scientifically directing and channeling activity. In 1906 Ward became the first president of the American Sociological Association. Ward in Dynamic Sociology held that scientific work was best performed by the state and that this applied much more to education: "all educational work should be intrusted to the state".

There exists no natural desire for education. Even admitting the natural craving of the youthful mind for knowledge, this would never be sought in any of the ways in which education required it to be conferred . . . . State education is far better for the pupil. It is distinguished fundamentally from private education in dealing with all in a strictly impartial manner . . . . This is a work which can not be trusted to individuals. It can neither be left to the discretion of children, of parents, nor of teachers. It is not for any of these to say what knowledge is most useful to society. No tribunal short of that which society in its own sovereign capacity shall appoint is competent to decide this question.\(^{150}\)

A major criticism of the Spencerian optimism regarding immigration came from the Eugenacists. In England, Francis Galton gave strong support to the importance of heredity. A major problem which Galton saw was the necessity of gathering and publicizing eugenic data; this gave a major impetus to the application of statistics. In the early 20th century "National Eugenics" was studied at the University of London, where Galton in his will later established a professorship of Eugenics, to which Karl Pearson was appointed. Pearson was a leading Darwinist Socialist who used socialism and Darwinism to attempt to gain class harmony in a socialist-welfare state. Pearson urged the teaching of "veneration for the State". These views had a strong impact on American social scientists. American economists became active members of the immigration restriction movement. These younger economists, many influenced by socialist ideas similar to Pearson's, were concerned about class disharmony evidenced by militant trade union activity. This labor unrest was viewed as non-American and the result of alien influences due to increased immigration.

A leading economist, Francis A. Walker ("Restriction of Immigration", Atlantic Monthly (June, 1896), p. 828) said of immigrants:

They have none of the ideas and aptitudes which would fit them readily and easily to take up the problems of self care and self government, such as belong to those who are descended from the tribes that met under the oak tree of old Germany to make laws and choose a chieftain.

Henry Pratt Fairchild, Prescott Hall and Thomas Carver among economists were members of the Immigration Restriction League. Carver declared: "It is notable of our own country, that the ideas of universality and non-nationality abound mostly among individuals of dominated races finding refuge there. . . . These foreign elements [are] largely anarchist and socialist." Irving Fisher was president of the Race Betterment League and the Eugenics Society. Another economist, Frank Fetter, declared: "Great changes in thought are impending, and these will include the elimination of the unfit . . . . and the conscious improvement of the race. Under the touch of the new science of eugenics, many of our most perplexing problems would disappear, making possible the better democracy which we are just beginning to seek.\(^{151}\)

Eugenic ideas influenced psychology. Psychologists like Henry Goddard, Lewis Terman and C. C. Brigham, emphasized the lack of democratic values among immigrants, and encouraged the use of the educational system to inculcate basic habits of discipline and work, while selecting and further educating the
elements in the population with proper intelligence. William McDougall, trained by Francis Galton, combined instinctual theory with Darwinism in *Is America Safe for Democracy?* published when McDougall came to the chairmanship of the Harvard Psychology department. Henry Goddard translated the Binet Scales into English and held that intelligence was a genetically determined single unitary function. Terman's student Otis adapted the Binet test to test army inductees during World War I; these were used to show the genetic inferiority of Eastern and Southern European peoples. These findings were summarized by C. C. Brigham for the use of Congress in establishing immigration restrictions and immigration quotas. Brigham later founded the Educational Testing Service at Princeton.

Through intelligence testing, the schools were to be able to group students according to their mental capacities and fit them to the needs of the industrial system. The more dominant racial and intellectual groups would be channeled into the universities and higher technical institutes. The elaborate work involved in such testing and tracking would provide further justification for an expanded bureaucracy, and social efficiency would become the justification for an increasing control and manipulation over people's lives.

In conclusion, we hope to have shown that the views of Robert Hutchins and R. Freeman Butts, who see the health and safety of the American political community as vitally linked with the work of the public school system, have deep roots in the ideological conceptions of American political and social philosophers. So does the fear that cultural pluralism would produce political disintegration, the triumph of vice and ignorance and the failure of republicanism. No longer able to use the Church to shape and police the political, moral, social and intellectual culture of the American people, American intellectuals found a useful substitute in the State controlled public school system.

The interesting question for the future is whether American social scientists and philosophers will abandon the notion of a culturally homogeneous society and undertake the task of reshaping the political system to conform to the needs of such a society. The acceptance of this challenge may affect the fate of democratic society in the United States, and has equal significance for our Canadian neighbors. But it also relates directly to the most difficult problems in international relations, where cultural imperialism, the desire to reshape others' manners and morals, ideas and political systems, in one's own national image of truth, justice and morality, constitutes the principal threat to the peace, even the survival, of human civilization.

**NOTES**


20. Ibid., p. 256.
21. Ibid., pp. 244-246.
22. See Lord Kames, Loose Hints Upon Education (Edinburgh, 1781), in Smith's Theories of Education, pp. 127-142; and in the same source, Thomas Jefferson's letter to Thomas Law, 1814, pp. 313-318.
33. Report to the College of Teachers, Cincinnati 1835, as quoted in Allen O. Hansen, Early Educational Leadership in the Ohio Valley (Bloomington, Ill., 1923; Arno, 1969), pp. 21-24.
34. Ibid. p. 24.
38. Ibid., pp. 70-71 and 75.
39. Ibid., pp. 72-73, 161.
41. Ibid., pp. 22-28.
42. Ibid., p. 30-31.
43. Ibid., pp. 39-40.
46. Ibid., pp. 7, 51-66.
47. Ibid., p. 11.