

The Ideology and Politics of the Common School

The 1830s and 1840s are known in educational history as the decades of the common school movement in the United States. It was during this historical period that the modern American school system began to take form. Obviously, schools and public school systems existed in the United States before the 1830s. What was different about the common school movement was the establishment and standardization of state systems of education designed to achieve specific public policies.

Historians have offered various interpretations of the common school period. No other period in American educational history has stimulated as extensive a debate about its meaning and goals. In part, this debate reflects the importance of the common school movement in understanding the American educational system. This chapter begins with a discussion of the various social and political groups that supported the common school movement, including the full-time educational reformers who devoted their lives to the common school ideal. Political, economic, and religious groups that opposed the establishment of the common school are considered next. Last, the meaning of the common school movement for the later development of the American school is explored.

Before the common school period, a variety of public and private school organizations existed. Massachusetts had laws requiring the provision of education and, as discussed in Chapter 3, had established the first system of urban education in Boston in the 1790s. On the other hand, many states, like New York and Pennsylvania, supported charity schools while a majority of children in those states attended private schools. Newer states had passed laws allowing for the development of schools but had not actively created organized systems of education. For instance, Ohio, after its admission to the Union in 1802, passed legislation in 1806 and 1816 allowing for the organization of schools supported by rents from lands and tuition. Beginning in 1821, Ohio law permitted

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the taxation of all property in a district for the support of schools. The state created a permanent school fund in 1827.

Although all these actions provided some support for education, they did not approximate the very distinctive features of the common school movement. Probably the most important difference between the common school movement and previous educational developments in the United States was the concept underlying the common school movement of a school under state control teaching a common body of knowledge to students from different social backgrounds. This concept of schooling was to serve distinct social and political goals.

Three distinctive aspects of the common school movement made it different from past educational developments. The first was an emphasis on educating all children in a common schoolhouse. It was argued that if children from a variety of religious, social-class, and ethnic backgrounds were educated in common, there would be a decline in hostility and friction between social groups. In addition, if children educated in common were taught a common social and political ideology, a decrease in political conflict and social problems would result. Obviously, this aspect of the common school movement can be traced to educational advocates in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who wanted to teach nationalism as a means of promoting national unity and to those supporters of charity schools who wanted to use education as a means of eliminating poverty and crime. The idea of using education to solve social problems and build a political community became an essential concept in the common school movement. The term *common school* came to have a specific meaning: a school that was attended in common by all children and where a common political and social ideology was taught.

The second important aspect of the common school movement was the idea of using schools as an instrument of government policies. Certainly, this aspect of education had existed in the past. Colonial schools had been maintained to train a population that would understand and obey secular and religious laws. Writers after the Revolution had advocated systems of schools to provide leaders and a responsible citizenry. What was different about the common school movement was the acceptance of the idea of a direct linkage between government educational policies and the solving and control of social, economic, and political problems. Within this concept, the common school was to be a panacea for society's problems.

The third distinctive feature of the common school movement was the creation of state agencies to control local schools. In part, this was necessary if schools were to carry out government social, political, and economic policies. In the past, states, like Massachusetts, had passed laws requiring the establishment of schools in local communities or, like New

York and Pennsylvania, had established state school funds for charity schools. In these situations, an official position had not been established to oversee the state educational system. In 1812, New York was the first American state to create the position of state superintendent of schools. In the 1820s, some other states followed New York's lead and created the office of state superintendent of education. But it was during the 1830s that state supervision and organization of schools became a major educational reform. In part, this was the work of the "father of the common school," Horace Mann, who became the first secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education in 1837.

These three distinct features of the common school movement do not constitute a revolution against previous ideas about schooling, but they do represent ideas that were gaining increasing currency in the early nineteenth century. Probably the most important of these ideas was the belief that human nature can be formed, shaped, and given direction by training within formally organized institutions. This thinking was embodied in faculty psychology and in the charity schools. It was a logical step for common school reformers to apply this reasoning to the entire society and to argue that government-operated schools could create the perfect society. Also, various social groups, such as the black community, discussed in Chapter 3, began to believe that schooling could be a means for economic and social improvement. They began to demand common schools, but often for reasons quite different from those given by full-time common school reformers. Although these differences existed within the common school movement, the final outcome of its reforms was the beginning of the modern American school system.

Varieties of Historical Interpretation

The different historical interpretations of the common school era reflect the more general debate about the role of education in American society. On the one hand, there are those who see the common school period as a battle between liberals and conservatives for the establishment of a school system that would be of great benefit to all members of society. On the other hand, some historians argue that common schools were established to protect privileged economic and religious positions in society. These broad differences in historical interpretation contain elements of the debate that continues to this day about whose interests are served by the public schools. Therefore, understanding the differences in historical interpretation of the common school period is important for understanding both common school reforms and current debates about schooling.

The first major educational historian to portray the common school movement as a battle between liberals and conservatives over extending

the benefits of schooling to all people was Ellwood Cubberley in his text first published in 1919, *Public Education in the United States: A Study and Interpretation of American Educational History*. Cubberley describes liberals as good people who struggle for education for all people against avarice-minded conservatives. He wrote lists of characteristics and arguments that divided those in favor of from those opposed to the expansion of common schools. His divisions and descriptions reflect his bias in favor of the common school. For instance, supporters are described as citizens of the republic; opponents are described as belonging to an old aristocratic class. Philanthropists and humanitarians in favor of common schooling were put in opposition to conservatives. Cubberley indicates his real bias when he places "public men of large vision" in opposition to "politicians of small vision." In addition, he describes the differences between supporters and opponents, respectively, as city residents versus rural residents; intelligent workingmen versus the ignorant and narrow minded; nontaxpayers versus taxpayers; Calvinists versus Lutherans, Mennonites, and Quakers; and New Englanders versus southerners. (Cubberley's description is not correct in all cases; for example, Quakers were strong supporters of the common school.) Cubberley locates further opposition to the common school movement among owners of private schools and non-English-speaking groups.¹

Each of these groups supported or opposed the common school for a variety of reasons. Again, Cubberley creates a list of these differing reasons, which reflects his own support of the common school movement. The arguments he lists as those given in support of the common school movement include prevention and reduction of "wrong ideas as crime; increased work force productivity; elimination of "wrong ideas as to the distribution of wealth"; reduction of tensions between social classes; elimination of charity schools because they stigmatized a certain class in society; assimilation of immigrants; and preparation of the citizenry for the exercise of the right to vote. Of course, these arguments not only supported the common school movement, but also became the traditional arguments for the support of public schooling in the United States.

Cubberley also lists arguments for the expansion of state control over education. In one sense, these arguments can be viewed as part of the continuing debate about the rights of parents versus the rights of the state over the education of children. In Cubberley's words, the major arguments were as follows: "That a State which has the right to hang has the right to educate"; that "the taking over of education by the State is not based on considerations of economy, but is the exercise of the State's inherent right to self-preservation and improvement"; and finally, as a reflection of the common school emphasis on education serving government policies, "that only a system of state-controlled schools

can be free to teach whatever the welfare of the State may demand."² Cubberley's list of the arguments favoring state control of education describes the actual political divisions that occurred during the 1830s and 1840s over the degree of government intervention in social and economic issues.

He lists the following as arguments given in opposition to the expansion of state power: "That taxes would be so increased that no state could long meet such a lavish drain" and "that there was a priestcraft in the scheme, the purpose being first to establish a State School, and then a State Church." As discussed in more detail later in this chapter, Cubberley's list greatly oversimplifies the political debate about the extension of state control.³

Cubberley lists the arguments of those opposed to the social and economic reform arguments for the common school, which, according to his interpretations, centered around aristocratic ideas of social class: fear that common schools would destroy desirable social-class differences and educate people out of their proper place in society; fear that the industrious would be taxed to pay for the education of the indolent; fear that people without children would be forced to pay for the education of other peoples' children; fear that native language instruction of non-English-speaking students would supplant English-language instruction in the schools; concerns of religious groups that the common school would hinder their advancement; and fear that private schools would be forced to close.

In general, Cubberley's interpretation is one that depicts the common school movement as the correct historical route to the development of an educational system that would benefit the majority of people by solving economic, political, and social problems. This vision of the common school movement received added support in Merle Curti's *Social Ideas of American Educators*, first published in 1935. As mentioned previously, Curti's history of education was written during the Depression, when there was a great deal of concern over the historical struggle between the haves and the have-nots.

For Curti, the common school movement was a major democratic movement designed to extend social benefits to the lower social classes in society. His description of the period is given in large part in the two chapters devoted to Horace Mann and Henry Barnard respectively. He portrays Horace Mann as a great equalitarian and reformer. For Curti, Mann's primary motivation was a desire to assure that all classes of society had equal access to knowledge. Curti states that Mann's "social vision remained undimmed to the end, and all his work in the educational field was an effort to introduce into that field a more humane and democratic spirit."⁴

Curti is equally glowing in his tribute to Henry Barnard, who was

secretary of the Connecticut Board of Education from 1839 to 1842 and was later editor of the *American Journal of Education*. Although Curti portrays Barnard as being more conservative than Mann, he still pays tribute to Barnard's career. Barnard, like Mann, is described as the educational reformer trying to democratize knowledge.

Unlike Cubberley, Curti is highly critical of the conservative economic and social ideas held by both Mann and Barnard, which puts a critical edge to Curti's praise of the common school movement. Criticism of the social and economic opinions of common school reformers became an important factor in the revision of educational history that occurred in the 1960s. The most dramatic revision came with the publication in 1968 of Michael Katz's *Irony of Early School Reform*, which deals with the decision in 1860 by Beverly, Massachusetts, voters to abolish their high school. In examining voting patterns, Katz found that working-class groups resisted the establishment of the high school, while the elite of the community worked actively for its creation.⁵ A later analysis found that wealth and occupation correlated with voting patterns, but that neighborhood location was the more important determinant of voting. In this case, those who lived in areas outside of the town opposed the existence of a high school serving the entire township.⁶

Katz used his discovery of resistance to the establishment of a high school in Beverly as a vehicle for providing a new interpretation of common school reforms. In the opening statement of his introductory chapter, "Educational Reform: The Cloud of Sentiment and Historiography," he states: "For the most part historians have helped to perpetuate this essentially noble story, which portrays a rational, enlightened working class, led by idealistic and humanitarian intellectuals, triumphantly wrestling free public education from . . . selfish, wealthy elite and from the bigoted proponents of orthodox religions."⁷ This, of course, is the interpretation given to the period by Ellwood Cubberley.

But, Katz argues, one should immediately begin to question this historical interpretation when one considers that by the end of the nineteenth century most urban schools were "cold, rigid, and somewhat sterile bureaucracies." He goes on to ask: "Could a truly humanitarian urge to help realize widely diffused aspirations have turned so quickly into the dispassionate ethos of red tape and drill?" In answering this question, Katz paints an entirely different picture of the evolution of the common school.

For Katz, the most important factors in explaining the common school movement are the social and economic changes associated with the outlying of factories, the increase in immigration, and the growth of cities. Within the context of these events, upper-class reformers were seeking to assure that they would benefit from these changes by imposing a common school system that would train workers for the new

factories, educate immigrants into acceptance of values supportive of the ruling elite, and provide order and stability among the expanding populations of the cities.

From this perspective, the rigid and bureaucratic schools that Katz claims existed by the end of the nineteenth century were not accidental, but were the logical result of a school system designed to discipline a population to serve the needs of an urban and industrial society. The emphasis on attendance, disciplined study, and order was designed to socialize the student, particularly the immigrant child, to the requirements of the new factory systems. Learning to behave in school was preparation for learning to work in the factory. Also, Katz argues, the bureaucratic structure of education, which evolved from common school reforms, was designed to assure upper-class control of schooling. In his conclusion, Katz states that the common school movement was "a coalition of the social leaders, status-anxious parents, and status-hungry educators to impose educational innovation, each for their own reasons, upon a reluctant community."⁹

Katz's interpretation does not change the identity of the leaders of the common school movement, but it does change their motivations. According to Katz, their actions were not the result of disinterested humanitarian impulses but were caused by a desire to protect their social positions and to provide the new industrial system with disciplined workers.

What became the most controversial aspect of this interpretation is the argument that common school reforms were imposed on an unwilling working class—an argument that posed an important challenge to traditional ways of viewing American schools. This interpretation suggests that the vast majority of people in the nineteenth century did not want the type of organization of schooling that became standard in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is important to understand that this attitude did not reflect a general opposition among the populace to education and schooling, but a rejection of common school reforms that sought to organize schools under central state control for the purposes of serving the social, political, and economic goals of government.

Katz's interpretation challenges not only Cubberley's benign view of the reformers but also interpretations that emphasize the importance of working-class support of the common school movement. Traditional labor history, beginning with the work of John R. Commons at the University of Wisconsin in 1918, stresses the key role of workingmen's parties in the late 1820s and 1830s in fighting for common school reforms. This interpretation places the American worker at the forefront of the battle for common schools. Of particular importance in this interpretation is the opposition of workers to the existence of charity schools,

which they felt reinforced social-class distinctions. According to Commons's interpretation, members of the workingmen's parties supported the common school because it provided the children of the poor with equal educational opportunity by mixing the rich and poor. Equality of educational opportunity, it was believed, would provide the children of the poor and the working class with an equal opportunity to compete with the children of the more affluent classes.

Rush Welter emphasizes the role of workingmen's parties in *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America* (1962), but his discussion minimizes their contribution to common school reform and stresses their contribution to later thinking about the democratic role of education. Welter, discussing the organized workingmen of the late 1820s and early 1830s, states, "Their numbers were few and their direct political influence was slight, but they first spelled out the educational perspective in which several generations of American democrats would see their society and their politics."¹⁰

A more complicated picture of common school reform emerges from Welter's interpretation of the workingmen's contribution to democratic educational theory: Although the workingmen's parties accepted the common school ideal of eliminating social-class distinctions and providing equality of opportunity, they also supported public schooling as a means of providing the working class with knowledge to protect itself against the interests and power of the privileged in society. This concept of political education in the common school, according to Welter, was different from the concept of education as a means of maintaining order in a free society. On the contrary, the workingmen's parties saw political education as a means of arming the working class against the authority and power of the upper class. In Welter's words, "In their [workingmen's] eyes political knowledge was useful, not because it supported the exercise of governmental authority, but because it provided an intellectual resource against authority."¹¹

The importance of Welter's interpretation is his emphasis on the workingmen's support of school reform and his argument that the workingmen supported the common school for different reasons than did other members of society. Within this framework, the common school did not arise from a consensus of values about what the common school should accomplish but was a result of different social groups each hoping that the common school would fulfill particular educational goals.

Katz's argument for imposition of common school reforms on an unwilling working class is in direct opposition to these traditional arguments. Interestingly, the major attack on Katz's thesis comes from radical Marxist historians who feel that his interpretation denies the role of the working class in progressive historical change. Marxist historian

Philip Foner led the attack in an article titled "The Role of Labor in the Struggle for Free Compulsory Education." For Foner, "the organized working class . . . was the driving force for universal compulsory and free public education."¹² Foner argues that the working class did not get the type of school system it wanted but that, from the time of the American Revolution, the working class was in the forefront of the struggle for public education.

Although recognizing the role of the workingmen's parties in the struggle for public education, historians have continued to emphasize the role of common schools in protecting the interests of certain groups in society. The scope of this interpretation was broadened in 1983 with the publication of Carl Kaestle's *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860*. Kaestle argues that the common school movement was primarily designed to protect the ideology of an American Protestant culture. Most of the common school reformers, he states, were native-born Anglo-American Protestants, and their public philosophy, "called for government action to provide schooling that would be more common, more equal, more dedicated to public policy, and therefore more effective in creating cultural and political values centering on Protestantism, republicanism, and capitalism."¹³

Kaestle identifies 10 major propositions as constituting the American Protestant culture the common school was designed to protect. These 10 propositions can be divided into 4 groups: The first group includes the belief in the fragility of the republican form of government, the importance of developing individual character to achieve social morality, and the role of personal effort in defining merit. This group of beliefs can be traced back to the early proponents of republican education, who believed that order could be maintained in a free republican society only through the education of responsible citizens. Kaestle argues that by the 1830s a certain confidence had developed that the experiment in republican government would survive, but there was still concern that actions had to be taken to assure its survival. In the common school movement, stress was placed on protecting the fragility of the republican form of government by providing a political education that taught a common set of political beliefs, emphasized the exercise of intelligence, and promoted a respect for laws. Or, as Kaestle states, the implication of native Protestant ideology was that "schooling should stress unity, obedience, restraint, self-sacrifice, and the careful exercise of intelligence."¹⁴

Also, as discussed in Chapter 3, the belief that social morality was achieved through improving the quality of individual morality was a central theme of the charity school movement. As part of Protestant ideology and the common school movement, Kaestle argues, it resulted in a belief that a good moral education would produce a moral society. In addition, this aspect of Protestant ideology stressed that poverty

could be eliminated if the children of the poor were taught that they could advance in society through their own individual effort.

The second group of factors in Kaestle's discussion is the role of women in society and the importance of the family and social environment in building character. According to Kaestle, Protestant ideology defined three central roles for women in middle-class families: to provide a sanctuary for the hard-working husband, to intelligently manage the household, and to nurture children. Of crucial importance was the role of women in child rearing because this role involved education for the political and moral well-being of the nation. The arguments given for the importance of this social role for women provided a justification for recruiting women as teachers in common schools—an important aspect of common school reforms—because of their supposed skills in nurturing and developing morality. Another important factor, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, is the fact that women were cheaper to employ as teachers than men were.

As noted in Chapter 3, during this period emphasis was also placed on the importance of the environment and family on the development of individual character. This was an important theme in faculty psychology and in the establishment of charity schools and houses of refuge. The stress on the importance of the family structure reinforced the importance of the domestic role of women.

In the third group of themes characterizing Protestant ideology, Kaestle includes a belief in the virtue of property and the availability of economic opportunity in the United States. Both Protestant ideology and the common school ideology contain the belief, according to Kaestle, that "property was to be respected because it taught virtue. Every one should be taught to desire property and to respect property."¹⁵ Related to this belief was a vision of America as the land of economic opportunity: The availability of property and education would make it possible for all people to achieve economic success.

The last group of themes Kaestle identifies includes a belief in the superiority of American Protestant culture, in the manifest destiny of American society, and in the necessity of unifying America's population. In the context of these beliefs, American Protestants believed that their religious values were the central core of the American experiment with republicanism. As noted in Chapter 2, educational writers after the Revolutionary War, like Noah Webster, equated Protestant-Christian values with republican values. Kaestle argues that this same theme appears in the Protestant ideology associated with the common school movement. Kaestle also argues that the belief in the superiority of Protestantism combined with a belief in America's unique destiny to "suggest to Americans that their nation was destined to reach the peak of human civilization."¹⁶ The assumption of the superiority of Protestant-

ism logically led to the belief that all people should be united by being educated into a Protestant culture.

Kaestle's description of early nineteenth-century Protestant ideology, which will be elaborated later in this chapter, provides a good summary of the basic tenets of the common school movement of the 1830s and 1840s. From Kaestle's perspective, this ideology was shared by a majority of Americans. Of course, Catholics, an important group whose importance increased as their population increased in the United States, rejected many parts of this Protestant ideology. Catholics felt it necessary to organize their own private school system in the 1840s in opposition to the common school system.

These different interpretations highlight the complex factors involved in the common school movement. No single interpretation provides an adequate explanation. Rather, the common school appears to have been a result of a complicated set of often-conflicting social and economic factors that included a humanitarian impulse to create the good society; a desire by the working class to enhance its political and economic position in society; a desire by manufacturers to have a disciplined and well-trained work force; a desire of the upper classes to protect their economic and social privileges; and a desire to maintain an American Protestant culture.

These themes are explored in this chapter by examining the goals and ideology of the common school reformers, the activities of the workingmen's parties, the actions of organized political parties and interest groups, and Catholic rejection of the common school.

The Ideology of the Common School Movement

The creation of a popular ideology and justification for the common school movement was mainly the work of a class of individuals who were able to devote the majority of their time to educational causes. These individuals occupied newly created government positions that gave them the time and authority to articulate the principles of the common school movement and conduct a campaign to spread the common school ideology. The most prominent of these individuals were Horace Mann and Henry Barnard.

For the purpose of understanding the basic ideology of these full-time common school reformers, this section concentrates on the life and ideas of Horace Mann. It is important to understand that the popularly stated common school ideology did not necessarily reflect the reality of the changes taking place in American education or reflect the positions held by all supporters of the common school. For instance, as mentioned briefly and as will be discussed in a later section of this chapter, the workingmen's parties supported the establishment of common schools

for different reasons from those given in the more popular rhetoric of the common school movement.

What is important about the ideology of the common school movement, as stated by its major leaders, was that it established the basic framework, from the nineteenth century to the present, for popular and official discussions about the goals and purposes of public schooling in American life. Within these early arguments for common schools can be found most of the hopes and aspirations that many American people have had for the public schools. These early justifications for public schooling not only claimed that schools could solve the major social, economic, and political problems of society, but also argued that common schools were necessary for its very survival.

Two important mechanisms spreading the popular ideology of the common school were educational periodicals and newly created educational organizations. Between 1825 and 1850, over 60 periodicals devoted to education were established. The most important of these journals were the *Massachusetts Common School Journal*, edited by Horace Mann; the *Connecticut Common School Journal*, edited by Henry Barnard; and the *Ohio Common School Director*, edited by Samuel Lewis. As historian Sally Wertheim states:

One of the purposes of the journals was to build support for the common school movement in communities where the proper climate for acceptance of the idea of universal education did not exist. The periodicals represented leading educational ideas of the times, as perceived by their editors and publishers, and provided a forum for these educational leaders to advance their philosophies about education.¹⁷

According to Lawrence Cremin, the most important organizations for spreading the ideals of the common school were the American Lyceum, organized in 1825; the Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers, founded in 1829; and the American Institute of Instruction, established in 1830. For common school reformers, Cremin claims, these organizations were an important "means of enunciating and pressing their demands."¹⁸ They held countless lectures, public discussions, and conventions at which common school advocates were able to spread their ideas.

In many ways, the spread of the common school ideology was a fascinating example of the diffusion of ideas. But, it should be remembered, the spread of new ideas required a public that was willing to accept them. In many ways, the public had been made ready for the acceptance of the basic ideas of the common school movement by the educational writers of the post-Revolutionary period, such as Noah Webster and Benjamin Rush, and by the arguments for social and moral reform made by the leaders of the charity school movement and the

Lancasterian system. In addition, the various types of faculty psychology made it possible for many Americans to believe in the common school as the panacea for the social, political, and economic problems of society.

Those who created and spread the ideology of the common school worked with as much fervor as leaders of religious crusades. And, in fact, there are striking parallels between the two types of campaigns. Both promised some form of salvation and moral reformation. In the case of the common school, the promise was the salvation of society.

In fact, the life and writings of Horace Mann can be characterized as a constant search for a means of social salvation. During his life he rejected Calvinism and adopted law as the means of social redemption, and after finding little hope in saving society through the establishment of proper laws, he turned to education. Mann was born in 1796 into a harsh Calvinistic environment in Franklin, Massachusetts. He claimed throughout his life that he abandoned Calvinism when, at the funeral of his 12-year-old brother, who had died of drowning, the family's Calvinist minister used the occasion to warn other young people of the dangers of dying unconverted. Mann described this minister as one who

expounded all the doctrines of total depravity, election, and reprobation, and not only the eternity, but the extremity, of hell-torments, unflinchingly and in their most terrible significance; while he rarely if ever descended upon the joys of heaven, and never, if ever, upon the essential and necessary happiness of a virtuous life.¹⁹

For Mann, phrenology and the common school became substitutes for his youthful experience with Calvinism. Calvinism had created for him a living hell that "spread a pall of blackness . . . beyond [which] . . . I could see the bottomless and seething lake filled with torments, and hear the wailing and agony of its victims."²⁰ In a series of letters to his sister in 1836, one year before becoming secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, he describes his rejection of this haunting vision of hell for a belief in good works in the present life. "My nature revolts at the idea of belonging to a universe in which there is to be never-ending anguish . . . while we are one earth, the burden of our duties is toward man."²¹

Mann entered the practice of law with the same fervor that would later characterize his involvement in common school reform. He was educated at Brown University and in 1823 was admitted to the bar and practice of law at Dedham, Massachusetts. Between 1827 and 1833, he served in the Massachusetts state legislature, where concerns with reforming society made him instrumental in enacting laws limiting the sale of alcohol and lottery tickets, establishing hospitals for the insane, and creating the Massachusetts State Board of Education.

While serving in the state legislature, he was surrounded by political and social events that affected his belief in the importance of common school reform and helped to shape his justification of the movement. A good way of understanding the social context of his decision to accept common school reform as the answer to society's problems is to read his description in his journal of the events between the time he was asked to serve as secretary of the Board of Education and his acceptance of that position.

On May 18, 1837, Mann received a letter proposing his nomination to the newly created State Board of Education and urging him to lead the board as secretary. He wrote in his journal on that date that, could a person be successful in that office, "what a diffusion, what intensity, what perpetuity of blessings he would confer! How would his beneficial influence upon mankind widen and deepen as it descended forever!"²² He did not communicate his acceptance of that position until the end of June. During that time, according to his journal entry for May 25, he read "Combe on the Constitution of Man." This was his basic text in phrenology, which provided him with the scientific hope that the mental faculties could be developed and shaped to create a moral and good individual and, consequently, a moral and just society. His continued involvement in general social reform was reflected by his attendance at meetings of the Massachusetts Temperance Society. This society believed that the ending of alcohol consumption would contribute to the elimination of poverty and crime and add stability to the family. Mann noted on May 25, after attending a meeting of the society: "The faith [temperance] is now in a forward state of realization; and what a triumph it will be! not like a Roman triumph that made hearts bleed, and nations weep, and reduced armies to captivity, but one that heals hearts, and wipes tears from a nation's eyes, and sets captivity free."²³

Mann's fear of growing social disorder in the United States was heightened when, on May 30, someone tried to start a fire next to his hotel room. He says about the event, "Fortunately it was discovered early, and extinguished. A gang of incendiaries infest the city. What a state of morals it reveals." He wonders how a group or individual could be driven to such an act. In the closing line of his description of the event, he touches on what would be an important theme in the common school movement: The hope for eliminating this type of crime, as he argued in his later writings on education, was the training of the young child. Or, as he asks in his closing line, "When will society, like a mother, take care of all her children?"²⁴

His fear of social disorder and religious conflict was further intensified when on Sunday, June 11, a riot took place in Boston between Catholics and Protestants. Tension between the two religious groups had been increasing in the United States with the immigration of large numbers of

Irish. Irish Catholics generally were widely discriminated against in housing and employment. One of the more popular songs of the time was "No Irish Need Apply." In his description of the riot, Mann says,

As I sit down to write, martial music is playing in the streets. A riot of almost unheard-of atrocity has raged for several hours this afternoon between the Irish population . . . and the engine-men and those who rallied to their assistance. . . . It is said lives are lost: it is certain that great bodily injury has been inflicted.

Mann goes on to reflect that the real problem was public opinion, which played a major role in the power of American government. The key, he felt, to eliminating this type of riot would be the proper education of public opinion.²⁵

Three days after the riot, Mann worried in his journal-over whether or not to accept the leadership of the Board of Education. Finally, on June 30, after reflecting on phrenology, attending temperance meetings, experiencing a fire-bombing, and observing a religious riot, he accepted the position. His journal for the date contains a statement of his belief in the ameliorating power of the school. With almost a religious passion, he states, "Henceforth, so long as I hold this office, I devote myself to the supremest welfare of mankind upon earth. . . . I have faith in the improbability of the race."²⁶

Horace Mann believed that he was moving from the profession of law, which he felt had failed to save society, to a field of endeavor that promised universal salvation. A month after his acceptance he wrote to a friend that he had abandoned the practice of law for a higher calling. He explained that law had failed because it dealt with adults whose character had already been shaped, but the hope was in molding the child: "Having found the present generation composed of materials almost unamalleable, I am about transferring my efforts to the next. Men are cast-iron; but children are wax. Strength expended upon the latter may be effectual, which would make no impression upon the former."²⁷

Mann's hopes and dreams for the common school unfolded in the pages of the reports he wrote as secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education. The most important was the *Twelfth Annual Report*, written in 1848 after Mann had resigned his educational post for a seat in the United States Congress. This report contained a summary of his ideas on the purposes of the common school.

In the *Twelfth Annual Report*, Mann returned to the reasoning he had used 11 years earlier for abandoning law for education. Again he argued that the hope for ridding society of evil actions was not in the law but in moral education. The increasing complexity of society, he felt, continually expanded the possibilities for moral transgressions. He even dismissed as futile his earlier involvement in the passage of laws against

the sale of alcohol, because "the government sees the evils that come from the use of intoxicating drinks, and prohibits their sale; but unpripcipled men pander to depraved appetites, and gather a harvest of dishonest profits."²⁸

The answer to this steady expansion of crime, he maintained, was to educate the child. In language reflecting his ardent belief in the moral power of the school, he stated that there was one experiment which, even not tried in its attempt to control crime: "It is an experiment which, before its inception offers the highest authority for its ultimate success. Its formula is intelligible to all; and it is as legible as though written in starry letters on an azure sky." This formula, and the key to the good society, he stated, was "best expressed in these few and simple words:—'*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.*'"²⁹ Mann claimed that all attempts to reform humanity had failed to realize the possibilities for shaping the character of children and youth.

In a broader sense, Mann put his hope in the schoolteacher, who, by educating children so that they would not transgress the law, would replace the police. This concept made schools the central institution for the control and maintenance of the social order. Also, it opened the door for the explosive political issue of whose morality would be taught in the public schools.

Mann walked a delicate tightrope in his advocacy of moral education in the schools. Given the temper of the times, moral education, which for most people meant a religious education, was considered an essential part of education. On the one hand, this meant that if Mann did not advocate a moral education with religious foundations he faced the possibility of being called irreligious and of having the common school condemned as a secular institution without religious foundations. For most people during this period, the education of character had to be linked to religious doctrines. If not, it could be accused of being antireligious. On the other hand, if he did link moral education to religion, he had to make a choice about the religious tenets to which moral education should be linked. Given the fierce denominational rivalries of the time, any choice he made opened the possibility that the common school might be destroyed by competing religious groups.

Mann defended his position on this issue in the *Twelfth Annual Report* by arguing that the presence and use of the Bible in the schools provided instruction in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity without reference to denominational differences, and this provided the basis for all creeds.

Is it not, indeed, too plain, to require the formality of a syllogism, that if any man's creed is to be found in the Bible, and the Bible is in the schools, then that

*man's creed is in the schools? . . . If a certain system, called Christianity, were contained in . . . the Bible, then wherever the Bible might go, there the system of Christianity must be.*³⁰

In addition to the use of the Bible in the schools, Mann claimed that the laws of Massachusetts required the teaching of the basic moral doctrines of Christianity, which he listed as instruction in piety, justice, love of country, benevolence, sobriety, industry, frugality, chastity, moderation, and temperance. "Are not these virtues and graces," asked Mann, "part and parcel of Christianity?"³¹ Within the framework of this reasoning, religious education in the common schools was to be based on a nonsectarian use of the Bible with the teaching of broad religious principles common to all Christian denominations.

Mann envisioned four destructive alternatives to this form of nonsectarian moral education. The first was to exclude all religious instruction from the schools. This, he argued, would make the schools "un-Christian," and the schools would receive no support from the general population. The second alternative was for the law to define and prescribe a system of religion for the schools, which, according to Mann, would involve the government in the establishment of religion and force a particular religion on all children. The third alternative was to give each religious sect with a majority in a community the power to define the religion of the schools. Mann strongly felt that this would result in the destruction of the common school by the heat of religious rivalries as all denominations fought for the inclusion of their doctrines. The last alternative was for the government to abandon all interference in the education of the young. As an advocate of the common school system, Mann quickly rejected this last possibility.

In the context of these arguments, the term *common* took on added meaning. Children in the common school were to receive a common moral education based on the general principles of the Bible and on common virtues, and such education was to eliminate crime and corruption in society.

Mann used the same type of reasoning in defining his goals for political education in the common schools. Like religious instruction, political instruction opened the door for groups with differing political ideas to fight over the content of political instruction. Mann stated in his *Twelfth Annual Report*, "It is obvious . . . that if the tempest of political strife were to be let loose upon our Common Schools, they would be overwhelmed with sudden ruin." His answer was to have schools teach only those articles of republican faith that were approved by "all sensible and judicious men, all patriots, and all genuine republicans." This political education, he proclaimed, would contain "articles in the creed of repu-

licanism, which are accepted by all, believed in by all, and which form the common basis of our political faith."³²

To avoid political controversy in the schoolroom, Mann proposed that the teacher avoid any discussion or comment that touched on political disputes. However,

*when the teacher, in the course of his lessons or lectures on the fundamental law, arrives at a controverted text, he is either to read it without comment or remark; or, at most, he is only to say that the passage is the subject of disputation, and that the schoolroom is neither the tribunal to adjudicate, nor the forum to discuss it.*³³

In this manner, Mann hoped to provide instruction in the fundamentals of politics without destroying the common school in the fury of political controversy.

Within the context of political education, the *common* in common school meant the teaching of a common political creed. The combination of moral and political instruction meant that the student leaving the common school would share with fellow students a set of moral and political beliefs; the result would be the creation of a society with a consensus of political and moral values.

For Mann, the inculcation of a common set of political beliefs would reduce the level of political violence in society as a whole. He hoped that a common school education would lead to political discussions based on a shared set of political beliefs. Thus, even though some disputes over a shared set of political beliefs might arise, these disputes would take place in the context of a common political faith. Mann envisioned that political violence would be avoided because of the adherence to common articles of republican faith.

According to Mann, it was necessary to teach the importance of using the vote, as opposed to revolution and violence, to bring about political change. This was a particularly important issue during Mann's time because the extension of universal male suffrage had taken place in the 1820s. Prior to that time, the vote had been restricted by property requirements. In reference to the vote replacing political violence, Mann stated: "Had the obligations of the future citizen been sedulously inculcated upon all children of this Republic, would the patriot have had to mourn over so many instances, where the voter, not being able to accomplish his purpose by voting, has proceeded to accomplish it by violence."³⁴

Mann wished to avoid not only political violence but also violence between social classes. Like Karl Marx in Europe, Mann was concerned with the creation of divisions between social classes caused by the growth of modern industry. *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and

Friedrich Engels was published in 1848, the same year that Mann wrote his final and summary *Twelfth Annual Report* for the Massachusetts State Board of Education. Unlike Marx and Engels, Mann believed that the answer to social-class conflict was a common school education—not revolution by the working class.

Like Marx and Engels, however, Mann recognized that modern industrial development had created a major split between capital and labor and thus the intensification of class consciousness. Writing in the *Twelfth Annual Report* about industrial development in Massachusetts, he poses a warning question: "Are we not in danger of . . . those hideous evils which are always engendered between Capital and Labor, when all the capital is in the hands of one class and all the labor is thrown upon another?" He goes on to argue that if one class possesses all the wealth and education, and the other is poor and ignorant, then the latter will be "servile dependents and subjects of the former."³⁵

"Now, surely," Mann writes with a great deal of conviction about the social power of the common school, "nothing but Universal Education can counter-work this tendency to the domination of capital and servility of labor." He believed that two alternatives existed through which common schooling could eliminate the problems between capital and labor. The first was to eliminate the friction caused by class consciousness. Mann admits that "a fellow-feeling for one's class or caste is the common instinct of hearts not wholly sunk in selfish regards for person, or for family." For Mann, the problem was not elimination of class consciousness but its expansion across social boundaries. Mann hoped that a common school education would spread feelings of class consciousness among all members of society: "The spread of education, by enlarging the cultivated class or caste, will open a wider area over which the social feelings will expand; and, if this education should be universal and complete, it would do more than all things else to obliterate factitious distinctions in society." In Mann's words, the expansion of class consciousness would "disarm the poor of their hostility towards the rich."³⁶

The second way common schooling would eliminate the conflict between capital and labor was by increasing the general wealth of society. Mann felt that common schooling, by improving the general wealth of society, would be the answer to those reformers who were calling for a redistribution of property from the rich to the poor. His argument is one of the earliest considerations of schooling as capital investment and of teaching as the development of human capital. Within his framework of reasoning, education would produce wealth by training intelligence to develop new technology and methods of production. Investment in education is a form of capital investment because it leads to the production of new wealth, and teaching is a means of developing human capi-

tal because it provides the individual with the intellectual tools for improved labor.

In other words, according to Mann, common schooling would eliminate the problems of the unequal distribution of property by increasing the general wealth of society and, consequently, improving the economic conditions of the poor. It would prevent poverty by giving individuals the tools for enhancing their economic position in society. Therefore, as Mann states in one of his more famous passages in the *Twelfth Annual Report*, "Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance-wheel of the social machinery."³⁷

Mann's arguments regarding the conflict between labor and capital added another meaning to the word *common*. Common schooling was to create a common social class by the extension of a common class consciousness among all members of society. By mixing the rich and poor within the same schoolhouse, social-class conflict would give way to a feeling of membership in a common social class and thus would provide society with a common set of political and moral values.

Mann uses arguments about education as capital investment to justify public financial support of the common school. One of the questions asked during the period was why those without children, or those who sent their children to private schools, should pay for the education of other people's children. Mann's answer is that the value of property is dependent on the work of previous generations and on the general level of prosperity of the community. He argues that property is held in trust by each generation, which through its labors increases its value. In other words, even a family without any children benefits from common schooling because common schooling increases the wealth of the entire community, which, in turn, increases the value of the family's property. Therefore, all members of society benefit economically from common schooling, whether or not they make any direct use of the schools.

With minor variations, Mann's statement of the goals and purposes of common schooling in his reports to the Massachusetts Board of Education were shared by the leading educational reformers of the time. This does not mean that they were shared by all members of society during this period. In a sense, Mann's reports represented the official justification for the creation of a common system of education. Involved in this justification was the hope that all the social, economic, and political problems of society would be solved by putting together in a common school the children of all members of society and by teaching them a common set of political and moral beliefs.

But this utopian vision of the good society created by a system of common schooling had certain inherent problems. First was the real problem of agreement on a common set of political and moral values to

be taught in the classroom. Such agreement concerning religious values never occurred, and, as a result, a private parochial system of education developed side by side with the common school. In the simplest terms, the common school never became common to all students. In addition, no proof existed that education would eliminate crime. In fact, one could argue that increased education simply meant improving the educational level of the criminal. Nor was there any real proof that a common school education could eliminate social, political, and economic unrest. It is possible, for instance, that social unrest is rooted in real economic and political problems that cannot be solved without dealing directly with the problems themselves. In this sense, the official ideology of the common school might be considered as essentially conservative because it did not call for any basic changes in the economic and political structure of society, but placed its hope for social improvement on the education of the individual. In fact, the official ideology of the common school accepted the existing political and economic organization of society and argued that any problems were the result of individual deviance or failure. Therefore, it was argued by common school reformers, the common school could create a utopian world by educating the individual to conform to the needs of existing political, social, and economic organizations.

Although there were obvious flaws in the reasoning of common school reformers, their faith in the power of the school continued into the twentieth century. The ideology of the common school became a standard part of the beliefs held by most Americans: Since the mid-1800s, the school has continually been seen as a means of eliminating poverty, crime, and social problems. In addition, the idea of education as capital investment and as a means of developing human capital has become one of the major justifications for schooling in the twentieth century. Horace Mann and other common school reformers made a lasting contribution to the ongoing debate about the relationship between school and society.

The Workingmen and the Struggle for a Republican Education

The educational demands made by the workingmen's parties between 1827 and 1835 provide an important example of how support of similar ideas and institutions by different groups and for different reasons can contribute to the advancement of an important social reform. Clearly, workingmen's parties wanted common schools, but for different reasons from those given by common school reformers. Nonetheless, the result of the combined efforts of the workingmen's parties and the common school reformers gave the appearance of a popular struggle for the establishment of a common school system.

Although the political impact and social composition of workingmen's parties between 1827 and 1835 has been debated, there has been no dispute about the importance of education in the political campaigns of the workingmen's parties. Their educational arguments shared many of the characteristics of the ideology of common school reformers, particularly a general demand for free common public schooling to serve political and economic purposes. But the reasons given by workingmen's parties for the establishment of common schools were distinctly different from those given by Horace Mann and other common school reformers. The reformers stressed the necessity of teaching a common moral and political creed as a means of eliminating crime, poverty, and social unrest and providing for equal economic opportunity, whereas the workingmen's parties argued for the necessity of education as a means by which workers could protect themselves from economic and political exploitation. Common school reformers emphasized education as a mechanism of social control, while the workingmen's parties emphasized education as a mechanism for gaining political and economic power. Both groups agreed that a common education was necessary to eliminate the distinctions between the rich and the poor and to promote equality of economic opportunity.

The workingmen's political movement began in Philadelphia in 1827 with a demand by the Mechanics Union of Trade Associations for worker influence on legislative action. In the spring of 1828, the Philadelphia Workingmen's Party nominated and campaigned for candidates to the state legislature. The organization of labor parties quickly spread through Pennsylvania, Delaware, Massachusetts, and New York. For most of these workingmen's parties, education became a central theme of their political campaigns.

Representative of the workingmen's parties' concern about education was the establishment in 1829 by the Philadelphia Mechanics Union of Trade Associations of a committee to investigate educational conditions in the city and state. The committee found that for all areas of the state except Philadelphia, Lancaster, and Pittsburgh, little support could be found for public instruction. The committee also attacked the existence of charity schools. First, there was a concern that private individuals were using government money to provide education of questionable quality for the poor. In his excellent study *Education and the Working Class: The Expansion of Public Education during the Transition to Capitalism*, historian William Russell quotes the committee as claiming that a large number of charity schools were "irresponsible institutions, established by individuals, from mere motives of private speculation or gain, who are destitute of character, and frequently, of the requisite attainments and abilities." In addition, the schools suffered from "ignorance, intemperance and immorality." Criticisms were also raised that charity

schools offered a limited curriculum and led to a loss of pride among parents.³⁸

In general, the committee believed that government monies were primarily being used to support colleges and universities—a situation it argued was “exclusively for the benefit of the wealthy, who [were] thereby enabled to procure a liberal education for their children, upon lower terms than it could otherwise be afforded them.” If this condition persisted, the committee reported, knowledge would be mostly in the hands of the privileged few and would “[consign] the multitude to comparative ignorance, and [secure] the balance of knowledge on the side of the rich and the rulers.”³⁹ The answer to this situation was to make equal knowledge a common property of all groups in society.

In New York, a similar complaint was voiced about the private control of charity schools by the New York School Society (originally the New York Free School Society). The New York Workingmen's Party believed that the existence of charity schools and the lack of adequate funding of schooling were increasing social-class differences. The lack of education among workingmen, it was argued, kept them ignorant of their rights and allowed for exploitation by the privileged.

One of the most important points made in the arguments of the New York Workingmen's Party was that knowledge was power in an industrial society. Thus, keeping knowledge from the masses was considered one method of assuring the upper classes a monopoly of power. Russell explains the general view of the workingmen's parties: “Kept in ignorance, workers could be deprived of their rights, cheated in their daily business, and ‘gulled and deceived’ by ‘designing schemers,’ ‘parasitic politicians,’ ‘greedy bank directors,’ and ‘heartless manufacturers.’”⁴⁰ In summary, workingmen's parties believed that the lack of a common school system was an attempt to deny them their rights and their share of economic and political power.

Workingmen's groups believed that common schooling was essential for the protection of their rights—that knowledge was necessary for the equal exercise of power in a democratic system of government. This argument is best expressed in an 1830 statement in the *Workingmen's Advocate*: “The right of self government implies a right to a knowledge necessary to the exercise of the right of self government. If all have an equal right to the first, all must consequently have an equal right to the second; therefore, all are entitled to equal education.”⁴¹

In addition, access to knowledge meant protection of rights against what was considered the tyranny of the upper class. One statement in the *Workingmen's Advocate* in 1831 stresses that education was the only sure “defense against not only an infringement, but a total usurpation of the native rights of the people, by the monopolizing demagogues of the land.”⁴² An editor in 1830 in the *Sentinel*, a workingmen's newspaper,

wisefully claims that if the previous generation had been properly educated, it would not have been cheated and blinded by those currently wielding political and economic power.

Differences and similarities existed between the arguments of the workingmen's parties for the necessity of education in a republic and those of the common school reformers like Horace Mann. Both groups agreed that education was necessary for the maintenance of a republican and democratic form of government, but the common school reformers emphasized political education as a means of making individuals worthy of democratic rights and as necessary for maintaining political harmony, whereas workingmen's groups emphasized the necessity of education for the equal sharing of power and the protection of rights. These differences suggest a different content in the political instruction to be offered in the schools. As a means of achieving his objectives, Mann wanted the basic principles of government and a common republican creed to be taught, while workingmen's groups called for the teaching of how to exercise power in the political system, the nature of political rights, and the protection of those rights as the means to achieve their goals.

With regard to crime and poverty, workingmen's groups and common school reformers shared an equal faith in the power of the school. In fact, in response to the issue of why a person without children should pay for the education of other people's children, workingmen's groups often advanced the argument that education increased the security of all people from criminal activities.

Common school reformers and workingmen's groups also shared a belief that equal education for all was necessary to reduce distinctions among economic classes, but, again, their reasons were different. The reason common school reformers wanted a common education was to reduce friction between capital and labor. Workingmen's groups wanted equal education as means of assuring that capital did not maintain a monopoly over knowledge and as a means of protecting their economic interests. As an editorial in the *Workingmen's Advocate* of 1834 states, education would provide workers with “a correct knowledge of their value as producers . . . [and of their] general interest as productive laborers.” This knowledge, it was hoped, would destroy the causes for the dependency of workers on owners and the unjust accumulation of capital.⁴³

Because knowledge was viewed as power and as a means by which capital maintained its grip over labor, it was logical for workingmen's groups to support equal education as a means of providing equal economic opportunity. The relationship between equality of educational opportunity and equality of economic opportunity has been stressed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The most extreme, but logical, linkage between equal education and equal economic opportunity was made by the New York Workingmen's Party in its state guardianship plan. The basic argument behind this plan was that equality of educational opportunity could not be achieved if one child went from school to an impoverished home life and another child went home to a life that was rich and offered many advantages. To achieve true equality of educational opportunity, the state guardianship plan argued, all children must be taken from their families and placed in state boarding schools where they would receive equal treatment, equal clothes, equal food, and an equal education. Although the radicalism of this proposal split the party, it did highlight the extreme importance of workingmen's groups to the connection between equality of educational opportunity and equality of economic opportunity.⁴⁴

The question remains as to whether or not workingmen, as represented by these early labor parties, gained the type of education they wanted through the establishment of a common school system. As discussed in later chapters, a tension existed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries between organized labor and the public school system over the content of instruction. Labor often claimed that public school instruction was conservative and taught principles opposed to the organization of workers into unions. Whether or not this was the case does not detract from the very important effect workingmen's parties had on spreading ideas favoring common school education and winning support for the establishment of common schools. In fact, when one considers the dates of the activities of the workingmen's parties and the common school reformers, it is clear that the workingmen's parties paved the way for reformers like Barnard and Mann.

The differences between the common school reformers and the workingmen's parties highlight the differences in meaning that can exist over commonly used words. One cannot assume that if all people say they favor education, they all favor the same thing. The word *education* has meant different things to different people. This is particularly true of the way the word was used in the different arguments given in support of the establishment of common schools.

The Whigs and the Democrats

The common school movement was born during a period of intense political change and rivalry. Of primary political importance in the 1820s was the ending of property qualifications for voting and the establishment of universal male suffrage. In addition, modern political parties were born in 1824 when the Jacksonian Democrats competed against the National Republican Party (which died in the early 1830s and was re-

placed by the Whigs). The Whigs and the Democrats had almost equal shares of the nation's voters.

These political changes were related to the common school movement in several ways. First, universal suffrage created a concern with the education of the future voter. Many supporters of the common school movement stressed the importance of education in assuring the maintenance of political order as democratic rights were extended. Second, political affiliation was the most important difference between groups advocating different forms of school organization. Most leaders of the common school movement were Whigs who believed that government should intervene to maintain social order through a centrally managed school system designed to educate moral and responsible citizens. On the other hand, members of the Democratic Party believed that social order would occur naturally, and, therefore, they believed in minimal government intervention and local control of the schools.

In their analysis of voting patterns in six states, Herbert Erskowitz and William Shade show that between 1833 and 1843 the voting patterns of the members of each party were clearly different. By 1840, 80 to 100 percent of both Whigs and Democrats adhered to the point of view of their party. With regard to educational legislation, in most cases there were significant differences in party voting patterns.⁴⁵

The differences between each party's political philosophy highlight important aspects of the common school and the continuing controversy over the political structure of schooling. Both political groups believed that education was a necessity but differed over the goals and structure of the educational system. In general, Whigs were concerned with morality, duty, and the reduction of social conflict and thus wanted an educational system that would shape moral character, teach social and political duties, and reduce conflict among social classes and political groups. Whigs believed these goals could best be achieved through centralized supervision by state governments. Democrats resisted the trend toward centralization of government control and talked mainly about rights and a society of conflicting interests.

In *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, Lee Benson describes the differences between these two political groups as positive versus negative liberalism. Within this framework, Whigs were advocates of a positive liberalism that called for government intervention to assure the workings of a free marketplace economy. Therefore, Whigs believed that government should provide money for education and for internal improvements to guarantee the establishment and functioning of institutions and economic organizations essential for the development of the country. For instance, Whigs argued that because private capital was not available for the development of canals and railroads essential for economic growth, the government should supply the needed capital. Ben-

son quotes New York governor William Seward's 1839 message as a summary of the Whig position on internal improvements and education. Seward argued that government action and spending were necessary "to enlarge . . . national prosperity, while we equalize its enjoyments and direct it to the universal diffusion of knowledge."⁴⁶

The Democrats represented negative liberalism and argued that government governed too much. They believed that the economy should function without any state intervention and that state monies should not be used to support a common school system. Benson states that John Bigelow, a leading writer for the Democrats in New York, "believed that the common school fund should be applied to the present crippling state debt and that thereafter the state should cease to propagate any science, art, trade, or religion among any class of people."⁴⁷

In *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, Daniel Howe argues that faculty psychology had the strongest influence on the moral philosophy of the Whigs, who believed that the balancing and regulating of the moral faculties was essential for the maintenance of social order. From this perspective, schools were necessary for assuring harmony within the individual. Whigs believed that if moral faculties were

left to themselves, the lower powers would escape control and wreck havoc. An unregulated faculty—whether pride, licentiousness, or some other appetite or emotion—was called a "passion." The good life entailed continual self-discipline, as one sought to "suppress his passions" or "cultivate and improve his virtues."⁴⁸

As Howe indicates, this philosophical perspective ruled out the idea of a *laissez-faire* society completely free of some form of regulation and "implied an active, purposeful central government, 'administering the affairs of the nation according to its best judgment for the good of the whole, and all parts of the whole.'"⁴⁹ According to this political ideology, the government was to play an active role in maintaining the economy, regulating morality, and assuring political and social order. Consequently, Whigs supported not only government funding of internal improvements (such as canals) but also the passage of laws to regulate morality. For instance, the temperance movement received strong support from Whigs.

For Whigs, schooling was the key to an ordered society. Howe summarizes the Whigs' political campaigns as being part of "a cultural struggle to impose on the United States the standards of morality we usually term Victorian. They were standards of self-control and restraint, which dovetailed well with the economic program of the party, for they emphasized thrift, industry, and public responsibility."⁵⁰ Whigs believed these values were necessary to bring discipline to voters.

The Whig ideal of an ordered society requires a consciously arranged order and

the Democratic free-market ideas reflected two different concepts of freedom. In turn, these differing concepts of freedom were reflected in attitudes about the political and social role of the school. For Whigs, true freedom occurred only when the balance of mental faculties within an individual assured that passion did not reign over reason. In addition, Whigs contended that social conditions must be organized so that the individual was not tempted into activity that would disrupt the harmony of the mind. In other words, the Whig position was that true freedom was possible only if individuals received a proper education and social temptations were removed. This explains why many common school reformers were active in the temperance movement while working for greater centralization and uniformity in the school system.⁵¹ Democrats, on the other hand, believed that true freedom was possible only in a society in which there was a minimum of government interference in the social order. Democrats viewed government attempts to order society as attempts to promote and protect the special privileges of the upper class.

Not all members of American society in the 1830s and 1840s complacently accepted the moral-reform efforts of the Whigs. For example, Howe reports that many thought the Whigs' assumption of moral responsibility for others meddlesome. He tells the story of the burning of the church of Lyman Beecher, who was a Whig, temperance advocate, and minister.

When Lyman Beecher's church on Hanover Street burned down, the volunteer fire companies, who hated his temperance crusading, refused to fight the flames. Instead, it is reported, they watched and sang: "While Beecher's church holds out to burn / The vilest sinner may return"—a parody of a hymn.⁵²

The best study of the differences in educational philosophy between the Democrats and the Whigs was conducted by Carl Kaestle and Maris Vinovskis for their book *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts*.⁵³ They studied the attempt in 1840 to abolish the Massachusetts State Board of Education and, of course, Horace Mann's position as its secretary. This action was considered a direct attack on the common school movement.

Kaestle and Vinovskis report that in the year preceding the attempt to abolish the board, a leading Massachusetts Democrat, Orestes Brownson, had attacked the board for trying to "Prussianize" education by centralizing control over the schools. Brownson contended that the board was a vehicle for Whig ideas about education and maintained that control should remain at the local level.

In 1840, a legislative committee composed of three Whigs and two Democrats was established to investigate the work of the Board of Edu-

cation. Surprisingly, given the majority of Whigs on the committee, its report attacked the board as an unnecessary expense and, quoting Kaestle and Vinovskis, as "a danger to political and religious freedoms." The committee report argues: "District schools, in a republican government need no police regulations, no systems of state censorship, no checks of moral, religious, or political conservatism, to preserve either the morals, the religion, or the politics of the state. Let them ever be kept free and pure."⁵⁴ Obviously, this reasoning was almost the exact opposite of that given by Mann for establishing a common school system.

The committee's report provoked a series of other investigations that eventually led to a vote by the members of the state legislature on the abolition of the board. The attempt to abolish the board failed by a vote of 182 to 245. The legislative vote provided Kaestle and Vinovskis with data by which they could analyze the nature of the supporters and opponents of the common school system in Massachusetts.

Kaestle and Vinovskis classified the members of the legislature according to religion, occupation, the geographical area they represented, and party affiliation. They hoped to determine which factors were most important in determining support or nonsupport of the board. The assumption was made that a legislator's position on this issue reflected that individual's support or nonsupport of the common school movement.

After analyzing the data, Kaestle and Vinovskis concluded that party affiliation was the most important factor in determining a legislator's support or nonsupport of the board. They also found that religion was not an important factor in legislative action. Of course, the legislature did not include a large Catholic faction, so the rift between Catholics and Protestants was not represented in their findings. They did find that legislators from manufacturing areas tended to support the board, unlike those from rural areas.

The fact that party affiliation was the most important factor does not mean that all Whigs supported the existence of the board and that all Democrats stood in opposition. One-fifth of Whigs and one-third of Democrats did not follow the general voting pattern of their respective parties. But even with these defections from the positions of both political parties, political ideology was the most important factor in differentiating between supporters and nonsupporters of the Board of Education.

The differences between the political parties in Massachusetts reflected more general differences between the two political groups throughout the nation. According to Kaestle and Vinovskis, "the Whigs argued that positive government intervention was a necessary and useful means of improving the quality of public schools throughout the commonwealth." On the other hand, Democrats felt "that any increased

state interference in local educational matters created the potential, if not the reality, of a centralized state school system that would dictate how children were to be educated."⁵⁵

Another way of interpreting these differences between Whigs and Democrats is advanced by Michael Katz in *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools*. Katz argues that the issue of local versus state control was part of a more general concern about who should control the schools. According to Katz, in the early nineteenth century there were four models for the control of educational institutions, any one of which could have become the dominant method in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He labeled the four models paternalistic voluntarism, democratic localism, corporate voluntarism, and incipient bureaucracy. One particular model became dominant, he maintains, because it reflected the realities of changing social conditions and because it served the interests of a particular social group.

His example of paternalistic voluntarism is the New York Free School Society, which controlled and administered charity schools by a self-perpetuating board of leading citizens who volunteered their time and were unpaid. Katz states that this type of organization "rested on faith in the individual talented amateur and, at an over-all administrative level, scorned the need for elaborate organization, state control, or professional staff."⁵⁶ The supporters of this type of organization claimed that it entailed little administrative expense, provided a great deal of financial integrity and efficiency, and demonstrated success in the existence of an extensive network of charity schools maintained for several decades. Paternalistic voluntarism, Katz argues, was a method of organization that allowed the social elite to exert its control and social goals over educational institutions. This form of organization and control was suitable for serving the interests of elites in preindustrial mercantile cities.

In contrast, supporters of democratic localism, which had been current in rural areas in the early nineteenth century, tried to adapt it to urban centers in the 1840s and 1850s. Advocates of democratic localism wanted to divide large urban school districts into smaller districts, each having its own administrative unit controlled by the local residents, instead of having one school board and a large bureaucracy administering an urban school system. Katz argues that democratic localism would have given the general public greater control over the educational system.

According to Katz, it was Orestes Brownson who formalized the theory of democratic localism. Brownson argued that the state should be composed of distinct communities that were the smallest units possible for protecting local interests. With regard to education, the local school district was to remain more powerful than the state, and each individual

school was to be "under the control of a community composed merely of the number of families having children in it." Obviously, this form of organization served the interests of the middle and lower classes. Katz contends that "democratic localists . . . subordinated both efficiency and organizational rationality to an emphasis on responsiveness, close public control, and local involvement."⁵⁷

The third model, corporate voluntarism, is the organizational model that was mainly used by colleges and academies. This model of control involves a self-perpetuating board of trustees administering a single institution. A great deal of variety among educational institutions is allowed by this form of organization, as exemplified by the many different types of academies that came into existence in the nineteenth century. Unlike democratic localism, this model assumes that the public does not have the knowledge requisite for governing an educational institution and that the board of trustees is to provide enlightened management. This type of management serves the educational interests and opinions of local elites.

The death blow to corporate voluntarism, according to Katz, came with the emergence of sharper differences between public and private institutions. Katz argues that academies lost the distinction of being public because they were not initiated by government and were not administered by government officials.

The fourth model of organization, incipient bureaucracy, is the one advocated by common school reformers like Horace Mann and Henry Barnard. The chief characteristics of this model are centralization of control, elimination of local variations, and standardization of schooling. Obviously, common school reformers rejected democratic localism because of the potential conflict among different religious and political factions over the content of instruction. In fact, the idea of a local school reflecting the point of view of its particular constituency was antithetical to the basic ideas of the common school movement. Common school reformers did not want schools to offer different courses of instruction but wanted all instruction to be the same in order to achieve the goal of providing a common education to all people.

The creation of a system of common schooling required centralization to assure uniformity of practices. This is best exemplified by the establishment of state boards of education and the appointment of state secretaries or superintendents of education. To a certain extent, the struggle between Whigs and Democrats was a struggle between incipient bureaucracy and democratic localism. An aspect of the emphasis on uniformity of practice was the creation of graded schools in which children were grouped according to age. Common school reformers believed that replacing the system of having children of all ages in the same classroom with the system of graded schools would result in increased efficiency.

In addition, standardization of instruction would be ensured by the hiring of full-time professionals to supervise the teachers. Katz argues that this model of organization is characterized by "professionalism and system," which "like the obsession with punctuality, reflected industrial values. Newly industrialized people must learn to reward a man for what he can do rather than for who he is." Thus, according to Katz, "graded schools, regulated promotions, and trained staff were designed to counter problems created by a populace accustomed to gaining privileges by means that had little to do with capacity to perform."⁵⁸

Katz argues in more general terms that incipient bureaucracy, with its emphasis on standardization, was primarily a mechanism for protecting middle-class Protestant values against the onslaught of an increasingly diverse population. Bureaucracy was to be the mechanism for assuring that the content of the common school education would reflect in the main the values of the original settlers' Protestant culture.

Katz's argument is similar to that given by Kaestle in *Pillars of the Republic*. As discussed earlier, Kaestle makes a case that the ideology of the common school movement centered primarily on republicanism, Protestantism, and capitalism. Katz argues that bureaucracy is an organizational form that ensured that these three values became standard in the common school. The opposite organizational model, democratic localism, left open the door for other values to gain dominance in particular schools.

For these reasons, Catholics supported democratic localism as a means by which their values might be reflected in local public schools. Bear in mind that the fear of common school reformers of the growth of pluralism was fueled by the increase in the number of Catholics in the United States and by the growth of an industrial proletariat. The triumph of bureaucracy over democratic localism in education made it necessary for Catholics to organize their own school systems.

The struggle between Whigs and Democrats over the common school reflected a more general concern about how schools should be controlled and whose values should be taught in a school's curriculum. This debate, which has continued into the twentieth century, has reflected in varying degrees the tension between those wanting popular control of the schools and little government intervention and those believing that government should work actively to assure that the schools serve general social, political, and economic goals.

The Catholic Issue

The contradiction between the attempt to make schooling common to all children and the Protestant values that dominated common schools resulted in major disputes between Catholics and Protestants over the use

of state educational funds. In large part, this conflict resulted from strong anti-Catholic feelings in the Protestant community. In the end, Catholics felt excluded from the common schools and found it necessary to establish their own system of independent parochial schools, which meant that the common schools never became common to all American children.

New York City was the scene of a major conflict in the 1840s over school funds, when Catholics demanded a share of the state educational funds that were being monopolized by the Public School Society (originally the New York Free School Society). Until this time, Catholics had been operating their own schools in an attempt to provide children of Catholic parents with an alternative to the Protestant-dominated schools of the Public School Society. Catholics objected to the use in the schools of the King James Version of the Bible and of textbooks that contained anti-Catholic statements.

The smoldering conflict between Catholics and Protestants in New York City erupted into a major conflict with the 1838 election of William Seward as governor of New York. Seward was a Whig and, like all good Whigs, was a strong advocate of government-sponsored internal improvements and increased state support of education. But his Whig philosophy had an important twist when it came to the issue of education. Although he believed that a centrally controlled and expanded system of education was necessary for the health of society, he also believed that state money for the support of Catholic schools was necessary to achieve this goal. It was this proposal that fanned the flames of conflict between Catholics and Protestants.

Seward indicated in his first message to the state legislature in 1839 that education would be an important part of his legislative agenda. He argued before the legislature that improved educational facilities were necessary for the development of responsible citizens and claimed that during his administration, "improvement in our system of education will be wider and more enduring than the effects of any change of public policy."⁵⁹ As reflected in his other speeches and correspondence, one of his major concerns was to educate Catholic immigrants, particularly the Irish, for citizenship. He resisted the strong anti-Irish feeling that existed in the 1830s and 1840s and denounced American hatred of "foreigners."

Seward discovered, while visiting New York City, that large numbers of immigrant children were not attending school, and by 1840 he concluded that many of New York's Catholic children were not attending public schools because of their anti-Catholic atmosphere. His concern was that immigrant children might grow up to be adult illiterates who would become public burdens and never enter the mainstream of American life. He then proposed before the state legislature in 1840 that Catholic schools would become part of the state school system while

retaining their private charters and religious affiliation. As historian Vincent Lannie writes in *Public Money and Parochial Education*, "Seward urged the establishment of schools that would be acceptable to this minority group and staffed with teachers who spoke the same language and professed the same religious faith as their pupils. Such schools would be administered by Catholic officials but supported with public funds."⁶⁰

Many Protestant Whigs were outraged by Seward's proposal and raised strong opposition to the plan. In a letter to a friend in 1840, Seward reasoned that any Whig who withheld support from him because of his proposal did not really support the "Whigism we derived from our forefathers of the Revolutionary Age nor is such the Whigism that I shall teach my children." He argued that it was necessary for the state to provide a moral and religious education to all children in order to maintain social stability and "if it cannot be otherwise conferred, may rightly be conferred by the employment for the purpose of teachers professing the same language and religious creed."⁶¹

The immediate response of the Catholic community in New York to Seward's proposal was to petition the Board of Aldermen of New York City for a portion of the common school fund. Historically, this petition was important because it enumerated Catholic complaints about the Protestant dominance of the public schools. First, the Catholic petitioners attacked the supposed nonsectarianism of the schools operated by the Public School Society. Of course, most common school reformers had claimed that the schools could be nonsectarian if they taught the basic principles of Christianity. The petition cited a number of instances in which the reports of the Public School Society either called for religious instruction or demonstrated the existence of religious instruction in the schools. This religious instruction included the reading and study of the Bible, which the petition claimed made the school sectarian. The petitioners argued:

Even the reading of the Scriptures in those schools your petitioners cannot regard otherwise than as sectarian; because Protestants would certainly consider as such the introduction of the Catholic Scriptures, which are different from theirs, and the Catholics have the same ground of objection when the Protestant version is made use of.⁶²

In addition, the petitioners complained of anti-Catholic statements in elections used for elementary reading lessons. They argued that historical and religious portions of the reading lessons were selected from Protestant writers who were prejudiced against Catholics. The petition stated: "The term 'Popery' is repeatedly found in them. This term is known and employed as one of insult and contempt towards the Catho-

lic religion, and it passes into the minds of children with the feeling of which it is the outward expression."⁶³

The petition recognized that the members of the Public School Society had tried to remove anti-Catholic sentiments from textbooks, but, according to the petitioners, they had failed because they were incompetent in their ability to identify anti-Catholic statements. As an example, the petition quoted the following passage from a textbook approved by the Public School Society.

*Huss, John, a zealous reformer from Popery, who lived in Bohemia, towards the close of the fourteenth, and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries. He was bold and persevering; but at length, trusting himself to the deceitful Catholics, he was by them brought to trial, condemned as a heretic, and burnt at the stake.*⁶⁴

The petitioners argued that the anti-Catholic atmosphere of the schools operated by the Public School Society had forced them to open their own schools for the education of the poor and that this amounted to a system of double taxation, whereby they were taxed to support the schools operated by the Public School Society and had to use their own money for support of an alternative school system. In the words of the petition, "The expense necessary for this [establishment of Catholic schools], was a second taxation, required not by the laws of the land, but by the no less imperious demands of their conscience."⁶⁵ Catholic claims that they had to assume the burden of double taxation for the maintenance of Catholic schools continued into the twentieth century.

The petitioners recognized that public monies should not be used for the support of religion but claimed that this was precisely what was happening through public support of the Public School Society. The petitioners were willing to remove all religious instruction from their schools during school hours. To assure that money was not used for religious instruction they recommended that the organization of their schools and the control of the disbursement of money "shall be conducted, and made, by persons unconnected with the religion of your petitioners, even the Public School Society. . . . The public may then be assured that the money will not be applied to the support of the Catholic religion."⁶⁶

Both Governor Seward's proposal and the Catholic petition brought a storm of protest from the Protestant community. The "great debate" began within a month of the presentation of the petition before the Board of Aldermen in the city's Common Council chambers. The Protestant community responded to the Catholic petition with the argument that if Catholics were willing to postpone religious instruction until after school hours, they should be willing to instruct the children attending the Public School Society schools after school hours. The Reverend Mr.

Knox of the Dutch Reformed Church claimed that the public schools were not "adverse to feelings of reverence for Catholic peculiarities." The Reverend Mr. Bangs of the Methodist Church argued that all poor and wayward children should be forced to attend public schools. Bangs argued, in the words of Vincent Lannie: "This coercive action of the state would really be an act of compassion, since these vagrants would be snatched from the streets and their concomitant vices, and taught to become Christian gentlemen and competent citizens." And last, Gardner Spring of the Presbyterian Church told the aldermen that he viewed the petition "with more alarm on account of the source from which it comes . . . if there was no alternative between infidelity and the dogmas of the Catholic Church, I would choose, sir . . . to be an infidel tomorrow."⁶⁷

The issue pitted Catholics against Protestants and forced realignments in the political parties. A Whig-nativist coalition developed in opposition to state support of Catholic schools and in favor of state support of public schools. Some Catholics remained in the Whig Party and gave their support to Governor Seward. On the other hand, Democrats had decided to support the Catholic school position and attracted a large following of independent Catholics. The actions of the Democratic Party were consistent with the principle that schools should reflect the desires of the local community.

The school issue so inflamed public feelings that riots between anti-Catholics (a coalition of nativists and Irish Protestants) and Irish Catholics broke out during the 1842 election. The riot began in front of the city prison and quickly spread to attacks on unsuspecting Catholic individuals and Catholic homes. Some Catholics took refuge in a hotel, but it also was attacked by anti-Catholic mobs. Rioters even attacked the residence of Bishop Hughes located behind St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Although emotions remained high, the state legislature in 1842 passed compromise legislation ending the existence of the Public School Society and turning over control of its schools to the public. In hopes of winning Catholic support for the public schools, the legislation established a central, elected school board that shared power with local boards at the ward level. It was hoped that in local wards that were primarily Catholic, ward control would result in the schools' reflecting Catholic sentiments. In the end, Catholics found this an unsatisfactory method of resolving their complaints.

New York City was not the only place where conflict erupted between Catholics and Protestants over the content of public schooling. In *Pillars of the Republic*, Carl Kaestle details Protestant and Catholic conflicts around the country. For instance, in Philadelphia in 1843 the public school board ruled that Catholic children could read their own version of the Bible in public schools and be excused from other religious instruc-

tion. Protestants claimed that this was an attempt by Catholics to exclude the Bible from the schools. The result of this conflict was the Philadelphia Bible Riots, in which 13 people died and a Catholic church was burned to the ground. Conflicts of this type but not of this intensity occurred around the country.⁶⁸

In the end, Catholics found it necessary to establish their own system of schooling, the organization of which emerged from the work of plenary councils held in Baltimore in 1852, 1866, and 1884. A major theme of these councils was that religious instruction should not be separated from other forms of instruction. At the First Plenary Council, church leaders told parents that they had a responsibility to "watch over the purity of their [children's] faith and morals with jealous vigilance." To avoid neglecting their children's upbringing, Catholic parents were urged to give their children a Christian education "based on religious principles, accompanied by religious practices and always subordinate to religious influence." The council urged that all possible sacrifices be made for the establishment of Catholic schools.⁶⁹

The idea that religion must be an integral part of instruction ran counter to the increasingly secular quality of common school instruction in the mid-1800s and the increasing importance of science. The Second Plenary Council meeting, in 1866, again emphasized the principle "that religious teaching and religious training should form part of every system of school education." In addition, concern was expressed about the large number of delinquent Catholic youth who were being sent to Protestant reformatories. The council admitted, "It is a melancholy fact, and a very humiliating avowal for us to make, that a very large proportion of the idle and vicious youth of our principal cities are the children of Catholic parents." It recommended the establishment of Catholic industrial schools to care for delinquent Catholic youth.⁷⁰

The Third Plenary Council, in 1884, sent forth decrees for the establishment of a system of Catholic schools. The council warned that the continued trend toward secular education was resulting in the undermining of Christianity and argued that all religious groups were calling for a Christian education in the schools, reflecting a common concern with the preservation of religious faith. The council claimed it was not condemning the state "for not imparting religious instruction in the public schools as they are now organized, because they well know it does not lie within the province of the State to teach religion." In fact, it considered the creation of Catholic schools as beneficial to the state because such schools would create better citizens by educating better Christians. It declared: "Two objects therefore, dear brethren, we have in view, to multiply our schools, and to perfect them."⁷¹

To achieve this objective of assuring a Catholic education, the council decreed that every church establish a parish school and that all Catholic

parents send their children to Catholic schools. The following decrees of the Third Plenary Council established the ideals of Catholic education in the United States.

1. That near every church a parish school, where one does not yet exist, is to be built and maintained in perpetuum within two years of the promulgation of this council, unless the bishop should decide that because of serious difficulties a delay may be granted.

IV. That all Catholic parents are bound to send their children to the parish school, unless it is evident that a sufficient training in religion is given either in their own homes, or in other Catholic schools; or when because of sufficient reason, approved by the bishop, with all due precautions and safeguards, it is licit to send them to other schools. What constitutes a Catholic school is left to the decision of the Bishop.⁷²

The establishment of a Catholic school system suggests that the dream of establishing a school system common to all children was impossible in a country settled by a wide variety of cultural and religious groups. It also demonstrates that some groups viewed the common school system as an attempt to impose a particular set of religious and cultural values on all American people. The Catholic rebellion against public school reformers gave proof to the argument that the common school reflected a primarily Protestant ideology. Beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth, many Catholics would refer to public schools as Protestant schools.

Conclusion

The common school movement provided the basic ideology and structure for the modern American school system. No single set of reasons or social forces brought it into existence. Rather, it was a product of a combination of political, economic, and social concerns that existed in the early part of the nineteenth century.

Politically, the success of the common school movement represents the victory of one political philosophy over another. Most individuals who supported and worked for a common school system believed that the government should play an active role in assuring the success of the economic and social system and that this was best achieved by centralizing and standardizing governmental processes. Many who opposed the development of the common school system believed that the government that governed best governed least, that the success of the economic and social system depended on the absence of government intervention, and that the free actions of the marketplace guaranteed the most equitable distribution of economic benefits. They opposed the cen-

tralizing tendencies of government and hoped to maximize popular control of the political process by maintaining local control.

In the 1830s, these differences in political philosophy separated the Whigs from the Democrats. Most Whigs favored the centralization of control over education and the intervention of government, while most Democrats resisted the expansion of government power and fought to retain democratic localism. The tension and struggle between these two different political philosophies has continued into the twentieth century under different political labels and represents one of the major areas of disagreement in American political thought. By the middle of the twentieth century, conflict over this issue was expressed as concern with centralization of educational control at the federal level—the Democratic Party supported this trend because of the promise it held for a more just and equitable school system, whereas the Republican Party resisted continued federal intervention and argued for local control and the benefits of the free marketplace. Throughout the history of the modern American school, differences in political philosophies have had a major impact on the development and organization of education.

Culturally, the common school movement attempted to assure that one set of cultural values remained dominant, as large groups of immigrants with differing religious and cultural values entered American life. During the early period of common school reforms, this primarily meant protecting a Protestant ideology against an influx of Irish Catholics. In the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, Americanization programs for immigrants in the public schools served the same function.

The protection of a particular set of cultural and religious values was made possible by the way in which control of the school system was organized. The growth of centralized and bureaucratic control, as opposed to democratic localism, assured that the dominant values of the school system would be Protestant and middle class. Beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth, the shifting patterns of control usually reflected the desire of one or more groups in society to ensure that the schools served particular political, social, and economic interests.

The development of the common school also reflected changing economic conditions. The early growth of industrialism placed a premium on education as preparation for work. From the standpoint of employers, common schooling could serve the useful function of socializing and training workers for the factory. From the workers' perspective, as reflected in the workingmen's parties, common schooling was a means of assuring that employers did not maintain a monopoly over knowledge. Knowledge was power in the evolving modern industrial setting, and workers did not want to be kept from that source of power.

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Also, the promise of American life was improved economic opportunities for all people. In fact, one could argue that the concept of equality of economic opportunity is a theme that has united all American people. For the worker, equality of economic opportunity was a means for improving personal economic condition. For the school reformer, such as Horace Mann, equality of economic opportunity was a means of reducing friction among social classes. For the employer, equality of economic opportunity was a means of ensuring a supply of the best possible workers by creating competition among workers in the labor market. For most members of society, the common school became the hope for providing and maintaining a society based on equality of economic opportunity.

Most social groups believed that the common school was the best means of controlling crime, social unrest, and political disruptions. In the early nineteenth century, workingmen, Protestants, Catholics, reformers, urban dwellers, and others shared a belief that the school was the key to social control and social stability. This belief became a standard fixture in the rhetoric surrounding the American school in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In summary, by the middle of the nineteenth century most of the major themes of the modern American school had emerged. Persistent political divisions over schooling would occur, and dissent in certain areas would continue. Also, hope would continue that common schooling would bring forth the good society by improving economic conditions, providing equality of opportunity, eliminating crime, and maintaining political and social order.

Notes

1. Ellwood Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States: A Study and Interpretation of American Educational History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), pp. 164-165.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
4. Merle Curti, *The Social Ideas of American Educators* (Paterson, N.J.: Pageant Books, 1959), p. 138.
5. Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).
6. Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), pp. 146-148.
7. Katz, *Irony*, p. 1.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
10. Rush Welter, *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 45.