

CHAPTER 3

The Common School Movement

THE FORTY-YEAR PERIOD BEGINNING IN 1830 SAW A GREAT REVITALIZATION of interest in public elementary schooling. The causes of this revitalization were complex and its results were ambiguous. The movement occurred in nearly every state in the Union, appearing earliest in New York, Pennsylvania, and New England and spreading westward and into the South somewhat later. The common school movement was a series of state movements for reform of elementary education; it can be considered a national movement only because these individual state movements were roughly congruent in time and in goals and because the various state reform leaders communicated with and learned from each other. As conditions and personalities varied considerably from state to state, each state movement had unique features. In what follows these unique features have been suppressed in an effort to present a general explanation of the causes and effects of the national common school reform movement. Much of the discussion will draw on examples from the Massachusetts reform movement, which was best documented and most influential in other states. The reader must bear in mind that the explanation for antebellum school reform developed here must be altered somewhat when it is applied to any of the specific state reform movements.

The common school movement had three goals. The first was to provide a free elementary education for every white child living in the United States. The second was to create a trained educational profession.

Normal schools or courses for the training of teachers and a codified theory of pedagogy that could be taught in those teacher training institutions had to be established. Reformers also sought to maintain higher standards for appointing school teachers. The third goal was to establish some form of state control over local schools. This last goal was the lynchpin of the movement for, without central control, none of the other goals was possible. As long as the autonomy of the district or town school committees went unchallenged, uniform criteria relating to attendance, the quality of school building, curriculum, and teacher qualifications would be unenforceable. In the early years of the movement, especially, lack of central authority repeatedly stymied the reformers' efforts. The great school reformer Horace Mann, appointed secretary to the Board of Education in Massachusetts in 1837, had to rely only on persuasion and publicity to effect the reform goals he sought. Mann traveled the Commonwealth encouraging change and he published extensive annual statistics on education to "show up" the laggard districts, but he had no power to enforce standards. Only when states began to centralize authority by assuming financial leverage over the local districts could state officials like Mann enforce standards and reform by threatening to withhold money from offending local districts. This centralization of authority and power occurred only to a limited degree and only very gradually over the nineteenth century. The reformers' limited success with centralization meant that other portions of their reform program were carried out haphazardly, or not at all.

I

The most widely advertised and popularly appealing aspect of the reform movement was its effort to increase school attendance. And here is where the results were most ambiguous. The common school movement should not be considered as a transition from few public elementary schools to many public elementary schools. Most communities in the settled portions of the United States had long provided public education of some sort. The common school reformers told their audiences that reform was imperative at the time because there had been a serious weakening of educational resolve in the country since 1800, because newer generations of Americans had refused to carry on the colonial and revolutionary traditions of widespread education for all. School attendance figures for the antebellum period are notoriously difficult to interpret, but it appears fairly clear that the "weakening of resolve" was a figment of the reformers' imagination, or more likely a fictional construct which they used to elicit more immediate support from their audience. The early nineteenth century seems actually to have seen a gradual but

steady increase in educational effort at the elementary level. In New York, where the pre-1830 enrollment statistics are the most accurate, Albert Fishlow found no change in the percentage of children aged 5 to 19 enrolled in school between 1795 and 1815. From 1815 to 1823 he found a 25 percent increase, which he attributes to the release of energies following the War of 1812. The enrollment rate then held constant until 1830, when it stood at 73.8 percent. By 1840 Fishlow found that the percentage of school-age children in school (those aged 5-19) had dropped somewhat to 69.4. He noted a similar decline in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts in that decade. Because of faulty statistics this decrease may be more apparent than real, but more likely the decrease reflects the large influx of Catholic immigrants to the industrial areas of those states whose children did not attend school.¹ Another gauge of educational effort is the number of school days provided for each school-age child. Here Fishlow finds, in New York, a slow and gradual increase—from 14 days in 1800 to 20 in 1840. Fishlow feels that his figures represent accurately the curve of educational effort throughout the settled states, if not the absolute percentages from state to state.

Fishlow extended his analysis to 1860. Nationally enrollment increased strongly, from approximately 40 percent of the children aged 5 to 19 in school in 1840, to 50 to 56 percent in 1850, and 57 to 60 percent in 1860. (These percentages, of course, would be higher if historians could work with the normal elementary school-age group of 5-14, but the census did not record the population statistics that way.) These figures indicate, of course, a growth in attendance but how much of that growth can be attributed to the common school movement is problematical. Most of the increase occurred in the West (the Ohio River valley and Michigan and Wisconsin) and South (especially Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana) rather than in the East. Much of that increase must have been due to continued extension of the district school system and to local boosterism in the developing West and Southwest. Common school reformers were weakest in those sections. In the East, where they were strongest, attendance figures generally leveled off after the 1830s. On the other hand, and probably as a result of the common school movement, the length of the school year significantly increased—in New York from 20 days in 1840 to 40 in 1861.

From 1840 to 1860 expenditures on education in the United States quadrupled while population did not quite double in the same period.

¹ Albert Fishlow, "The American Common School Revival: Fact or Fancy?", in Henry Rosovsky, ed., *Industrialization in Two Systems* (New York, 1966), 40-67. On attendance during the early nineteenth century see Carl Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), Stanley K. Schultz, *The Culture Factory: Boston Public Schools, 1789-1860* (New York, 1973), and Maris Vinovskis, "Trends in Massachusetts Education, 1826-1860," *History of Education Quarterly*, XII (Winter, 1972), 501-530.

Again it is unclear how much of this increase can be credited to common school reform. Fishlow found that expenditures for education taken as a percentage of estimated Gross National Product equaled .8 percent in 1860. Only Germany exceeded the United States in percentage of GNP devoted to education, spending 1 percent on education. France spent .4 percent and England less. The white literacy figure for the United States of approximately 90 percent in this period was equaled only by the figures for Germany and Scotland. England and France were far behind. But the United States' educational effort in its period of rapid economic development in the nineteenth century appears almost insignificant when compared to the educational efforts of modern developing countries. In the late 1950s, 56 developing countries spent on the average 3.3 percent of their GNP on education; none spent less than 2 percent. The United States did not spend 2 percent of GNP on education until after 1900; 1970 expenditure on education equaled 7.5 percent of GNP in the United States.²

II

Whatever the statistics on attendance and length of school year and magnitude of educational effort show, they do not appear to demonstrate any revolutionary changes in the amount of schooling in the United States that can be associated with the common school movement. If anything, the common school movement might be said to have energized an already developing increase in educational effort in the United States. The common school movement had a more profound effect in ways that cannot be measured quantitatively. The rhetoric, efforts, and accomplishments of the common school movement set terms for educational debate and established patterns of professional aspiration and control that have persisted almost without challenge until the present day. The essence of the common school movement was its rhetorical commitment to the deliberate use of education as a tool for social manipulation and social progress. Educational control had to be centralized and educators trained to adhere to a single professional standard in order to accomplish this manipulation of society.

This emphasis on schooling for social manipulation explains the most distinctive element in the common school movement's rhetoric—the im-

² It must be noted that the authority with which these figures appear in the text does an injustice to Professor Fishlow and to other econometricians and statistical historians who have so laboriously constructed carefully qualified estimates of educational effort for the early nineteenth century from sparse, conflicting, and sometimes inaccurate statistics. Although stated precisely, these numbers are estimates that illuminate orders of magnitude rather than precise quantitative descriptions.

perative to get all children, and especially urban children, into school. The need for an educated electorate still dominated the speeches of schooling's advocates: If all males have the right to vote, society's interests require that each should be educated. To insure that mothers would correctly nurture children, half of whom were future voters, women should be educated even though they did not vote. But the rhetoric of the common school reformers contained a new urgency, an urgency that sometimes went to the extent of demanding that all children be forced into school. The mere establishment of educational institutions was insufficient; children must attend them if the schools were to accomplish their task of improving society. The idea of compulsory education was anathema to many in the laissez-faire atmosphere of nineteenth-century America and school reformers were very chary of suggesting it, especially before the Civil War. But the reformers' writings are full of hints of a desire to solve the problem by forcing parents to send their children to school. Reformers identified poor parents as the offenders—beginning a tradition in which educators blame poor parents for the failures of the schools—arguing that they kept their children away from school in order that they might work on the farm or in the factory to increase the family income. Industrial states, beginning in the late 1830s, adopted attendance laws which applied only to children working in factories and required them to attend school for three months each year. These laws were aimed at poor parents who were, no doubt, less able to defend themselves against what middle-class parents would have successfully opposed as unwarranted interference with parental prerogative. More honored in the breach than in the letter, these laws foreshadowed those to come mandating statewide compulsory education for all children. Massachusetts and New York, in 1852 and 1853 respectively, adopted the nation's first compulsory education laws. Other states passed laws after the Civil War but the pattern became universal only when Mississippi accepted the principle in 1918.

The common school reformers were also quite concerned with establishing age grading in the common schools and with standardizing textbooks. As we have seen, the absence of grading and of uniform school books had greatly reduced the efficiency of the district schools. School reformers sought vigorously to eliminate these inefficient practices, for there was no hope of financing for all children the leisurely-paced training given in the district schools. The reform movement's economic feasibility required that children move through the common school rapidly so as to free space and teacher time for more children. The reformers considered the widespread establishment of the age-graded school as one of their prime accomplishments.

Another indication of the reformers' concern with getting every child into school and keeping him there until he had learned rudimentary skills

and social virtues was their willingness to change the curriculum and the pedagogical approach in order to attract the unschooled. For example, some reformers in New York were so eager to enroll Catholic children whose parents were hostile to the Protestant flavor of the city's schools that they agreed to give the city's Catholic bishop a voice in the appointment of teachers and selection of texts for the Catholic children. Reformers from Horace Mann to E. A. Sheldon were constantly tampering with the curriculum and pedagogical forms in order to make schooling more attractive and more effective. Their discussions suggest that they sought to sell education to children who had so far rejected it.

The capstone of the common school reformers' efforts to enroll all children, and especially those of the lower, "alienated" classes, was the free school. Too often historians of education in the United States have viewed the creation of the free school as the reformers' supreme goal. It is better understood as a means of raising attendance at elementary schools so that those common schools could achieve their major goals of teaching common values to all children. Free schools were meant to eliminate the situation in which the poor did not attend the district or public schools because even the very small "rate" or tuition payment required was beyond their means. In the rural districts poverty was relatively slight and rates might be informally excused for the one or two families that found themselves unable to pay them. In cities and manufacturing and port towns, however, it was a different problem altogether. Here poverty was immense and highly concentrated; whole neighborhoods of families were unable to pay rates and their children were thus excluded from school. In a first attempt to deal with this problem philanthropists financed charity schools or positions for charity scholars in the regular schools. Neither alternative was very effective. Because the poor found the process of declaring themselves impoverished and the stigma of "charity scholar" that their children carried too demeaning, many boycotted the charity schemes. Furthermore, well-to-do parents did not like the idea of paying to send their children to a school when poor children came free. They wished a more exclusive schooling for their money. Paying students tended to withdraw from the schools containing charity scholars leaving those schools exclusively populated by poor children. The free schools, supported entirely by taxation and state grants, solved all of these problems. Everyone went to school "free" so that no child was especially identified as unable to pay. Similarly, the middle and upper classes objected less to mixed economic classes in the same school under these circumstances, especially since they were paying for public education whether their children attended or not. And the free school mechanism provided for a slight redistribution of wealth or income that benefited the poor: taxes derived largely from the property of the middle and upper classes supported schooling for children of all economic

classes. The abolition of rates and the establishment of a free school system would, the reformers hoped, remove the last barrier that prevented the poor and the alienated from attending school. As we shall see, the reformers' hopes were too sanguine. Foregone income rather than tuition bills had been the most important economic barrier keeping the poor and the immigrant out of school. Nor were economic reasons the only ones that kept children out of school.

Although it was perhaps the most important single legislative goal of the common school movement, the reformers had a difficult time effecting the abolition of rates. Opposition to raising taxes for schools was widespread. New York State did not abolish rates statewide until 1867; Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Michigan waited even longer. But where it counted the most, the reformers were more successful. In the cities where the poor congregated, rates were abolished much earlier. Most large cities in the United States eliminated rates a full quarter of a century before their states did. New York City, for example, abolished rates in 1832, Buffalo in 1838, and Rochester in 1848. Once the battle for free schools had been won—not without a fight, however—in these cities, the reformers thought rate bills in the rest of the state fairly unimportant. They were committed to free schools less as a democratic principle than as a means of getting the poor into schools. The concern for enrolling the poor that underlay most of the important reforms advocated by the common school reformers grew out of the realization that schools could not be used for social manipulation, for social control, until the vast majority of poor children, who needed the control most, were in attendance.

III

Who were the common school reformers and what kind of reformers were they? Perhaps the best way of comprehending this educational reform movement is in political terms. The desire to use schools for social manipulation or social control was part of the Whig drive to reorder American society. The Whiggish nature of common school reform is evident in the fact that the majority of the reformers—usually conservative, middle class, and often clergymen—identified with the Whig party. Two of the most outstanding of the common school reformers—Mann and Henry Barnard in Connecticut—were themselves Whig politicians before they were appointed to the educational offices that brought them into the center of school reform. Further, more often than not, Whig legislatures passed common school laws and Democrats formed the most vocal opposition, especially to the centralizing features of such legislation.

Educators and educational historians have long comforted themselves with a belief that the common school movement resulted from the democratic sentiments of educators responding to the needs of the working classes who sought improved educational facilities in order to better their lot and take their rightful place in the political and economic life of the nation. Since the Democratic or Jacksonian party is known as the party of the common man, school reform is often vaguely linked with Jacksonian reform and the progress of the Democratic party. But, however much common school reform may have benefited the common man, he was not a leader in its development; and the ideology of common school reform was much closer to Whiggery than to Jacksonianism.

The Whig party was a kind of transition party between the Federalists of the early national period and the Republican party that was established in the 1850s when the Whig party split over the slavery issue. The Whigs came to power nationally in the 1840s and had won power in some states in the thirties. The party's leadership represented the upper and middle classes, industrialists, large bankers, large farmers who sought internal improvements (canals and roads) to enhance their ability to market their products, southern commercial and banking interests and those planters dependent on them, and native American artisans. The Whig party came together in large part as an anti-Jackson party and, as such, contained all manner of men who for personal and/or ideological reasons were unhappy with the policies of the party in power. Broadly speaking, however, the Whigs were the party of the established middle and upper classes, of men who had inherited their high status rather than achieved it. It was the party of the elite and of those who felt their interests to be similar to those of the elite. Whigs were generally economically progressive and socially conservative. The established professions—law, medicine, and religion—were heavily Whig and the party had close ties with organized Protestant religion. It was from this group that most of the common school reformers came.

Despite the diversity within the party and its usual character as an opposition party, it is possible to describe a Whig ideology that was held by the more prominent leaders of the party, if not by the great majority of its followers. The Whig party supported an active role for the government in the stimulation and direction of economic activity, while the Democrats were generally more sympathetic to laissez-faire policies prohibiting governmental intervention. Lee Benson has characterized the distinction between the parties as one between the Whigs' positive liberalism and the Democrats' negative liberalism.³ The Democrats believed in leaving the individual alone to do as he liked, believing that the max-

³ Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, N. J., 1961), especially 86–109.

imum freedom for the individual would lead to the greatest improvement of the society. They also called for the widest possible decentralization of power, believing that the concentration of power, especially in the hands of the state, inevitably interfered with individual freedom. The Jacksonians were instrumental in seeking to do away with the system of chartering new economic ventures. The Whigs, on the other hand, while not opposed to individual freedom, did wish to subordinate individual economic freedom to higher concerns of social good and economic growth. They wished to retain the charter system and the power of the government to stimulate and guide economic development which that system provided. The Whigs were quite progressive in supporting economic growth and in building economic institutions capable of serving a national economy. Much of the Democratic economic ideology suggests that the Democrats sought to maintain the localistic economy of an earlier day in which each small geographic area was economically independent, and the individual yeoman's farm and the individual artisan's shop were the most important economic units. The Whigs, on the other hand, understood that the nature of the United States economy was changing—that all areas were economically interdependent, that the factory employing hundreds of hands to run complex machinery was replacing the individual farm and shop as the significant economic unit. The Whigs saw that the economy was growing and industrializing, and they welcomed and sought to stimulate those changes.

In a way, Whiggery was a form of national boosterism—the Whigs anticipated a great future for the United States just as the local boosters did for their local areas. Henry Clay, congressman from Kentucky from 1811 until his death in 1852 and three times unsuccessful candidate for the presidency, illustrates Whig support of economic growth. Clay began his career as a booster of Lexington in its fight with Louisville for domination of Kentucky's trade. But then his boosterism went national: he was a leader of the War Hawks, who urged the United States to go to war against Britain in 1812 because Britain refused to honor those portions of the treaty ending the Revolutionary War requiring her to give up her outposts west of the Alleghenies. Clay's national boosterism became even clearer in his advocacy of what he called the American System, a four-point program aimed, in the words of one historian, at "building up the wealth and power of the republic, [at] shaping for the United States a grand destiny that would be carved out in proud independence from old Europe."⁴ Clay called for a high tariff that would protect from foreign competition the products of American (home) industry—the theory being that because, in the early stages of industrialization in the United States, American workers and factories were neither as efficient nor as

⁴ Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *The Jacksonian Era, 1828–1848* (New York, 1959), 59.

productive as English ones making the same products, a protective tariff must be established to prevent cheaper goods manufactured in England from driving American goods off even the American market. Thus protection to these young industries would keep them viable while they were growing and, Clay argued, once they became mature, they would be as efficient as European industry and no longer need tariff protection. Clay recommended the high tariff in order to encourage the industrialization of the nation. Industrialization, in turn, would provide home markets for the products of American agriculture. Unlike earlier forms of economic organization, industrialization required large numbers of workingmen who needed food grown by others. Clay envisioned an independent United States in which the trading cycle was complete within the borders of the country. Until his time the United States was part of the European trade cycle, sending raw materials and agricultural goods to Europe in return for manufactured goods. Clay hoped that in the future American farmers would sell their products to American workingmen and American factories would sell their goods to American farmers. He also called for nationally financed internal improvements which would improve interregional communication and facilitate interregional trade in the United States. These improvements were to be financed from the sale of public land in the West and from tariff revenues. These internal improvements—chiefly canals, some roads, and harbors—were meant to span the Appalachian mountains and to connect major cities with their hinterlands. Clay saw them as part of the federal government's responsibility to stimulate the economy. The fourth element in the American System was the Bank of the United States. This large central bank was to serve as the place of deposit for government funds and was to control, as much as was possible with the banking techniques of the day, the movement of currency and credit in such a way as to stimulate the economy. The Bank was a very primitive and loosely controlled forerunner of the Federal Reserve banking system. The Bank of the United States was first established in 1797 and was rechartered twenty years later. Congress rechartered it again in 1832 but President Jackson vetoed the recharter and opened the famous and complex bank war of the 1830s. Jackson's views prevailed and the Bank, like the other proposals of the American System, went down to defeat.

The American System violated the tenets of negative liberalism on almost all counts and Jacksonians fought it at every turn. Their opposition had two contradictory thrusts that represented both sides of the ambiguity that Marvin Meyers has located at the heart of "the Jacksonian persuasion."⁵ It was opposed by those who opposed all industrialization

⁵ Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford, Calif., 1957), and Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968).

and economic growth in favor of retaining an economy of small farms and small shops. And it was opposed by those who favored achieving economic growth by freeing completely the entrepreneurial spirit of individuals and of independent communities to initiate profitable economic schemes. Both groups strongly opposed the American System's threatened interference with local control and local initiative. They based their opposition on the doctrine of states' rights. Everything not entrusted to the federal government in the Constitution was automatically reserved for the states and nowhere in the Constitution were internal improvements, central banking, or the encouragement of manufactures mentioned. Tariff, according to negative liberalism's reading of the Constitution, could be imposed for revenue only. The Whigs were never successful in implementing the American System. Not until the Civil War and the coming to power of the Republican party under Abraham Lincoln were the elements of the American System enacted at the national level. The philosophy of the American System, however, informed the Whigs' evaluation of social problems in the United States between 1830 and the Civil War and their proposed solutions to these problems.

Where did education or schooling fit into the Whig ideology? Clay's vision of the economy made education more vital to economic growth than it had been under earlier forms of economic organization. The older vision of the American economy advocated that the country develop the wealth and resources lying on and in the land, that it should be a land of farmers, loggers, miners, and trappers, and of merchants who helped move these resources to Europe in exchange for manufactured goods. Clay urged intensive investments in nonextractive industry and exploitation of America's population and that population's skills. Many Whigs believed that a population's industrial capabilities were related to its educational level, but they were confused as to just what the relation was. Abbott Lawrence, merchant, textile manufacturer, founder of the first American factory, co-founder of the manufacturing city that bears his name, philanthropist, and Whig congressman from Massachusetts, was typically confused. In 1846 he sought to convince a Virginia congressman of the virtues of the American System, and in doing so expiated on the close relation of education to efficient labor. Lawrence pointed out that when Virginia turned to manufacturing, as he thought it must, it should establish "such manufactures as may be adapted to the peculiar condition of your labor. There are two classes of labor; intelligent, and unintelligent; the former is that kind of labor which requires a considerable amount of mental culture, with active physical power. This combination is capable of applying Science to Art, and of producing results that are difficult, and oftentimes complicated." Tasks suitable for unintelligent laborers, on the other hand, could produce only coarse and common

articles. The establishment of manufacturing would itself stimulate a "desire for knowledge" among the workers. "More education, more intellectual cultivation, will be desired by those engaged in the mechanical departments; and with this eagerness for knowledge will follow skill and cleverness in the use of tools, and then will follow the inventive power, for which [the workers of Massachusetts] have become so distinguished in the estimation of the world." In those words Lawrence suggested that industrialization would stimulate education. At other times he implied that education was a necessary stimulus to economic growth. "You cannot, I should suppose, expect to develop your resources, without a general system of popular education; it is the lever to all permanent improvement."⁶

But just how education served as a lever for permanent improvement, or even temporary improvement, is unclear. Every one of the school reformers wrote as if it were obvious that more and better schooling led to economic advance. It seemed so obvious, so much a part of the conventional wisdom, that no one took the trouble to explain just how what children learned in the common schools was going to make them more efficient or more inventive workers. But school reformers always made the claim. Education, Horace Mann wrote, "can raise more abundant harvests, and multiply the conveniences of domestic life; . . . it can build, transport, manufacture, mine, navigate, fortify; . . . a single new idea is often worth more to an individual than a hundred workmen,—and to a nation, than the addition of provinces to its territory. . . . Education has a power of ministering to our personal and material wants beyond all other agencies, whether excellence of climate, spontaneity of production, mineral resources, or mines of silver and gold."⁷ Can Mann really have been talking of the district school system before 1840, or the common schools of his own day? Did rote memorization really serve so many functions and teach the youngster industrial skills?

The common school reformers were not arguing, as did the boosters, that the presence of educational institutions would bring wealth to a community through the extra buying power it attracted. Rather, they implied that learning the common school subjects improved a person's potential as a worker. References to Eli Whitney, inventor of the cotton gin and the interchangeable parts method of manufacturing rifles, and to Robert Fulton, inventor of the steamboat, run throughout their writing. Common schooling was supposed to increase greatly the number of inventors of this kind. Yet the reformers did not know how education

⁶ Abbott Lawrence to William C. Rives (7 January, 1846) in *Letters from the Honorable Abbott Lawrence to the Honorable William C. Rives of Virginia* (Boston, 1846), 5-7.

⁷ Horace Mann, *Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Education; Together with the Fifth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board* (1842), 82-83. Henceforth, Mann's reports as secretary of the Board will be cited as *Annual Report*.

could accomplish these ends. Listen to Mann again: "An early awakening of the mind," he argued, "is a prerequisite to success in the useful arts." There is no argument there. Moreover, a worker must have the power to take correct mental pictures and to reproduce them. Also, he must be able to revive or reproduce "at will, all the impressions or ideas before obtained, and, also, the power of changing their collocations, of rearranging them into new forms, and of adding something to, or removing something from, the original perceptions, in order to make a more perfect plan or model." Again, few would care to argue with Mann on those points. "Now, every recitation in a school," he continued, in getting to the crucial point of explanation, "if rightly conducted, is a step towards the attainment of this wonderful power. With a course of studies judiciously arranged and diligently pursued through the years of minority, all the great phenomena of external nature, and the most important productions in all the useful arts, together with the principles on which they are evolved or fashioned, would be successfully brought before the understanding of the pupil. . . . When such a student goes out into life, he carries, as it were, a plan or model of the world, in his own mind."⁸ Mann sounds as if he were trying to convince himself.

A good deal of recent historical work has been focused on possible relations between education and economic growth in the United States—using insights and conceptual tools from economics, planning, and political science as well as history. These studies have sought to compare the economic growth of the United States in the nineteenth century—a development about which surprisingly little is known—to the experience that nations have had in modernizing and industrializing in the mid-twentieth century. Such comparisons are likely to become one of the most fruitful areas of future research in the history of education in the United States, but as yet their results have been too meager and too conflicting to support any firm conclusions. Some argue that education is a modernization investment that precedes industrial growth—that industrial growth cannot take place until substantial investments in education have been made. Others argue the opposite—that education was something of a luxury, possible for large numbers of people only because of the economic surplus that modernization (and, in the case of the United States, abundant natural resources) made available for educational spending. In this view, education is only a by-product of economic development. The evidence presently assembled does not allow us to choose intelligently between the alternatives.

A smaller but related problem is why industry in the United States was so successful in using new techniques and new methods so rapidly while British industry, for example, was reluctant to adopt new methods.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 105-107.

Did education have anything to do with the American capitalist's and workman's ability to discover new processes and to adapt flexibly to rapid change in industrial techniques. The inventiveness and adaptability of American industry and the American worker most impressed foreign visitors to the United States. Those traits explain much of the United States' rapid economic progress in the nineteenth century. One historian explains this trait as resulting from a lack of education. In European apprenticeship systems masters rigorously and carefully taught their apprentices the details of their trades. Their teaching was so careful and effective that trades passed almost unchanged from generation to generation, making it more difficult to introduce new methods or new machines in industry. In the United States apprenticeship was a weak institution in which trades were taught hastily and superficially. Because American workers lacked the careful "education" their European counterparts had received, they were more flexible and adaptable when faced with new problems and new methods.⁹ But whether widespread common school education in the United States made any positive contribution to the skill and adaptability of the American workman remains unclear. The school reformers apparently were not clear how education helped, and modern research has not yet solved the problem either. The question remains very much open.

But the Whig school reformers were much more explicit in discussing another area in which education related to economic growth. Education would foster industrialization by teaching future workers to respect property, to work hard, and to accept their lot, if not happily, at least submissively. This aspect of schooling's role is clear in a questionnaire that Horace Mann sent to a group of factory owners and superintendents in 1841 in connection with his fifth report to the Massachusetts Board of Education.

What . . . has been the effect of higher degrees of mental application and culture upon the domestic and social habits of persons in your employment? Is this class more cleanly in their persons, their dress and their households; and do they enjoy a greater immunity from those diseases which originate in a want of personal neatness and purity? Are they more exemplary in their deportment and conversation, devoting more time to intellectual pursuits or to the refining art of music, and spending their evenings and leisure hours more with their families, and less at places of resort for idle and dissipated men? Is a smaller portion of them addicted to intemperance? Are their houses kept in a superior condition? . . . Are their families better brought up, more respectably dressed, more regularly attendant upon the school and the church; and do their children, when arrived at years of maturity, enter upon the active scenes of life with better prospects of success? . . . [Do the edu-

⁹ John E. Sawyer, "The Social Basis of the American System of Manufacturing," *Journal of Economic History*, XIV (1954), 361-379.

cated and uneducated differ in] regard to punctuality and fidelity in the performance of duties? . . . from which [the educated or the uneducated] have those who possess property and who hope to transmit it to their children, most to fear from secret aggression, or from such public degeneracy as will loosen the bands of society, corrupt the testimony of witnesses, violate the sanctity of the juror's oath and substitute as a rule of right, the power of a numerical majority, for the unvarying principles of justice?

To these very leading questions the owners and superintendents answered in kind. Educated workers, one wrote, "have more order and system; they not only keep their persons neater, but their machinery in better condition." Others spoke of greater punctuality, industriousness, and frugality among the educated. All felt their machinery was safer with the educated than with the uneducated.¹⁰

The superintendents never once spoke of reading, writing, or mathematics as skills that were useful in the factory and that distinguished the educated from those who had not gone to school. Skills taught in school and their possible contribution to economic growth did not concern the managers. They were concerned with the social virtue that they hoped schools would transmit. Mann and the factory managers depended on the schools to serve as the key agent for teaching morality.

Previously, the teaching of morality—regard for the rights of others, respect for property, deference to one's superiors, love of justice, commitment to hard work—had been a principal responsibility of the family, the church, and the community. Morality had not been considered a particularly important part of the school's business when it was thought of as its business at all. But the Whigs found, especially in urban and industrial environments, that the home and the church and the community were not performing their function as inculcators of morality. The Whigs faced the dilemma that the very economic changes that would make the United States a powerful independent nation were also undermining the "quality" of her population—undermining the moral fiber or character of Americans to the point that the nation might be destroyed from within. As Abbott Lawrence reminded his Virginia correspondent in discussing the relation of education and industrialization: "The elective franchise, in the hands of an ignorant and debased population, would very soon place our country in a state of anarchy."¹¹ The Whigs' search for an agency to inculcate morality testifies to their realization that, under the new economic and social conditions they had done so much to bring about, the family, church, and community had defaulted on their traditional function of socializing the young to the moral codes and values of the society, or at least to what the Whigs thought should be the moral

¹⁰ Mann, *Fifth Annual Report*, 88-89, 90-110.

¹¹ Lawrence to Rives (7 January, 1846), in *Letters*, 7.

codes and values of the society. A great deal of the motivation behind common school reform in the era after 1830 grew from this Whig desire to establish centralized, efficient agencies that would superintend the moral development of the nation in much the way that the economic institutions they advocated would superintend the development of a flourishing industrial economy. The Whigs were convinced that the two thrusts must occur simultaneously, for they were fearful—indeed, they thought they had ample evidence—that economic change without the reinforcement of social control over the industrial population would spell the doom of the American experiment.

Mann's identification of the moral importance of the common school is typically Whig in its assignment to a centralized institution of the duties previously handled by the family and the community. In his journal he called the common school "the greatest discovery ever made by man." The common schools were preventive and provided antidotes to social ills; other social organizations were merely remedial, dealing with evil only after it had occurred. Mann concluded his journal entry by exclaiming: "Let the common school be expanded to its capabilities, let it be worked with the efficiency of which it is susceptible, and nine-tenths of the crimes in the penal code would become obsolete; the long catalogue of human ills would be abridged; men would walk more safely by day; every pillow would be more inviolable by night; property, life, and character held by a stronger tenure; all rational hopes respecting the future brightened."¹² A few days before Mann left political office to accept the secretaryship of the Massachusetts Board of Education in 1837, a gang of boys set fire to the roof of the building where he lived. He was appalled, and quite probably scared, and his reaction is important as an indication of how men of his background and class thought of education. He confided to his journal the night of the fire that society, "like a mother," should take care of all her children by giving them moral guidance. And, for Mann as for so many Whigs, the common schools were to be society's maternal agent.

The breakdown of traditional community controls that accompanied industrialization, urbanization, and westward expansion frightened the Whigs who, of course, supported these three movements—Mann himself was a principal promoter of state support for railroads and other industrial initiatives when he served in the Massachusetts legislature—and they were not about to cure the social problems caused by industrialization, urbanization, and westward expansion by curbing these movements. By supporting education instead, they hoped to cure the evils and retain the advantages simultaneously. Whigs observed traditional strengths of the

late colonial and early national American community disintegrating on several fronts. Industrialization entailed the expansion of the factory method of manufacturing, a method that required the gathering of large masses of workers in a single place. During English industrialization, an experience with which large numbers of Whigs were familiar, the concentration of industry and people had created filthy industrial cities filled with povertystricken workers who were densely packed in poor and inadequate housing and who contributed to an ever rising crime rate and an ever expanding network of vice. Industrialization appeared to create a socially degraded and vicious population. Americans, like most of the British, were more prone to attribute the final cause of this degradation to the poor moral character of the industrial workers rather than to the conditions under which they lived and worked. But those conditions did serve to emphasize and heighten people's evil traits and to cause them to reveal themselves more readily. Industrialization and urbanization concentrated large numbers of socially vicious people in a single place; where the traditional community controls might have suppressed the major part of this viciousness when such people were widely scattered through the population, those traditional controls had no power in the industrial ghetto. Social viciousness reinforced social viciousness in the urban slum. Industrialism additionally threatened to create a mass of men without property, without the stake in social order that the mass of yeoman farmers and individual artisans had because they owned their farmland or their shops. It had long been assumed that one great strength of republican society in America, one reason why it was relatively free from the disorder and licentiousness thought to mark European populations, was that the mass of Americans were men of property. Industrialization seemed certain to change that condition.

Urbanization threatened additional dangers. It undermined traditional means of social control by greatly increasing the social distance among social classes within the city. In small communities there had not been a great deal of social distance between the rich and the poor. The visible effects of class difference were small because most citizens, as property owners, were economically self-sufficient. Even the wealthy had few means of conspicuous consumption. In the small communities and even in the cities of 1800, the social classes lived close to each other. Often, indeed, their houses were interspersed, with the poor, for example, living on streets behind the homes of the well-to-do. Because there was not much social distance among classes in the traditional communities, personal methods of social control worked fairly well: individual remonstrance by a social leader—with a recalcitrant worker or a husband neglecting his family in favor of drinking at the inn or an adolescent turning to hooliganism—was most often effective and sufficient. But after 1820 or 1830, as the population of cities soared, a new pattern of residen-

¹² Mary Mann, *Life of Horace Mann* (Boston, 1865), I, 142.

tial and social segregation appeared. The rich and the poor began to live at opposite ends of town. And, as the towns grew larger, this polarity represented a considerable physical distance and an even greater psychological distance. People felt less and less safe venturing into neighborhoods inhabited by social classes different from their own. Forerunners of modern social workers appeared in American cities during this period, symbolizing the distance between the classes—the well-to-do supported urban missionaries to distribute systematically the charity that had been distributed on a personal basis in earlier times and to report to the upper and middle classes, somewhat in the manner of anthropologists reporting on primitive tribes, on conditions and attitudes in the somewhat mysterious and very distant slums. The personal basis of social control was gone.

Urbanization strained traditional patterns of social control among all people in the city—including the rich and middle class. The small community was filled with formal and informal agencies of social control. The church was a powerful force for inculcating and enforcing habits of obedience, conformity, and morality. Since the open town meeting—for all its alleged contributions to democracy—was run by the community's hierarchy and had no method of secret balloting, a man had to vote publicly before the hierarchy, which was quite likely to punish him if he deviated from acceptable standards. Economic control in the small community was tight. Few sources of credit were open to a man and he knew that they would close to him if he did not conform to the standards of those with financial power. There was a vast amount of informal social pressure on individuals to conform because of the lack of privacy in the small community. Everyone knew everyone else and everyone else's business. In most Protestant churches of the day the individual related the circumstances of his religious conversion publicly; his religion was not a private affair between God and himself but a semipublic concern where the congregation—quite likely to be the majority of adults in his community—judged his piety. Everyone helped everyone with such tasks as barn raising and corn husking, but such mutual dependence extended into such intimate problems as sickness, marital problems, and charity. One did not go to impersonal and professional hospitals or agencies for help in these situations, but to one's neighbors. Neighborliness had great advantages over the impersonality of the professional social agency, but privacy was not one of them. The most intimate aspects of one's life were open to the other families in a small community. Even love was a public affair: an undetected walk in the woods was all two lovers could hope for in the way of privacy for there were no crowded and impersonal public facilities or automobiles in which couples could retreat from the world. Such lack of privacy served to restrain individuals from deviating from the accepted standards of the community. One was too well known by and too dependent on one's neighbors to risk alienating them by behaving in a manner that would outrage their sense of propriety.

People moving to the cities escaped this network almost completely. The person on the move, especially to or within urban areas, could throw off his past and leave his social and economic niche. In moving, he virtually insured that no one was likely to find out about his past; he moved into a world of relative privacy, into what many consider the excessive privacy of urban living. He was free to vote, worship, spend, read, and love as he wished, without a neighbor keeping track of him. The Whigs did not trust people who lived in such privacy to conform to the moral standards of the age. They sought to establish some kind of institutionalized form of social control to substitute for the personal community network of the small town, a form of social control that would insure that individuals living in the impersonal urban world would perform their responsibilities and work so as to promote the general welfare. The Whigs looked to schools as one institution which could efficiently internalize a sense of social control and social duty in the urban population.

Whigs also associated this same breakdown in community networks of social control with expansion westward. Here again individuals were thought to have moved out of their community and out from under its restraints and to be, therefore, in grave danger of turning into dissolute and irresponsible drifters. Timothy Dwight voiced a popular conservative view of westerners in 1826 when he described them as men who led "irregular, adventurous, half-working and half-lounging" lives, who hated "sober industry and prudent economy," and who possessed, furthermore, a "noxious disposition."¹³ Westerners acquired these characteristics, according to their critics, because they had moved outside of the community orbit of social control. One unhappy result of their having done so, in the Whig view, was that they grew discontented with their lot and lost respect for their political betters. People in older communities accepted class differences, believing that they served the needs of order and stability by allowing all members of the community to know what to expect of others. Class lines facilitated the distribution of responsibilities and patterns of deference so that the community worked harmoniously. Deference was crucial to the traditional community—men knew their places and respected and deferred to those in superior positions. And those who were deferred to—the social reformers and the forebears of the social reformers of the common school era—liked to think that the lower orders deferred happily and acquiesced cheerfully to the class system. Westerners appeared to the Whigs to have lost all pretense at deference to individuals or responsibility to the general good. Instead, westerners supported "radical," "demagogic" politicians like Andrew Jackson. Whigs did not consider all westerners guilty of such transgressions—Henry Clay was a westerner, after all. But the Whigs saw political

¹³ Quoted in Francis S. Philbrick, *The Rise of the West, 1754–1830* (New York, 1965), 345.

radicalism, in the person of Jackson, coming from the West and genuinely feared that the western population, like that in the urban slums, might destroy the nation.

A fourth major social change in the United States during the second quarter of the nineteenth century was the large influx of relatively poor, non-English, and often Catholic immigrants. Vast social and economic changes in Europe, rather than policies fostered by the Whig economic doctrine, caused this increase in the flow and change in the nature of immigration to the United States. This new wave of immigrants—much more “foreign” than earlier immigrants had been—threatened further to destroy traditional modes of social control. The presence of large groups of immigrants, often speaking an alien language, worshipping in different confessions, congregating together in order to maintain their ethnic identity, increased the social distance among peoples in the industrial and urban regions. The Irish immigrants, in particular, driven penniless from their farms in Ireland, arrived on the eastern seaboard without the skills that would make them valuable as laborers in urban and industrial concerns and without the capital to establish farms where they might have used the skills that they did possess. They remained in the cities, a depressed class of ghetto dwellers working for the lowest imaginable wages, the last to be hired and the first to be fired. Their presence greatly increased the problem of urban poverty and vice. “Immigrant” and “poverty and vice” became so synonymous, in fact, that many Americans imagined that only immigrants were poor and lived in degraded slums (much as many Americans today imagine that only blacks are on welfare).

How accurate or justified were the Whigs’ fears of urbanization, industrialization, immigration, and western expansion? Superficially, it might seem that they wildly exaggerated the social changes of the common school era. Statistically, those changes do not seem great enough in the period between 1820 and 1840 to have justified the social leaders’ great concern for them. Most Americans remained in traditional communities under traditional social controls. For example, in 1840 only about 11 percent of the population lived in cities and towns over 2,500 (the point at which the census divided urban and rural). The figure had already reached 6 percent in 1800. Urban population was to rise five percentage points in every decade after 1840 for the rest of the century, which makes the rise that the common school reformers had experienced seem even less significant. But the statistics must be read another way in order to understand how people perceived urbanization in those years. Because the United States population had been rising so rapidly, nearly six times as many people lived in urban places in 1840 as in 1800, and the percentage growth in urban population reached 82 percent between 1820 and 1830 and 68 percent in the following decade. Urban population was to double between 1840 and 1850 (see table). Three percent of the American population lived in cities over 100,000 in 1840; there was no

Growth of the Urban Population of the United States, 1790–1920
(in thousands)

Year	Total Population	Urban Population	Percent Urban	Percent Growth of Urban Population	Percent Growth of Total Population
1790	3,929	201	5.1		
1800	5,308	322	6.1	60	35
1810	7,239	525	7.3	69	36
1820	9,638	693	7.2	33	33
1830	12,866	1,127	8.8	82	34
1840	17,069	1,845	10.8	68	33
1850	23,191	3,543	15.3	99	36
1860	31,443	6,216	19.8	75	36
1870	39,818	9,902	25.7	59	23
1880	50,155	14,129	28.2	40	30
1890	62,947	22,106	35.1	61	25
1900	75,994	30,159	39.7	36	21
1910	91,972	41,998	45.7	39	21
1920	105,710	54,157	51.2	29	15

From David Ward, *Cities and Immigrants*, 1971, p. 6. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

city that large in 1810. In 1840 New York City (excluding Brooklyn) contained almost 2 percent of the nation’s population, around 300,000 people.

Thirty-three million people immigrated to the United States between 1820 and 1920. Against this figure the 100,000 that came in the 1820s and the 500,000 that came in the 1830s or even the 1.4 million that came in the 1840s seem few indeed, far too few to justify the fear of the immigrant that Americans of the period felt. On the other hand, people living in the 1840s did not have the perspective of a century’s experience with immigration. To them the rate of increase was immense and the character of the people arriving radically different from what they had known. Although from 10 to 20 percent of the immigrants each decade before the Civil War came from the United Kingdom—the source of the vast majority of pre-1820 immigrants—from 45 to 73 percent came from Ireland and Germany. And the vast majority of these settled in cities where they were considerably more visible (and threatening) to social leaders already concerned with the moral dangers of urban life than they would have been had they scattered evenly through the nation.

The extent of poverty is even more difficult to determine statistically: there had been poverty, especially urban poverty, in the United States both before and after the Revolution. Its increase in the early decades

of the nineteenth century was most probably rather gradual, but at some point in that rise it changed from being an accepted condition with which the community dealt routinely to being a problem calling for special concern. It came to public consciousness dramatized as a new problem calling for new solutions. It is not clear why or how poverty, degradation, and vice became such popular issues at the particular time they did. Probably the early nineteenth-century media—the preacher, the lyceum lecturer, the lady's magazine, and the newspaper—inspired this interest. Also, it is probable that the growing social distance between the financially secure and the poor made conditions among the poor more interesting, more scandalous, and more frightening to the well-to-do than they had been when members of various social classes met each other routinely.

The conservatives' view of the westerner seems, perhaps, the least justifiable. A more hard-working, pious, neighborly, and communal population than that settling the old Northwest is difficult to imagine. The fervor with which the westerners sought to build communities in their new homeland modeled as precisely as possible—down to the details of architecture and ritual—on that of the communities they had left behind suggests that the westerners themselves were troubled enough by their break with the traditional community to seek reinstitution of the network of social control that those communities had provided. Westerners, or at least the community leaders in the West, thought as conservatively on social issues as did the eastern Whigs, and the fervor with which reformers pursued the common school ideal in western areas that contained few immigrants, little industry, and few urban places suggests that westerners did perceive some of the problems in their condition that worried eastern conservatives.¹⁴

The United States experienced significant social changes in the period after 1820—especially significant when viewed against the background of what had preceded them (as the participants at the time viewed them) rather than against the degree of social change that was to follow. The Whiggish leaders sought desperately to minimize the threat that those changes posed to the social order and stability of their country. Their desperation was evident in the building of the city of Lowell, Massachusetts, in the late 1830s and early 1840s. A group of Boston merchant investors proposed to build a group of textile mills in the countryside at the point where the Merrimac River's fall was sufficient to drive the textile machinery and to build a model town there which would avoid all

¹⁴ Compare this sense of fear with the realities of western conformist communities in T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier* (Chicago, 1964), and Page Smith, *As a City Upon a Hill: The Town in American History* (New York, 1966), chapters 3, 4.

the evils associated with British industrialization. Lowell was erected from scratch in a rural area far north of Boston and its urban evils. Its labor force was to consist of young women from New England farm families who came to work in the factories in Lowell for only two or three years, long enough to earn a dowry or to support a male relative in school. The young women would live in dormitories under the supervision of house mothers approved by the companies. The factories sought to stand *in loco parentis* for their workers just as the colleges did with students. Lowell's planners overbuilt the city with schools, parks, and churches; in fact, Lowell was a kind of nineteenth-century industrial park trying to hide its true nature under a garden-like mantle.

Industrialism developed in Lowell according to plan for a time, but by 1850 at the latest this plan had been aborted. The factory managers found that the ever increasing pool of immigrant labor provided cheaper and steadier hands; the pursuit of profit squeezed out ideals. Lowell became a typical New England mill town—dirty, shabby, indisputably industrial, and populated by propertyless immigrant laborers who gave every indication that they had already become a permanent working class.

The planners of Lowell had hoped to create conditions under which they could have reaped the advantages of industrialization without suffering any of the evils that accompanied the concentration of industrial workers. Their urban environment was to be pure and isolated; their work force was to be drawn temporarily from the ranks of the property-holding; while living in Lowell the worker would not suffer from the impersonal privacy and lack of social control that typified urban, industrial environments but would be as closely supervised as she would have been at home. The planners' visions for Lowell did not materialize, and even had they, Lowell's scheme was too utopian and expensive to serve as a viable model for easing the dangers of industrialism. More viable and less expensive modes of maintaining social control over industrial and urban and immigrant populations had to be found. Schooling was one such device.

The Whiggish social leaders of the first half of the nineteenth century sponsored a host of educational agencies to meet the need for inculcating social control. They supported the benevolent societies which distributed Bibles and tracts and sent missionaries to the poor and the alien in an effort to persuade them to mend their ways and accept the guidance of the established religions. These were the same benevolent societies that supplied funds and faculty for the western colleges and academies. Easterners of all ranks supported their efforts in the West, which were not limited to the encouragement of higher education. One of Lowell's mill girls remembered that during her stay in the mills, from 1835 to 1845, "the needs of the West were constantly kept before us in the churches. We were asked for contributions for Home Missions, which were willingly

given; and some of us were appointed collectors of funds for the education of indigent young men to become Western Home Missionary preachers."¹⁵ Many of these societies sent agents, annually, to the mills in Lowell to recruit teachers for the western elementary schools. Many mill girls felt dutybound to go and civilize the westerner. The Sunday school movement embodied another attempt to teach social control to the poor—in this case the children of the poor. Pioneered in England in the late eighteenth century as a means of teaching young children who worked six days a week their letters and numbers on Sunday, the Sunday school made its way to the United States soon after the turn of the century. Although housed in and supported by churches, the Sunday school's original purpose was to teach intellectual skills—principally reading—and nonsectarian morality to working children. (It took on its present-day religious function only when the expanding common school system made its original function obsolete.) The Sunday school movement flourished throughout the urban United States as a means of combating actual and anticipated social disorder. "There is a growing spirit of libertinism destructive of good order in society and good morals in individuals," an official of the Sunday School Union—the national benevolent society organized in 1824 to encourage the building of Sunday schools—claimed in 1835. "The riots in our cities I know from my observation . . . are sustained by the youths: lads of 16 to 20 years of age." His solution was to teach every child social virtue in a Sunday school.¹⁶

Whiggish philanthropists supported charity schools for pauper children and scholarships for the poor at regular schools but, as mentioned, these efforts did not succeed in reaching the vast bulk of the children of the poor. Whigs also supported a variety of self-improvement institutions, such as mechanics institutes, which combined a library, scientific cabinet, and reading room with lecture series, in hopes of providing young men the facilities with which they could educate themselves. Many of these institutions turned into lyceums—lecture halls where young and old of all classes gathered to hear touring lecturers discuss in a popular manner current issues, scientific advances, or literary appreciation. Only a few retained their character as hospitable retreats for the working-class boy interested in reading or self-improvement. And these seem to have been used more by the well-trained young man already on the way up rather than by the poor. All of these educative institutions had their successes and their constituencies, but none singly or all in combination effectively rescued the majority of the children of the poor and the alien-

¹⁵ Lucy Larcom, *A New England Girlhood* (Boston, 1889), 256.

¹⁶ Joseph H. Dulles to Frederick A. Packard (20 August, 1835), quoted in Clifford Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800–1865* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1960), 51–52.

ated. A more systematic and more efficient effort seemed necessary to bring them within the community—to make them conform to the moral and social codes of the majority. The common school—and it is wise to note how closely the words "common" and "community" are related—was to be that effective agency.

The common school appeared even more efficient when school reformers discovered that women could be used to staff the lower grades. Reformers justified the appointment of women in various ways, emphasizing especially the effectiveness of the maternal instinct and the female personality in dealing with young children, especially in schools that were to act as "mothers" to children. Another motivation for choosing women teachers, however, was that they generally commanded less than half of a male's salary for the same work. Although women had taught in the "dame" schools and sometimes in writing schools before 1830 (both schools were for children under seven), the remainder of the teaching force had been male. In the years between 1830 and 1860 the teaching force rapidly feminized, especially in the eastern states where the migration of males to the West left a surplus of women. Women came to predominate in elementary school teaching, a predominance they would maintain to the present day. Although there were many and varied reasons for this change—changing conceptions of child nurture and the abundant supply of unmarried women in the East—economy seems to have been the prime consideration.

Common school reform was primarily an effort to reach down into the lower portions of the population and to teach children there to share the values, ideals, and controls held by the rest of society. The reform also had a lateral aspect, of lesser importance, but still significant. Reformers feared that the children of the social leaders and of the middle class might not be adequately socialized by their families to the norms of the society. The Whig leaders, the school reformers, middle- and upper-class people in general felt some uneasiness about their own behavior during the early nineteenth century. Often they, like the westerner, had moved away from their communities, from their families, and from their religion. Pursuit of the economic and social opportunities open to them had led them to compromise with traditional values. First, those who held leadership positions had made money, often quite a lot of money. On the one hand, such financial success was a warrant of sanctification because fortune smiled only on God's appointed but, on the other hand, financial success challenged the Puritan distrust of riches, the Christian respect for suffering on earth, the Biblical injunctions against accumulating riches on earth. Second, moving to the city, which Whigs did as often as anyone else, caused people to compromise with the ideal of plain living and high thinking. Social status within a small stable community had depended more on the status of a person's ances-

tors than on the visibility of his wealth. In the impersonal city, where one's inherited status was unknown, one's social rank depended on visible wealth—on the size of one's house, on the gilt on one's carriage, on the number of servants, on the cut of one's clothes, on the lavishness of one's entertainments. Conspicuous consumption became a necessity. Third, the religious piety and orthodoxy that had marked the smaller rural communities of the United States gave way in the cities to less demanding, less dogmatic, and more refined religious practices. As people moved from the smaller to the larger communities they deserted the religious forms of their fathers to adopt the less rigorous and less pious religious habits of the urban elite. Fourth, the well-to-do felt some guilt about what the move to the city had done to family life. Because the kind of work that young children had done on the farm to help the family was not available in the city, children were not economically useful and family size shrank precipitously when families moved to the city. It is not clear how the middle class accomplished family planning in the early nineteenth century but the successful effort to do so imposed tensions on family life and led those families to feel that they were compromising with the values of the traditional community. Where children of poor families in the city found plenty of work in factories, middle-class families in search of status could not let their children face such demeaning work—the ability to support children in idleness was a demonstration of social status.

In sum, members of the middle and upper classes felt that they had compromised with their older values when they moved away from the older network of social controls. They especially worried about the effect of their compromises on their children. Choosing schooling for their children as an antidote to their own compromises allowed parents to appear greatly concerned about their own backsliding without having to alter their own behavior in any way. Such parental concern has often inspired school reform.

The goal of common school reform, then, could be summarized as the effort to find an effective substitute for the mechanisms of social control and socialization that had characterized the preurban and preindustrial small stable community. The common school was common because it taught the common subjects and common values and it was common because it was to enroll every single child in the United States in order to socialize him. Reformers hoped the common school would carry out all the socialization functions that the traditional community had performed with a stable and homogeneous population. Yet the common school was to impose moral and social consensus on a heterogeneous population living in conditions often openly hostile to the influence of organized schooling. However one evaluates the desirability in

a free society of the goals that the Whigs set for common schooling, it is clear that Whig hopes for the common school were vastly too high and their goals impossible to achieve. The common school could not help but fail to meet their expectations. The tragedy has been that in the face of common schooling's inevitable failure to fulfill these goals schoolmen and citizens alike have failed, for generation after generation, to reassess either the viability or the desirability of the objectives set for public schooling at the start of the common school movement. The promise behind the commitment to morally oriented schooling for all has not been seriously challenged. Instead, schoolmen and citizens have agreed that success is just around the corner if only the common school system could be made a little larger and a little more powerful.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The best introduction to antebellum American society and politics remains EDWARD PESSEN, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics* (Homewood, Ill., 1969), which contains a thorough bibliographical essay. LAWRENCE A. CREMIN chronicles educational reform in *The American Common School: An Historic Conception* (New York, 1951). FREDERICK M. BINDER, *The Age of the Common School, 1830-1865* (New York, 1974), HENDRICK D. GIDEONESE, "Common School Reform: Connecticut, 1838-1854" (Unpublished Dissertation, Harvard University, 1963), and SIDNEY L. JACKSON, *America's Struggle for Free Schools: Social Tensions and Education in New England and New York, 1827-1842* (Washington, D. C., 1941), are also useful. A good collection of primary sources is RUSH WELTER, ed., *American Writings on Popular Education: The Nineteenth Century* (Indianapolis, 1971).

Recent statistical research suggests that a rather large percentage of the eligible population before 1830 received some formal instruction and, therefore, the increases in attendance which accompanied the common school movement were more moderate than promoters contended. ALBERT FISHLOW, "The American Common School Revival: Fact or Fancy?", in HENRY ROSOVSKY, ed., *Industrialization in Two Systems* (New York, 1966), 40-67, CARL KAESTLE, *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), STANLEY K. SCHULTZ, *The Culture Factory: Boston Public Schools, 1789-1860* (New York, 1973), and MARIS A. VINOVSIS, "Trends in Massachusetts Education, 1826-1860," *History of Education Quarterly*, XII (Winter, 1972), 501-530, agree that participation by middle- and lower-class Americans in the pre-common-school educational enterprise was widespread.

The connections between education and economic growth have been explored in MARIS A. VINOVSIS, "Horace Mann on the Economic Productivity of Education," *New England Quarterly*, XLIII (December, 1970), 550-571, STUART BRUCHEY, *The Roots of American Economic Growth 1607-1861* (New York, 1965), chapter 8, DOUGLASS C. NORTH, *Growth and Welfare in the American Past: A New Economic History* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1966), and ALBERT FISHLOW, "Levels

of Nineteenth-Century American Investment in Education," *Journal of Economic History*, XXVI (December, 1966), 418-436.

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The following studies locate the common school movement within the larger antebellum reform effort. CLIFFORD GRIFFIN, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1960), GRIFFIN, *The Ferment of Reform, 1830-1860* (New York, 1967), WALTER D. LEWIS, "The Reformer as Conservative: Protestant Counter-Subversion in the Early Republic," in STANLEY COBEN and LORMAN RATNER, eds., *The Development of an American Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1970), 164-191, and RAYMOND A. MOHL, *Poverty in New York, 1783-1825* (New York, 1971), emphasize the conservative nature of the movement, while ALICE FELT TYLER, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860* (Minneapolis, 1944), FRANK TRACY CARLTON, *Economic Influences upon Educational Progress in the United States, 1820-1860* (1908; New York, 1965), and PHILIP CUROE, *Educational Attitudes and Policies of Organized Labor in the United States* (New York, 1926), recall its humanitarian objectives and stress the influence of working people on the reform activity.

On the image of the West as a section desperately in need of order and civilization see HENRY NASH SMITH, *Virgin Land* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), CONSTANCE ROURKE, *American Humor: A Study in National Character* (New York, 1953), and BERNARD A. WEISBERGER, *They Gathered at the River* (Boston, 1958). PAGE SMITH, *As a City Upon a Hill: The Town in American History* (New York, 1966), chapters 3 and 4, T. SCOTT MIYAKAWA, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier* (Chicago, 1964), and DANIEL BOORSTIN, *The*

Americans: The National Experience (New York, 1965), distinguish between this image of rampant individualism and the more accurate reality of the West as a territory in which conformity and consensus were exacted when not offered voluntarily.

A number of authors have suggested that adults, and the nation itself, strayed from old ideals during the early nineteenth century; among the most useful sources are BARBARA CROSS, *Horace Bushnell: Minister to a Changing America* (Chicago, 1958), FRED SOMKIN, *The Unquiet Eagle: Memory and Desire in the Idea of America Freedom, 1815-1860* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1967), JOHN G. CAWELTI, *The Apostles of the Self-Made Man: Changing Concepts of Success in America* (Chicago, 1965), chapters 1-3, OSCAR HANDLIN, *The Americans* (Boston, 1963), and WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (Boston, 1884).