Revisiting the “Three R’s:”

Exploring the Effects of Religion, Race, and Regulation on America’s Public School Systems

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Introduction

Every day, thousands of American children make their way to public school. Some walk, some drive, and others take a public bus. There are children who start at 7:00 in the morning and others who start at 9:00. They might be preparing for a day of math, science and literature, or they might be eager for their art, drama, and computer classes. In each district, in every state, schools must follow different rules. One might be hard pressed to find two identical schools. But despite all these differences, some things are guaranteed. In this country, every child has a right to wake up and go to a public school. No matter this child’s gender, race, socioeconomic status or immigration status, children are entitled a spot in their local school, for free.

This is not a shocking concept to 21st century Americans. As children, we dread sitting in classrooms and long for summer breaks. We take for granted the ability to receive a free education, because in this country it is not a privilege reserved for the wealthy. It is a right that every child experiences, and indeed, going to school is a right that every American child must, in some capacity, take advantage of. Our states have all decided that because school is such an important part of a child’s development, there should be laws requiring it.

How did this happen? When the Pilgrims landed on this land in the 17th century, they certainly did not immediately require that every child between the ages of 5 and 16 must go to school. When Jefferson and Madison drafted the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, nowhere did they dare to tell every parent in this country how their children should spend their days. And even when abolitionists were fighting for the end of the 200-year long brutal system of race-based slavery, they did not expect that immediately after the end of slavery, every Black child would enroll in public school. Our education system, like our judicial system, our
immigration system, or our economic system, had to be developed. It did not arise from nothing. There is a rich history behind the development of America’s public schools.

The Tenth Amendment of the United States Constitution reads “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.”¹ The Federalists could not have presumed every responsibility an office holder could have, and then prescribed it to either the Executive, Judicial, or Legislative branch. Nor would they have wanted to: heavily influenced by the autocratic British monarchy, our founders purposefully designed a government with limited power and a system of checks and balances to avoid any one branch from amassing too much control.² In accordance with this design, the last amendment to the Bill of Rights gives states control over anything not already listed in the Constitution.

Education is a perfect example of a power reserved for the states. Even today, our schools remain under the jurisdiction of their local governments. The federal government cannot impose a curriculum onto schools – they can only incentivize schools to adopt one, like when President Obama offered grants to states who used the Common Core.³ States, not the federal government, choose how much of their state budget gets allocated to education. Local superintendents, not the states, make decisions about hiring and firing. Even school boards are present to debate and discuss issues affecting their district’s schools. Running a school district is truly a local process, rooted in the culture and the traditions of the city.

Compared to the 18th century, Americans today are more willing to expand the federal government. Our country spent $15 billion, cumulatively, between 1789 and 1900. In 2011, it spent almost $10 billion each day.⁴ In 1790, our new country had a debt-to-GDP ratio of 30%. In
2011, that ratio was just under 100%.\textsuperscript{5} Our government has a lot more initiatives, departments, and people to oversee than when it was first designed, and therefore spends significantly more money. And despite concerns over the amount of debt the country is in, no one believes that our country could still function if the government reverted back to its original size. As our country grew, Americans had to become more accepting of the fact that government interference was sometimes necessary.

Our schools follow the same trend. Schools remain mainly under the control of districts and state governments, but there are federal restrictions placed upon schools that would never have been imposed 150 years ago. Today, our federal government’s main job, in terms of regulating the public schools, is to ensure that children have equal access to education. There are crucial pieces of legislation that support this, like Head Start, created under President Johnson to provide early education to low-income students.\textsuperscript{6} However, other pieces of legislation demonstrate that even federal programs often defer to the states. No Child Left Behind, implemented under President Bush, has been criticized for the freedom it gives states to define and implement “high standards” however they see fit.\textsuperscript{7} Even actions that might seem like a federal exertion of power still contribute to our primarily local school system.

Eventually, all fifty states accepted this tiered system of education regulation, in which the federal government is peripherally involved. But naturally, before residents of any state could accept some federal involvement in their schools, they had to accept state involvement. A state government needs authority before it can ensure school districts are following any federal regulations, as well as to impose its own regulations, which are much more numerous than
federal ones. Understanding state centralization, therefore, is key to understanding the history of our public education systems.

The fact that each of our fifty states have individualized school systems means that the history of American education is incredibly complex. It would be a huge undertaking to analyze the centralization of each of the fifty school systems. It is also impossible to expect any theoretical concept to apply to each state’s history in the exact same way. However, exploring this research clarified general trends that emerged across states. States developed centralized education systems on their own timelines, but there were notable similarities between regions. The Northeast, for instance, was willing to centralize their schools much faster than the South. No centralized school systems gave the state Boards of Education unlimited power. Rights were always reserved for the local school boards and district leadership.

The bulk of this thesis does not ask how schools centralized. It asks why. However, it is important to understand why early Americans were hesitant to centralize schools, because it forces us to recognize that convincing Americans school centralization was worth it was no easy task. Centralizing schools gave the government significant amounts of power over the children of the state. Allowing the government to take on this responsibility required a convincing, time sensitive reason that was relevant to all citizens of that state. Centralization could not have simply been imposed on communities. Community members had to be the ones paying taxes towards schools, attending schools, and electing school officials. They had to want their children in public schools.

To create a public education system, families have to be willing to invest in the whole community, not only in their own child. If a wealthy family wants their child to receive a good
education, there have always been ways to do that. But universal education targets the poor. A universal education system taxes each member of the community -- whether or not you have children, and whether or not those children attend a public school -- in order to finance public education. This system was not built to help the wealthy; it is meant for those who can afford only a free education. So in order to create a tax-funded, centralized system of public schools, people had to pay higher taxes to help the poor. Unfortunately, people are unlikely to happily accept tax increases solely for the good of the community. Creating a centralized school system, therefore, required leaders to convince taxpayers they had a vested interest in public education.

This majority of this thesis asks what this interest was, and what it became. Often, school reformers used centralization as a way to control populations that were highly marginalized, politically and economically. Even if centralization efforts did not begin with that intention, often they had that result. This thesis will examine how centralized school systems affected underrepresented populations, particularly Catholic immigrants in Massachusetts and Ohio, recently freed slaves in Virginia, and religious minorities in the wake of Engel and Schempp. While much of this thesis will aim to deepen our understanding of this “control,” it is important that we do not paint every American education reformer as malicious. Generally, education reformers in the Antebellum Era, when the Common School Movement was at its peak, were not looking to purposefully discriminate against underprivileged children. Though reformers were looking to exert control over populations, they believed that their actions benefited both the child and the community. They believed they could identify what sort of education was desirable, and it was their job to enforce this, whether the families and the children wanted it or not.
But this mindset, though easily seen as arrogant or disrespectful, is rooted in the strength and vigor of reformers’ Protestant beliefs. For those not similarly driven by their faith, this may be hard to comprehend; while trying to understand the motives of these reformers I experienced similar hesitations. My immediate reaction after reading what non-Protestant children in Protestant schools experienced, for example, was disgust and judgment. But these people believed that if these children, if not taught the correct “American” values, were going to either offend God, or miss out on eternal salvation. Saving these children was a necessity. From a 21st century point-of-view, this is demeaning. From a 19th century one, this is generous.

An immediate question arises: what are American values? How were those formed and how can they be taught? We hear about typical American values often: this country prides itself on individuality, democracy, hard work, and social mobility. Some of these are alluded to in the Constitution: the four freedoms in our First Amendment speak to this country’s commitment to self-expression. We have inscribed in our governing documents that this country will not stifle your speech or your identity. America was not built for an all-powerful governing body. It was built on the individual actions of regular Americans, who capitalized on the opportunities this country presented to become successful. This “American Dream” values citizens for their contributions to this country, and in return expects citizens to honor this country, and help make it a success, whether that be through voting, military duty, or community service. These are the values that common schools were built to inculcate. As we will see, these values are heavily rooted in Protestant tradition, particularly John Calvin’s emphasis on individual thought.

Even today, our policymakers want schools to instill particular values. In the 19th century and in the 21st, education is meant to teach our children what is right and wrong, which will
inevitably lead to some disagreement. Deciding which values to teach the next generation is ambitious. It affects everyone, not just those families with children in public schools. Any American should care what our schools teach the next generation. If a state allows schools to teach climate change skepticism, for example, as has been the case in Tennessee since 2012, it is possible that children in that state will grow up doubting human-induced climate change, a posture that has national implications.\textsuperscript{8} Values are inculcated today, just as they were in the 1800s. Some of the values, however, have changed, because they are dependent on geographical and historical contexts. Historically, beliefs about religious and racial superiority were unquestioned sources of community value formation; today, we dismiss such attitudes as discriminatory -- and therefore inappropriate foundations for our communities’ values. But communities valued these offensive practices for decades. Just like outrage would occur today if students learned the benefits of racial discrimination, outrage would occur in the post-Civil War South if integration were praised.

In the 19th century, schools could be opportunities for social mobility, even for these underprivileged groups. But they also provided a majority group an opportunity to decide how to best educate a minority group. School officials gained the power to dictate how schools were funded and how lessons were taught. Sometimes, schools were cheated out of equal resources. Other times, the school system did encourage minority children to take advantage of their educational opportunities, as long as they grew up to embody these ideal, American values.

This thesis is comprised of four cases studies, each of which considers a different way in which centralization -- presented, not entirely inaccurately, as a way to prepare citizens to participate in a free society -- was also used as a tool of social control. By this I mean that after
states centralized their education systems, schools were used to somehow “manage” minority populations. Chapters 1 and 2 examine the development of the education system in Massachusetts. In chapter 1, particular emphasis is given to the role of Calvinism, and its impact on the earliest American school systems. Chapter 2 focuses on the common school reformers in the Northeast, the “nonsectarian” education system that emerged from their work, and the implications that this system had for immigrant, and primarily Catholic, residents.

Chapter 3 shifts gears to the South, contrasting Massachusetts’ energy over schools with Virginia’s apathy. I focus on the role of racial discrimination in Virginia’s school system. The chapter asks why white Virginians were so reluctant to centralize, but how they were able to capitalize on their school system, using it to sustain a racial hierarchy that had been supported by the institution of slavery, once they were forced to accept a centralized school system. Chapter 4 looks again at religion, and examines the development of the public and parochial school systems in Ohio. To ensure this chapter introduced new themes (there is significant overlap between Massachusetts and Ohio, the similarities of which are discussed), attention is placed on the conflicts between Catholic and Protestants, and the implications that those conflicts have for the future of our education system.

The thesis ends with a discussion of *Everson v. Board of Education, Engel v. Vitale,* and *Abington v. Schempp.* The decisions that the Supreme Court made in the mid-20th century had not only major impacts on our contemporary education system, but also shed light on the ways in which our modern schools have completely transformed from their original conception in the 1600s. This chapter will not only explain the effects of the cases, but also explore the backlash from the American public.
This thesis aims to explore the effects of centralized education systems on underrepresented groups throughout American history. The states and events chosen for each chapter were deliberate. These states are either representative of a larger region of the country, or embody a larger cultural shift occurring at the time of the event. The size and structure of our public education system today is remarkable, particularly because it remains so locally controlled. It is crucial to ask how this system developed, why it is designed the way it is, and the effects this system has had on marginalized populations.
Endnotes

Chapter 1: The Origins of Massachusetts Free Schools

In the 1600s, Massachusetts was ahead of its time. Soon after its founding, the colony was on a mission to provide accessible education to all citizens. The early history of Massachusetts schools, beginning in the seventeenth century, set the stage for education reform that would happen 200 years later, not only in Massachusetts, but across the nation. These early settlers shared a general consensus that, in order to thrive and honor God in this new country, Massachusetts citizens needed to be educated. While it would be incorrect to assume that no colony outside of Massachusetts prioritized free schooling, Massachusetts had a particularly strong commitment to it, and the state exemplifies many of the early public education movements that occurred in the Northeastern colonies. This chapter will examine why this commitment emerged, and analyze it first through the laws Massachusetts passed and then through the organization of its early school system. Once we understand why and how this trend occurred, we can understand why Massachusetts is an important case study to understand the roots of the centralization and regulation of American public schools.

Characteristics of New England Towns

When settlers first arrived in Massachusetts, they created two colonies: Plymouth colony, comprised of the Southeastern parts of Massachusetts, and Massachusetts Bay, encompassing the North and the West.¹ While the schools in these two colonies were not identical, the impulses behind establishing them were similar. Because of the similarities, and because our discussion in this chapter extends past 1691, when the two colonies became one, this chapter will refer to
“Massachusetts” as one united colony. Any reference to Massachusetts legislation prior to 1691 refers to Massachusetts Bay.

Unlike Southern colonies, Massachusetts benefited from a high concentration of people. A typical New England town in the 17th and 18th century was between four and ten square miles, with a village center that generally contained a school, a church, and a cemetery. Beyond this center were homes, the number of which generally ranged between 40 and 60. In these towns, people were not isolated; they could easily connect with neighbors and share ideas.

Massachusetts also had a surprisingly high life expectancy for the 17th century. Mortality rates were significantly lower in Massachusetts than they were in England. Between 1640 and 1680, the Massachusetts population more than quadrupled, from around 10,000 to 40,000. This was a much different lifestyle than colonies with large farms or plantations, where people often lived self-sufficiently. It would have been unreasonable to build town schools where a small population and inadequate transportation inhibited students from travelling to a central location. But in community-oriented New England towns, officials could reasonably argue that schools would benefit many children.

The colonists who came to New England were relatively homogenous. Most original settlers were English, and New Englanders were distinctive for their almost universal commitment to Calvinism. Calvinism, a theology founded by John Calvin, describes several denominations of Protestantism. Calvinism stressed the importance of original sin. Specifically, it declared that all humans were born sinful because of Adam and Eve’s disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Made possible by Jesus’s sacrifice, a select few humans can be “saved,” meaning go to heaven. Calvinists did not believe there was any way for humans to know whether
or not they were part of this select few.\textsuperscript{7} This strict theology influenced everything that the colonists touched in early New England, including education.

Calvinism relied heavily on an individual’s ability to read the Bible, because Calvin believed that one way to combat a corrupt church was to require people interpret the Bible for themselves.\textsuperscript{8} Of course, this requirement could not be fulfilled without the acquisition of literacy. This alone may have been enough to encourage Massachusetts’ expansion of schooling, but Calvinists had a greater motivation as well. Children’s piety depended on more than their ability to read. Calvinists feared that even the smallest misinterpretation of the Bible created idols of God, a sin forbidden in the Ten Commandments. Any incorrect knowledge, therefore, was an insult to God.\textsuperscript{9}

Calvinists were interested in ensuring that everyone in their community respected the word of God. Calvinists did not obey God to gain salvation -- Calvin’s theory of predestination stressed that human actions do not influence election. Election was only dependent on God’s will; even the most pious individual might not go to heaven. Instead, Calvinists revered God out of pure devotion. They felt a civic duty to spread the word of God to all children, and they were prepared to use legislative power to do so. Like a contemporary community views financial stability, a Calvinist community viewed high religiosity as a sign of success. Quickly, education became the tool to achieve this. Students could be taught why they should embrace their faith, allowing legislators to ensure Calvinism’s strength and longevity.

The devotion to Calvinism required children become familiar with specific scriptural teachings. To effectively interpret God’s commands and actions, children needed to understand more than the general themes that ran through Scripture. So when we discuss religion in schools,
we must understand that these schools were only not teaching a general love for God, but detailed stories and lessons of Christian theology. Luckily for colonial Calvinists, the homogeneity in Massachusetts made this possible. Not only was the colony mainly Calvinist, it was also mainly Congregationalist, a branch of Calvinism which emphasizes a reliance on scripture and the authority of individual churches. In 1776, 150 years after colonists originally settled in Massachusetts, 71.6% of the population still identified as Congregationalist.\textsuperscript{10} Massachusetts established the Congregational Church in the 17th century, meaning they paid taxes to support it. This was a common practice in the colonial and Revolutionary era, but Massachusetts was the last state to disestablish their church, in 1833.\textsuperscript{11}

Beginning in 1635, the colony made church attendance mandatory. By 1689, there were already 260 churches in the colonies.\textsuperscript{12} In an era with few resources, a small population, and a need to ensure people had the basic necessities, the significance of building so many churches in only a few decades cannot be underestimated. Calvinism influenced much of colonial America, and Congregationalism influenced much of colonial Massachusetts. But quickly following colonization, we can already see tensions rising over this strict Protestant culture. Anne Hutchinson was put on trial in 1637 for preaching ideas deemed dangerous by the Protestant ministry. She was originally charged with Antinomianism, a religious heresy that indicated she “believed in a free grace form of Congregationalism that did not require a mediating clergy… [and] did not believe that truth resided only in Biblical texts.”\textsuperscript{13} Hutchinson's crimes, which today would be protected under the First Amendment, resulted in her expulsion from the colony. In 17th century Massachusetts, religion dissent put the entire community at risk. By enforcing harsh
laws that limited free speech, the colony could prevent its constituents from abandoning Congregationalism, ensuring a more pious and homogeneous population.

With such a high proportion of the population following one denomination, it would not have been hard to mandate that people attend church, pay taxes to fund the Congregational church, and require schools to teach Congregational scripture. Teachers who summarized the prior week’s sermon, for example, would surely summarize the Congregational church sermon, with little concern over needing to please children of other denominations. Most children across the Northeast were Protestant. The minority of families who were not, such as the German Catholics in Pennsylvania, tended to rely more heavily on education in the home.\textsuperscript{14} From its origins, the Northeastern region, and particularly Massachusetts, unapologetically promoted one denomination over all others. In trying to protect the community from heresy, they had to disregard anyone who did not subscribe to Calvinist beliefs.

\textit{Early Mandates to Educate Children}

At first, most children of Massachusetts were educated at home or at the church, which we can associate with their adherence to Calvinism. Because of the connection between Calvinism and literacy, it would be incorrect to assume that educating children at home was any indication of apathy towards schooling. On the contrary, Calvinist traditions preached the importance of families, and scripture dictated that being educated at home was actually most effective. Families were viewed as the first institution to expose children to religion, and were seen as the ones most responsible for their children’s moral and religious upbringing.\textsuperscript{15} Because so much of Calvinist education focused on how best to become a moral and pious adult, it is no
surprise that if families were the ones responsible for inculcating morality, they were also the
ones responsible for educating their children.

Home or church schooling also occurred because of logistical roadblocks. There were
few people available to teach in seventeenth century New England. Not many people had formal
educations, and not just anyone who was literate could be trusted to teach.\textsuperscript{16} Teachers, who were
responsible for developing the piety of their students, had to be well versed in theology, and
ministers could certainly fulfil this qualification.\textsuperscript{17} Additionally, building town schools was a
daunting task. The settlers’ had just arrived on land without any infrastructure. Their first priority
had to be cultivating the land to access food, water, and shelter. This is why examining the
motivations behind Massachusetts schools is so intriguing. While it is unrealistic to expect
settlers to set aside time to build schools, explaining why many students were educated at home,
we also know that an impressive number of schools were built in a short amount of time.

The first laws regulating education were directives to parents and guardians. In the first
example of American education legislation, the Massachusetts School Law of 1642 mandated
that either parents or apprenticeship masters teach the children for which they were responsible.
It required overseers to “catechize their children and servants in the grounds & principles of
Religion.” It also required all town selectman to “have a vigilant eye over their brethren &
neighbours” to ensure that the children of their town were literate.\textsuperscript{18} While this law did not
increase the number of schools in Massachusetts, it marks the first time in American history that
a governing body attempted to ensure that all children in their jurisdiction were educated. In
1648, the legislature amended the law to incentivize masters to take on apprentices, so even more
children could receive the benefits of education. This incentive was financial; masters were paid,
using taxpayer money, to hire more students. Therefore, in 1648, almost two hundred years before the establishment of its formal Board of Education, Massachusetts required that taxpayers contribute to a system of free education for children. As we know, Calvinists felt personally responsible for spreading the word of God to their community. Not only was it acceptable to use taxpayer money to teach children religion, it was imperative the colony do so.

By putting pressure on parents and guardians to educate their children, we can see how the 1642 law reinforces the belief that the home is the most appropriate schoolhouse for children. However, though Calvinists remained steadfast in their belief that families were the best moral guardians, throughout the latter half of the 17th century, the Massachusetts legislature began to shift the responsibility of education towards the church. By trusting parents or masters with the responsibility to teach children, Calvinist legislators were risking the morality of the entire colony. They had no way to ensure that these lessons were being adequately taught. There was no system in place to assess the progress made in individual homes or apprenticeships. Of course, some children may have received a comprehensive religious education at home, if their parents were well versed in the subject matter and were dedicated to teaching it. But this was a risk that put the reverence for and adherence to God at stake. It could not be taken.

To account for this, Massachusetts passed another law in 1647, often referred to as the Old Deluder Satan Act. The Old Deluder Satan Act is the result of the shifting ideals between education at home and education in a school. It required communities of 50 or more households to employ at least one teacher. If towns had over 100 households, they were required to establish a school. Teachers were to be paid “either by the parents or masters of such children, or by the inhabitants in general.” The Old Deluder Satan Law was, for the first time in American
history, an order to towns to establish schoolhouses and fund their own school systems. We can still see the remnants of this law in our modern day education system, in which schools rely heavily on local property taxes for funding. Children’s education, this law implied, could not be left up to their families or masters. Massachusetts began to doubt that all parents would inculcate their children with the appropriate information, particularly in regards to religion. This act warns not to appoint teachers or administrators who “have manifested themselves unsound in their Faith.” Massachusetts wanted to ensure that those shaping the morality of children were pious themselves, and free from misconduct.

The Old Deluder Satan Act was nicknamed such because the law claimed that building schools would prevent Satan from influencing children: “It being one chief project of Satan to keep men from the knowledge of Scripture… that so at least the true sense and meaning of the Original might be doubted and corrupted with false glosses of Deceivers.” The law used religion to justify its requirement to build schools. The purpose of school, this law declared, was to ensure that children had the necessary knowledge to reject the influence of the Devil. In both Massachusetts and New York, a teacher was expected to lead Sunday choir, conduct church services, and catechise the children on the previous Sunday’s sermon. Early textbooks pulled several passages from the Bible. In one 168-page primer, 20 pages were devoted to spelling, while the rest listed Bible teachings.

Though there were differences between classrooms, the general curriculum, and the use of catechisms and Bibles, was standard within and beyond Massachusetts. It would be anachronistic to claim that simply because these schools were publicly funded, there was any expectation they would be secular. Schools were unapologetically religious, and because many
schools were run through or with the support of churches, they could be denominational as well. The Congregational Church would serve its Congregational constituents. In these schools, lessons could be as theological and specific as churches and parents wanted them to be.

Religion was also the obvious source of morality. Children did not only need to be literate, but they needed to learn what behavior was most acceptable in society. For Calvinists, all of their daily actions contributed to a larger, religious social good. The work that they did reflected their respect for God. The Bible provided schools a book of rules from which they could teach children values like frugality or productivity. Whether through efficient work or devout worship, students could learn how their behavior could best serve God. Schools were created to reinforce these characteristics. The Massachusetts settlers who came to America were a highly religious population. They did not doubt that, for the sake of the future of their new colony, children needed to be taught morality, as well as mathematics.

This assumed connection between religion and morality drove public education for much of American history. In this time period, reformers successfully used education to spread religion. By the 1670s, all New England colonies, other than Rhode Island, had a law similar to the Old Deluder Satan Law. Religion was the driving force behind schools. Even in the nineteenth century, when groups began to debate religion in schools, the question was not whether religion should remain in the curriculum, but what kind of religion would be taught. How sectarian would the curriculum be? Would schools promote theology or virtue? We will explore these questions in later chapters, but it is important to remember that for much of American history, there was a strong relationship between religion and education.
The First School Districts

Education remained an important part of Massachusetts culture throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. As the colony grew, however, the rising population and increasing number of towns demanded that more attention be paid to free school efforts. As European settlers forced Native Americans off their land, they moved progressively west. Massachusetts residents began to settle throughout the colony, as opposed to staying on the East coast. Because both the government and the public had reinforced the expectation that schooling be prioritized, as the population expanded, so did the education system.

New England towns had no universal template to help them decide how to support, regulate, or advise their schools. Though each had some sort of free school system, the meaning of “Free” differed between towns. In Salem, Massachusetts, for example, only poor children attended school for free, whereas other towns offered all children a free education. In rural areas, residents were much less likely to support publicly funded education for all students. A combination of strong individualism and apathy towards schools, which were seen as teaching “elite” skills like geography or history, contributed towards an hostile view towards education. This knowledge was unnecessary for children who were going to become farmers, and farmers felt that by mandating they pay for a system that promoted these skills, the government was forcing them to support something that did not benefit them. It also implied that the learning of this knowledge was superior to a lifestyle that they had cultivated, which instead relied on knowledge of the land, the climate, and the agricultural economy. This attitude bred apathy towards schools, and more rural, Western towns required fewer months of schooling, paid teachers lower salaries, and taught children in crumbling schoolhouses with few resources.
Despite the regulations of the 17th century, public education in Massachusetts was still extremely decentralized. There were vast differences in the extent to which citizens supported town schools, preferred religious schools, or discouraged education all together. In an attempt to create an organizational structure that towns could replicate, the state encouraged towns to divide themselves into precincts, which we can think of as modern-day school districts. Precincts dealt with more specific needs of the schools, such as religious affairs and local problems, while the town dealt with larger scale issues, like property and finance allocations.\textsuperscript{30} Once again, we should not assume that these schools were secular. Both town selectmen and ministers oversaw the precinct, or district, schools.\textsuperscript{31}

Originally, not each precinct had their own school. Dedham, for example, tried to maintain one schoolhouse for the town, but sent a schoolmaster to teach in each precinct. But the town realized that different precincts had different interests, as specific as deciding which house was the most appropriate to teach in. The town realized that if each precinct was given a school building, it was more likely that people would be satisfied with their schools. By 1755, each of Dedham’s four precincts had their own school.\textsuperscript{32} By the time the Massachusetts legislature wrote this town-precinct system into law in 1789, they were simply formalizing what had been the process for decades.\textsuperscript{33} This structure was not limited to Massachusetts; New York also had a similar system, beginning in 1811.\textsuperscript{34} But Massachusetts was the first to invent the three-tiered school system that we still see replicated today. Our modern education system divides power between the federal government, state government, city or town, and school district. While the 18th century system did not yet include the federal support that modern schools receive, this division of powers set a precedent for a system that continues into the present day.
Under the pervasive influence of the American Revolution, schools became an opportunity to instill not only religion, but civic virtue as well. Civic virtue, appreciating a society’s values and fulfilling one’s civic responsibilities, could have been imparted by encouraging tangible actions, like taking part in philanthropy or (for white males) voting, but also by promoting American values like republicanism and democracy. Children began to learn that literacy and individuality did not only make you a good Protestant, but also enabled you to free yourself from tyrannical kings. Our founders were strong supporters of public education, and believed that it was particularly effective in the effort to prevent corrupt, aristocratic rule. John Adams wrote, “The Whole People must take upon [themselves] the Education of the Whole People and must be willing to bear the [expense] of it.” He argued that schools should teach students to honor themselves before their “Servants… and Statesmen,” in order to avoid blind devotion to larger-than-life figures. Students should learn not to “applaud” Washington, but “the Nation which Educated him.” Adams emphasized that education could teach students self-reliance and self-sufficiency, values that, because Americans had just dissolved ties with the British crown, were held in high regard. By instilling a sense of civic responsibility in children, society continued what they had done with Calvinism: in both instances, schools were a pipeline to promote certain values.

The division of towns into precincts is an example of decentralization: schools controlled by towns became controlled by districts, and so the number of regulatory agencies increased. There was no state mandate to ensure that schools had a tiered system of education until the late 18th century. This system emerged organically, not through a centralized authority demanding its implementation. However, the formation of this structure is still significant. School districts
provided residents a voice in their public education system, which encouraged a greater interest in and appreciation for free schools. By allowing residents to participate in their school system, Massachusetts proposed that schools should be a reflection of the district’s values. This attitude was certainly influenced by the era of the American Revolution, which encouraged self-expression and a participatory democracy. But this attitude also encouraged a sense of ownership over the school system. The community members understood that an education was valuable, and they wanted to enjoy its benefits. This attitude would not disappear; in fact, it would grow. As more families enrolled in schools, more opinions needed to be considered. As we will learn, trying to accommodate the values of so many different populations, when each group feels entitled to free schools, is not an easy task.

It would be unrealistic to expect Massachusetts to create a centralized, statewide system of education in the 18th century. Americans in this era, and particularly New Englanders, valued individual liberties. They felt more strongly tied to local town meetings than to any state governing authority. An attachment to localism will continue to be a theme in various states. In some cases, localism prevented states from mustering support for a centralized education system. But in Massachusetts, the precinct system helped residents recognize that they were entitled to the benefits that education could offer. And it is only because so many different groups felt entitled that hostile fights over schools eventually emerged.

While schools remained locally controlled, Massachusetts’ commitment to free schools set integral precedents for the future of American education. Massachusetts was the first colony to invest in all of their children, even those who could not afford an expensive, private school tuition. In its 17th century laws, the Massachusetts government demonstrated a responsibility to
educate as many children as possible. Early legislators wanted future generations to remain
dedicated to the strenuous mentality that Calvinism demanded. But even in the 18th century,
when supporters of schools became motivated by revolutionary political and civic beliefs, we can
see the reasons to promote education expand beyond just inculcating religion. And as we enter
into the 19th century, we will see the priorities of schooling shift even more drastically. While
religion remained integral to Massachusetts schools, it became a far less rigid component of the
public education system.
Endnotes: Chapter 1

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Chapter 2: Horace Mann and the Common School Movement

We cannot discuss the history of American public education without examining the impact of Horace Mann, Massachusetts’ first Secretary of Education. Massachusetts was at the forefront of the movement to establish free, public education for all of its citizens. Its public education system, developed in the nineteenth century and heavily aided by the state government, set integral precedents for the future. This centralization was crucial to the growth of our modern public education system; however, it did not come without consequences. As schools came increasingly under the arm of the state, they also lost touch with many of their original goals. Education, originally expanded for the purpose of inculcating denominational piety and theology, assumed a new role in the nineteenth century. Unlike their predecessors, Horace Mann and similar education reformers framed religion as a tool for virtue, not piety. This chapter will examine how and why this transition occurred, focusing on the mid-19th century urban demographic and its impact on centralization, coalition building, and cultural conflict.

Forces that Encouraged Common Schools

The Common School Movement, like other Antebellum reform efforts, was a product of its time. It emerged because of circumstances specific to nineteenth century America. The Common School Movement aimed to expand access to education to all children throughout Massachusetts. Though similar movements occurred throughout the country, often in the Northeast, Massachusetts’ commitment to centralizing its education system makes it a worthwhile case to examine. By the mid-19th century, education had become a priority in many states where it had not been one. While it had an admirable goal and an impressive impact, one
should not ignore that the Common School Movement was also a fearful reaction to an urbanizing and industrializing country.

The Common School Movement was led by the new Massachusetts Board of Education. The large role that this agency played makes the Massachusetts Common School Movement exceptional. Two men stand out for being committed to specifically state-led education reform. Without James G. Carter, the Board of Education likely would never have been formed. Carter was born in 1795, and was instructed from an early age to take advantage of the education he was offered. He graduated from Harvard University in 1820, at which point he devoted himself to reforming Massachusetts’ schools.¹ Carter played an integral role in the Common School Movement, and was interested in combating the inequities that arose from unequal schooling.

Better known than Carter is Horace Mann, the most famous actor in the Common School Movement. Mann was mainly self-taught; he had little formal schooling during his childhood, but graduated from Brown University in 1819 after educating himself.² Mann first worked as a lawyer, and then joined the Massachusetts Legislature in 1827 and the State Senate in 1834. In 1837, he was chosen to become the first Secretary of the new Board of Education. He served in this position for 12 years, until 1848, when he moved to Ohio to become president of Antioch College for the remainder of his life.³ Carter and Mann were certainly not the only two reformers in Antebellum America, or even Massachusetts, dedicated to education reform. However, the attitudes of these men are similar to reformers’ attitudes around the country, particularly in fellow Northeastern states like New York and Pennsylvania.

Mann and Carter staunchly believed that schools had the power make society more egalitarian and moral. As discussed in the previous chapter, morality was linked to education in
the 17th and 18th century because schools could teach children Calvinist values like efficiency and frugality, which indicated one’s devotion for God. Exposing children to desirable values remained critical to the Common School Movement throughout the nineteenth century, however, the values that were taught shifted. Children no longer had to be pious to be moral. However, they did have to be virtuous. The difference between piety and virtue lies in theology: piety requires a knowledge of and adherence to specific scripture, while virtue simply requires a belief in God and a gratitude for the gifts God has provided. Virtue is embodied in lessons from the widely circulated 19th century textbook, The McGuffey Reader. In the passage, “Time to Get Up,” a mother compels her son to pray and thank God for his family and health.\(^4\)

Mann and Carter were most compelled to help “vulnerable” children, meaning those who were not exposed to these Protestant values. We can observe two major groups of children that fit into this category. The first were poor students, who could not access the same education as wealthy ones. In the early 1800s, schools were funded locally, similar to the way we utilize property taxes today. However, as they still do today, this system of funding created vast disparities between districts. Today the districts with the lowest home values, where the neediest children reside, pay lower property taxes and suffer from under-resourced schools. In the early 1800s, districts could choose how much they wanted to pay for schools. Naturally, some districts chose to spend less money, leaving their children with fewer resources. Carter, Mann, and other reformers hoped to equalize these funds, so districts would have similar amounts of money to spend.\(^5\) This was particularly important to Carter, who felt that without this regulation, inequality between districts was inevitable, and students in lower-performing districts would attend religious institutions, as opposed to their under-resourced local schools.\(^6\).
If families could afford it, students and parents unsatisfied with their district school might also alternatively attend an academy. Academies, secondary schools focused on more scholarly types of learning, like Latin or Greek, charged tuition. This did not only prevent lower-class children from receiving a competitive education, but a secondary education as well. District schools were primarily for younger children; academies were the main source of further schooling. Around 1820, tuition rates prevented 94% of Massachusetts children from attending secondary school and college. By supporting, and occasionally contributing funds to, academies, the state devoted their resources to the most advantaged social group. Mann and Carter feared that without universal access to equal education, the richest members of society would form a dangerous ruling class: "If the multitude who have the power," Mann wrote, "are not fitted to exercise it, society will be like the herding together of wolves. The only safety, then, is in the concomitance of qualifications and power." Without high-quality common schools (as district schools came to be called), the power of the well-educated would be unchecked. As Adams warned fifty years earlier, their rule could be tyrannical.

Carter also argued that attending academies minimized one’s stake in, and therefore their willingness to support, common schools. He described a process where the wealthiest in a community “withdraw their children from the common schools” because the schools were inadequate. This would lead families to also withdraw their “heartfelt interest” from the schools, which was needed to “lead the way to improvements” in the schools. This abandonment, by the most well-off members of society, limited how many resources common schools could accrue. If few students attended common schools, the state would not impose taxes to fund them. This hypothetical creates a vicious cycle. If common schools could not support themselves, they
would not be able to gather materials, their reputations would continue to sour, and wealthy
children would never attend. Carter urged the public that “our only reliance” should be on the
schools which educate the largest number of students: not on the schools meant for a lucky few.\textsuperscript{11}

The second group reformers targeted were immigrants. After the Irish Potato Famine in
1845, Irish immigrants came to this country by the masses. But there was no shortage of Irish
immigrants to America in the first half of the 19th century either. Even in the early 1800s, much
of Ireland’s population was impoverished, especially compared to England.\textsuperscript{12} Between 1825 and
1830, over 100,000 Irish immigrants had left their home country, most for North America.\textsuperscript{13} In
1834, of the over 57,000 immigrants to America, over 24,000 were Irish, making them 42% of
the immigrant population.\textsuperscript{14} Rising foreign immigration was accompanied by increasing
domestic migration, because the Industrial Revolution had made urban factory jobs readily
available. In the early and mid-19th century, Eastern cities experienced a population boom. They
became a crowded hodgepodge of new cultures, languages, and traditions.

There was also an influx of German immigrants in this time period, but German
immigrants could often afford to buy Western farmland. Irish immigrants, on the other hand,
came here with few resources or money to spare.\textsuperscript{15} Constrained to coastal cities and often unable
to care for even their own health and safety, Irish immigrants became the targets of violent gangs
and shady politicians.\textsuperscript{16} Bolstered by the support of thousands of newcomers who were promised
financial and job security, “vulgar politicians and ignorant monopolists,” gained significant
influence over the cities.\textsuperscript{17} Suddenly, urban immigration posed a major risk.

Native and immigrant populations clashed over religion, as well as class. The majority of
these Irish immigrants were Catholic. As immigration rose, so did tensions between Protestants
and Catholics. Anti-Catholicism in America was not a new phenomenon; since the 16th century, American colonists believed the Catholic church was flawed and corrupt. But increasing numbers of poor Irish immigrants exacerbated the hostilities. For many, Catholicism was so dangerous because of its hierarchy. Unlike Protestants, Catholics had a very clear structure to follow. Protestants feared Catholics’ allegiance would not be with the American government, but with the top of this hierarchy: the Pope.\(^\text{18}\) In a series of letters called, “A Foreign Conspiracy against the Liberties of the United States,” Samuel Morse warned Americans “Of a subtle enemy to the democracy of the country… suspect and fear it most when it allies itself to our interests in the guise of a friend. Mistrust of all that Popery does.”\(^\text{19}\) Catholics were not directed to think for themselves, but to repeat the beliefs of an all-powerful figure. Not only was this antithetical to American values like freedom of thought, which can be traced to the Calvinist directive to individually interpret the Bible, it also jeopardized the electoral system. If the Pope directed Catholics to vote a certain way, and enough Catholics followed, they could sway American elections. Catholicism, in the eyes of many, threatened democracy.

In 1834, even before the massive influx of Irish immigrants, the Ursuline Convent near Boston was burned to the ground. Inaccurate reports about the convent holding a Protestant woman hostage, symbolic of widespread anti-Catholic propaganda, spurred a Protestant mob to attack the convent.\(^\text{20}\) Though the mob was likely angry that this convent educated both Protestant and Catholic children, an investigative committee reported that they could not “[ascertain] that any pupil placed under their charge for purposes of education, has been converted… to the Catholic faith.”\(^\text{21}\) Despite no evidence of the sort, Protestants were convinced that Catholics
immigrated to this country with the intent to sabotage it. This was the attitude of many
Protestants in the wake of the Common School Movement.

Our founders believed that schools could be a place to instill traditional American values.
If immigrants attended common schools, they too could learn which values were desired in this
country. Schools also have a long history of promoting assimilation, especially to recent
immigrants. Nineteenth century Irish immigrants were no exception. In common schools,
immigrants could learn exactly how American children should behave. Schools could teach
self-sufficiency, national pride, and most importantly, Protestantism. Because Catholicism struck
such fear in Americans, it is no wonder that common schools, which could promote a “correct”
type of religious observance, were attractive. However, immigrants could only receive this
education if common schools were made accessible to all.

The Common School Movement, therefore, was an implicitly anti-Catholic movement.
Mann himself wrote that it was the Protestant value of “freedom of thought… which has given
superiority to the communities where common schools have flourished.” He undoubtedly
believed that Catholics threatened society because he saw the hierarchical orientation of their
faith as inhibiting the ability of Catholics to think for themselves. Common schools could
inculcate positive, Protestant values like independent thought -- which were democratic, and
therefore “American” values, too. But despite any anti-Catholicism they harbored, Carter and
Mann also genuinely believed that common schools could do immense good. For a year, Mann
examined factories to prove the economic benefits of common schools, and found that the
educated factory worker “reported a 12% to 15% increase in the speed of his machinery.” He
believed education allowed for our greatest documents to be written: “Without the schools,
would we have had the great men in the councils and in the fields of the Revolution? Or….

Should we have had the sages who … [formed the] Constitution of the United States?”

And similar to the fear of Catholics remaining loyal to the Pope, Mann reminds us that a voter who “[knows] nothing of the principle and structure of the government under which they live” is a danger to democracy. Education is vital in a society which grants citizens so much freedom and responsibility. Schools help ensure each individual exercises this responsibility in the most productive way.

Of course, it’s also important to remember that for common school reformers, promoting Protestant values was not an evil, necessary to combat the ills of Catholicism, but a benefit that common schools could provide. These men believed they were doing a service by offering a free Protestant education to Catholic students. Protestantism encouraged morality. Too many Americans, Mann thought, acted out of passion. The Revolution had encouraged men to tune in to their most radical beliefs, and our society had become prone to “a thousand selfish considerations,” encouraging immoral qualities like “ambition… avarice… pride and vanity.”

To reemphasize good behavior, he suggested, “The germs of morality must be planted in the moral nature of children, at an early period of their lift. In that genial soil they will flourish and gather strength.” Mann embodied the shift between the colonial and Antebellum eras. In colonial times, Calvinism required the next generation to have a religious education in order to ward off the Devil and create devout individuals. But in the Antebellum Era, Mann encouraged a religious education that would shape children into moral citizens with upstanding values, who could help cities flourish, not jeopardize their success. One reason this shift happened was
simply because immigrants were changing cities, and reformers felt they were becoming unsafe and immoral. As a result, reformers became more invested in restoring morality than piety.

Of course, Mann believed morality was best taught through the Bible: “A work, devoted to education, which did not recognise the truth that we were created to be religious beings, would be as though we were to form a human body forgetting to put in a heart.” Religious schooling was still the norm during the Common School Movement. America was, after all, still a highly religious society. Anti-Catholicism would not have been so potent if there was not such a strong preference for and adherence to Protestantism. It was this anti-Catholicism, along with urbanization, and a desire for an educated electorate and an efficient workforce, that made Americans realize schools, and more specifically, schools that taught morality, would benefit the entire community. Acting on this new impulse, Carter and Mann had the support they needed to expand schools. Now they wanted to reach as many children as possible. By examining how they expanded access to education, we will discover, another, more subtle, reason for the shift from piety to virtue.

*The Development of the Massachusetts Board of Education*

The Massachusetts Board of Education was created in 1837, making it the second oldest Board of Education in the country, behind New York. It was created under the leadership and support of Edward Everett, governor from 1836 - 1840. Both Everett and Carter felt strongly about the benefits of moving schools from local to state control. Despite its historical significance as one of the first Boards of Education in the country, the early Massachusetts Board had relatively few powers. It mainly served as a central place to collect and distribute
information about the states’ common schools. Using this information, the secretary, who from 1837-1848 was Horace Mann, would write annual reports on the condition of the schools.\footnote{32}

Though Mann is the most famous education reformer, Carter actually attempted to form a Board of Education first, in 1827. While he was unsuccessful, in 1826 he was able to transfer more power from precincts to towns. Towns regained the responsibility for certifying and supervising teachers.\footnote{33} In doing so, he aimed to reverse the decentralization that had been progressing since the 18th century: “If the State continues to relieve themselves of the trouble of providing for the instruction of the whole people, and to shift the responsibility upon the towns, and the towns upon the districts… The rich will, as a class, have much better instruction than they now have, while the poor will have much worse or none at all.”\footnote{34} He knew some districts would place more value on education than others, and feared the inevitable disparities. Though schools are still primarily locally funded, Carter provided some support by creating the state school fund in 1834, using the money Massachusetts received from selling the territory that became Maine.\footnote{35}

Carter and Mann did not only feel that schools could limit inequities, but that the government had the responsibility to instruct schools to do so. Mann feared that if the district schools were underfunded and people were driven towards religious schools, it would jeopardize the harmony between ethnic and religious sects. In his first annual report, Mann wrote that religious schools teach children “to wield the sword of polemics with fatal dexterity; and where the gospel, instead of being a temple of peace, is converted into an armory of deadly weapons.”\footnote{36} Mann insisted a common school education was more valuable than a religious one. Mann was not hostile towards religion in general, nor was he an atheist. But his childhood experiences
made him wary of religious schools. Mann was raised in a strict Orthodox Calvinist household, and was disturbed by the “vivid descriptions of sinful man, a harsh God, and the fires of Hell” that he heard from his preacher growing up.  

By adulthood, Mann had converted to Unitarianism, a branch of Christianity that was much more lax. The largest contrast between Calvinism and Unitarianism was that Unitarians believed Christ died for everyone’s sins, even those who did not accept Christ as their savior. They rejected the trinity most Christians subscribed to, consisting of God, Jesus, and the holy spirit, and instead only declared faith to one loving, forgiving God. William Ellery Channing, a Unitarian preacher, told us that God feels a “concern for his creatures” and “desire for their improvement.” This was a stark contrast from the vengeful God described in Calvinism, who holds men “over the pit of hell.” Most radically, Unitarianism rejected the doctrine of original sin, and refused to agree that humans were born flawed, or that only a select few would be saved. For many in the mid-nineteenth century, Unitarianism was radical, and as we will see, Mann’s adherence to it was a target during the common school debates.

While the first Board of Education was primarily meant to collect information and report on schools, Mann went town to town and visited the schoolhouses to ensure they were up to his standards. Mann defined the Common School Movement as having two main goals. First, every district should have a free school that is safe, has good teachers, and instructs children with the “rudiments of knowledge” and the “principles of duty.” Mann did not only expect schools to lead academic lessons, but lessons in virtue and morality as well. Second, if a town had a larger population, and therefore more residents contributing to the school fund, it should also pay for a more “advanced” school, which would cater to any student’s “impelling spirit of genius.” Mann
was likely looking to replicate an academy, but where even the poorest students could be exposed to a more scholarly curriculum.

In accordance with his goals, Mann made a tangible impact on Massachusetts schools. Mann required towns have a “sufficient number” of schools with “competent” teachers open for at least six months every year. These schools must teach “orthography, reading, writing, English grammar, geography, arithmetic, the history of the United States, and good behavior.” Mann ensured there was some standardization between the schools’ curricula and set guidelines for what Massachusetts students should know. He told the public that education was worth the state’s time and the money. Schools were crucial institutions that would only be strengthened by the government’s support. The precedents Mann set demanded that public schools would not only be plentiful and offer high-quality educations, but that the state would help oversee them. He professionalized the office of the Secretary and helped Massachusetts build high achieving schools. By doing this work, he planted the roots for the 1852 compulsory school law, which required that all children ages 8 - 14 attend school for at least 12 weeks.¹⁴²

Despite his commitment to involve the state government, Mann also allowed districts to retain significant power over their schools. Local, elected representatives would have the most control.¹⁴³ School committees could decide whether to teach “algebra, vocal music, drawing physiology, and hygiene,” they could determine whether or not to establish secondary schools for students over the age of 15 (and then regulate those schools on their own terms), and they could hire and fire teachers at their will.¹⁴⁴ Mann added crucial new levels of oversight to the school system while still prioritizing the influence of the local populations. Mann, Carter, and
other reformers maintained a separation of local and state powers, but the precedents that they set allowed for increased accountability, attendance, and academic excellence.

Nonsectarianism

As explained, schools prior to the Common School Movement were far from secular. Some were run by ministers, others were in churches, and almost all used sectarian religious texts to instill morality in their students. As Mann began to grapple with his hopes to improve education, he faced a challenge: to what extent should he allow religion to be practiced in the schools, which were state-run, taxpayer funded, and meant for all children? The 1780 Massachusetts Constitution supported both a religious establishment (the Congregational Church) and religious freedom, declaring that “Every denomination of Christians… shall be equally under the protection of the law.” But after the American Revolution, religious diversity began to increase. Anglican, Baptist, and Quaker immigration to New England forced lawmakers to cater to a new citizenry. In 1827, the Massachusetts legislature made it illegal to teach any particular sect of Protestantism in the common schools.

This 1827 law outlawed funding sectarian schools. District schools that previously catered to only Congregational students could no longer freely do so. Schools had to ensure that every Protestant denomination (because in the 19th century, “Christian,” did not include “Catholic”) felt accommodated in the common schools. If we accept that the Common School Movement officially began with Mann’s position as secretary in the 1830s, then this law was already in place by the time substantial reform began. Therefore, while Mann surely felt a religious obligation to provide schools for the poor, his movement could not aim to promote one
religious sect over another. Because of this 1827 law, school became a tool to improve social welfare, and while one way of doing this was to increase a general sense of religiosity, school could no longer promote any specific denomination or theology.\textsuperscript{47} This law represents the formal, legal shift between piety and virtue. In order for Mann to attract the most students, he needed to appeal to denominations beyond Congregationalism.

In response, the Board of Education decided to promote a “nonsectarian” or “pan-protestant” agenda in their common schools. This ensured that Christianity could still be taught in schools, while preventing it from catering towards any denomination. Instead, common schools had to emphasize the ways in which Christianity could instill a general of morality in children without discussing any details that vary between sects. Mann did not view this as a sacrifice, but as a sensible solution to increasingly diversity. He saw more similarities between denominations than differences anyway, and pointed out that before children were able to learn any sectarian specifics, they needed to learn the general basics.\textsuperscript{48} Soon, Massachusetts law demanded that Biblical stories be read without “comment or remark,” preventing teachers from promoting a single denomination.\textsuperscript{49} The story of Adam and Eve does not have to be interpreted by denominational priests in order to teach children that they should obey God. Mann trusted teachers to “at most… say that the passage is the subject of disputation, and that the schoolroom is [not]... the forum to discuss it.”\textsuperscript{50}

The Common School Movement came in the wake of the Second Great Awakening, which led to a rapid increase of religion in America. Between the Revolution and 1850, church membership increased from 17\% to 34\%.\textsuperscript{51} There was also an increase in Evangelical Christian denominations. Evangelicalism rejected the Calvinist conceptions of original sin and Hell. They
could be Unitarian, Baptist, Methodist, or any number of denominations. At first, Evangelicals argued over which theological specifics were most relevant. However, eventually Evangelicals found their differences to be minute, and they united under the mission to “Evangelize” America. They formed the “Benevolent Empire,” establishing countless voluntary organizations to transform the United States into a more civil and Christian civilization. These could be centered around gambling, temperance, Sunday Schools, or any number of causes. Overall, the combined Evangelical impact was huge. Robert Baird, a historian of the time, reported that 14.5 million people were Evangelical Christians, out of a nation of 17.5 million. This was an extreme overestimate, but one’s perception is often equally as important as the data. No matter their actual numbers, Evangelicals loudly called upon society to become more moral, more Christian, and, in doing so, more American.

Disestablishment and Evangelicalism nicely complemented each other and ensured Mann could expand common schooling to children of all religions. As the state forced schools to become more accepting of all Protestant denominations, Evangelicals began to care less about the differences between them. Overall, the culture became more accepting of religious diversity, as long as that diversity was limited to Protestantism. Catholicism, along with other minority religions, still faced massive discrimination.

Common schools frequently included school prayer, hymn singing, and Bible reading in their daily activities. Textbooks discussed God’s miracles and taught children to read using Bible passages. Schools were required by law to read “some portion” of the “common English version” of the Bible each day. (“The Common English Bible” referred to the King James Bible, which only Protestants used. The limitations of this will be discussed below). Common
schools were unapologetically religious. Mann, like other Massachusetts citizens, never considered a school system without religion, particularly after the influence of the Second Great Awakening. Religion was assumed as the most effective way to promote a virtuous citizenry. Mann believed schools could teach religion in an unbiased way that also promoted republican values. An effective religious education should teach the skills necessary to judge each denomination, so a student can choose his own sect “according to the dictates of his own reason and conscience.” By giving children the basic information, which Mann saw as widely accepted truths, children could gain the knowledge to make important and complex decisions for themselves. According to Mann, the common schools could promulgate the moral benefits of religion while still respecting Protestant religious diversity.

Backlash

As with any major reformer, Mann faced a myriad of opponents during his efforts to expand common schools. While many complaints did not concern religion, like those regarding finances or the increasing role of the government, a number of opponents did worry about it. How much of the curriculum should be religious? What kinds of religious texts or prayers were most appropriate? Once again, few argued that schools should not include religion. Mann’s supporters and opponents alike wanted to ensure their children were exposed to religion, as long as it was the right type.

Many argued that Mann’s common schools removed any sort of significant religion from the curriculum. They preferred when district schools maintained independence and could teach religion however they felt appropriate. These opponents tended to be highly religious
themselves, often Orthodox Calvinists who Mann felt jeopardized his reforms: “Those who are born orthodox… if they had had wit enough, would have invented orthodoxy if Calvin had not. I never saw one of this class of men whom I could trust so long as a man can hold his breath.”

They criticized nonsectarianism for being a brief, diluted version of religious education, and did not believe it could effectively teach children how to revere God.

Reverend Matthew Hale Smith traced increased crime in American cities to reduced scripture in schools. Because common schools “deny the propriety of an early religious training,” they, “practically oppose [Christianity’s] lessons.” He did not deny that the Bible was used in schools, nor did he argue that Christianity was entirely absent, neither of which would have been true. However, he believed the amount of religion in the common schools was severely inadequate: ”When religious and intellectual culture are divorced, is it strange that we have a harvest of crime?” A limited use of scripture would be unable to combat children’s natural immorality, resulting in the vice in society.

But Smith was most offended by the way Mann interpreted his job as Secretary. Smith did not believe it appropriate for the government, or anyone within the government, to determine which parts of the Bible should be taught. ”The man who rejects a part of the Bible, must… reject the whole. It claims entire inspiration. If it be not so inspired, it is not true.” Only teaching some parts of the scripture implies others are unnecessary. Humans cannot decide what is most valuable; God believed the whole Bible was significant enough to read. Not only was it an insult to God and a sign of Mann’s arrogance to limit Biblical teachings to his selections, it is also a “tyrannical” precedent: “What right has the State… to say what shall be taught in schools which the people sustain? What more right have they to say that no religion shall be taught, than
they have to say that Popery shall be taught?" If the state can regulate which religion children learn, or even decide children don’t need to learn any substantial religious laws, what prevents the government from abandoning Protestantism entirely? Smith fears this would result in Catholic classrooms. While not entirely accurate, we will see his predictions come closer to reality in the 20th century.

Mann strongly believed that Smith’s complaints were unwarranted. Perhaps his most straightforward counter-argument was that common schools were not secular because they used the Bible. No matter how much of the Bible was used, reading any of it endorses religion. In fact, Mann claimed that before the Board of Education was established, the Bible was not always read in schools, and when it was, it was used to prove the superiority of one sect over another. But in 1848, “The Bible has been restored. I am not aware of the existence of even a single town in the State in whose schools [the Bible] is not now introduced.” Of course, Mann’s opinion in the Common School Journal, which was meant to increase public opinion around common schools, is not a reputable statistic. However, Massachusetts law did require daily Bible reading in common schools. Increased standardization and centralization made it much more likely this law was followed.

Objectively, neither Mann nor Smith can claim complete accuracy. Mann did limit the amount of religion in the curriculum. He would not have been able to enforce statewide education policies without ensuring children of multiple denominations could benefit from them. The Board of Education taxed its citizens to support public schools -- enough to spend over $3 on each child. Compared to Connecticut’s 0.10 cents per child, its easy to recognize how revolutionary this was for the time. When taxing the public for a service, a government must
ensure the vast majority of its citizens benefit from that service. Smith was correct, therefore, in suggesting Mann limited how much religion could feasibly be taught. That being said, Mann’s assertion any use of the Bible is inherently religious is also legitimate. The King James Bible is not a secular text; it forces students to validate the existence of an all-powerful Protestant God, no matter what they believe. Of course, Mann did not see his curriculum as coercive. He thought his use of the Bible was justified, because teaching morality was in everyone’s best interest.

Mann also argued that mandating one sect be taught in common schools was unrealistic and dangerous. It would have created an establishment between church and state, which, since 1833, was no longer legal. It also could have encouraged competition between sects, instead of creating a spirit of unity.66 School was not the place to assert the dominance of any denomination. Mann encouraged “all other means of instruction, -- the pulpits, the Sunday schools, the Bible classes, the catechisms, of all denominations -- to be employed according to the preferences of individual parents.”67 In common schools, denominational education was likely to promote hostilities. However, Mann had no agenda to rid sectarianism from society, and he encouraged parents to take advantage of sectarian institutions, in addition to common schools.

Despite this, some were convinced that common schools advanced Unitarianism. Allen Dodge, a Whig and Orthodox Calvinist minister, was a prominent opponent of the Board of Education and believed Mann built the school system to spread his personal beliefs. Dodge was a vocal advocate for abolishing the Board of Education, and participated in the almost-successful attempt to do so in 1840.68 Dodge agreed that our country’s diversity prevented schools from promoting any particular denomination. But he felt that Mann’s curriculum did exactly that: "In a country like this, where such diversity of sentiments exists… the difficulty and danger of
attempting to introduce these subjects into our schools, according to one fixed and settled plan, to be devised by a central Board, must be obvious.” Dodge’s beliefs were not completely random. Nonsectarianism, which did not stress original sin but did stress God’s love for humankind, was more similar to Unitarianism than other denominations. Morality was integral to a child’s education, but Dodge felt Mann’s morality was “modified by sectarian views.”

Finally, others argued that the new education system gave the government too large of a role. Systematizing and regulating common schools destroyed their democratic purpose, some believed. Dodge thought that it was local control that encouraged the “zeal and activity” towards common schools, which would be “overshadowed” and eventually “grow faint” under a centralized system of control. But those most in favor of the Board of Education lived in areas with high immigration rates. The arrival of more and more poor, Irish Catholic immigrants encouraged even the staunchest opponents of the Board of Education to see the value of common schools. As discussed, Mann schools were meant to attract Catholic students as well as Protestant students. The King James Bible was a reliable tool to teach students how to become moral, hard working Americans. But by using the King James Bible specifically, the schools could also conveniently promote Protestantism over Catholicism, discouraging Catholic children from blindly obeying the Pope, and instead promoting desirable American qualities like individualism. Using the King James Bible had two major effects on the Common School Movement.

First, it silenced many of Mann’s opponents. Mann had to fend off a number of complaints, but those who argued against his religious curriculum were often more supportive when they realized the alternative. Catholic children could either be educated in Catholic schools, which could create a unified Catholic bloc, or they could attend schools that taught an
overview of basic Protestant values. Even the most Orthodox Calvinists found the latter to be the lesser of two evils. And Evangelicals supported Mann’s curriculum, which essentially replicated their voluntary societies -- various denominations committed to rejecting the evils in society. Whether these “Evils” were inequity, immorality, Catholicism, or more likely a mix of all three, common schools provided a place for Protestants to uniformly advance their agenda. Therefore, though some Orthodox voices loudly protested the centralization of schools, a fear of Catholic dominance convinced them otherwise.

But by appeasing one community, Mann fueled hostility from another: Catholics. He received massive backlash from Catholic communities, especially after the Irish Potato Famine, when Irish immigration increased exponentially. Mann did not choose to ignore the beliefs of Catholics, or orchestrate nonsectarian education to rid Massachusetts of Catholicism. He, like others, was subject to anti-Catholicism. He genuinely felt that this education system would teach Catholic children superior values without rejecting their religious beliefs. Massachusetts law ordered that teachers instill in their students “the principles of piety and justice and a sacred regard for truth, love of their country, humanity and universal benevolence, sobriety, industry and frugality, chastity, moderation and temperance.”

Mann asked, in reference to Catholicism, “‘Are not these virtues and graces part and parcel of Christianity?’” Mann saw no difference between the values taught in the King James Bible and the Douay-Rheims Bible, the version Catholics used. However, the Douay-Rheims Bible was based on the Latin translation of the Bible, while the King James Bible was based on Hebrew and Greek ones. This alone meant the texts were not identical. However, because Catholics believed scripture “must be read communally,” they relied heavily on footnotes and commentaries from
scholars. It was far from neutral, then, when common schools demanded the bible be read without any note or commentary -- it was inherently anti-Catholic. Unsurprisingly, Catholic students and leaders alike, across Northeastern states, wanted a change.

In 1859, Catholic ten-year old Thomas Whall refused to recite a Protestant version of the Ten Commandments in the Elliot Grammar School, a Boston school which was two-thirds Catholic. Whall’s refusal was actually suggested by a teacher in his Sunday School, who asked his students to “politely refuse to recite prayers or read from or sing hymns of Protestant origin” in their schools. The Catholic community was not ignorant to the fact that the schools were discriminatory. This Catholic teacher directed students to defy state law, which required common school students to recite these Ten Commandments. But when Whall followed his teacher’s orders, his Assistant Principal, McLaurin F. Cooke, whipped him. Whall recounted this beating lasting 45 minutes, until “his little hands swollen to more than twice their size” and he was “crazed with pain.” Cooke was charged with assault and battery, but the charges were dropped. The judge realized that punishing Cooke would have diminished the importance of the Ten Commandments law, beginning a slippery slope towards removing the Protestant Bible from schools entirely.

By allowing the Board of Education to oversee all common schools, government officials gained the power to demand that in school, all children must read, pray, and sing as a Protestant would. Notable cases of Catholic protest occurred in New York City and Philadelphia as well, cities that also experienced rising rates of Irish immigration. In New York, Bishop John Hughes advocated for parochial schools to receive state funding, because common schools, which clearly enforced Protestantism, were given money, even after the New York State Common Council
voted to only fund “nondenominational institutions.” Bishop’s efforts were unsuccessful. In Philadelphia, Protestant gangs revolted after the school board allowed Catholic students to read their own Bibles in school. 20 people were killed as the gangs “[burnt] Catholic churches, schools, and homes while Catholics and nativists exchanged gunfire.” Both experiences convinced Catholic communities that there was no place for Catholics in common schools, and that they should devote their energy to developing parochial schools, whether or not they received public aid. Rising rates of Irish immigration contributed to a hostile culture between Protestants and Catholics that began a battle over common schools.

The Massachusetts Board of Education began with only a few explicit powers, but Mann’s reforms had major effects. Common schools provided opportunities for all Massachusetts children to receive an education, opening new doors for low-income or immigrant children. But in choosing to centralize the free school system, Mann learned that it was impossible to appeal to every religious group in the state. He felt that prioritizing morality, instead of religious diversity, was integral to the purpose of schooling. In response, schools became agents of religious control, stifling Catholic’s freedom of religion.

But Mann’s ultimate goal, expanding educational access to students no matter their social class, was widely successful. When Mann left his position as Secretary in 1848, he had successfully convinced most skeptics that common schools were worth the investment. About 62% of Massachusetts children between the ages of 5-14 were attending schools in 1850. Similar percentages are seen in other Northeastern states (69% of New York children attended), but Southern states fell short. Virginia, which we will examine in the next chapter, enrolled 14% of
5-19 year olds.\textsuperscript{82} Using Virginia as a case study, we now turn to a new question: if centralized education was so successful in the North, why did it repeatedly fail in the South?
Endnotes: Chapter 2

3. Ibid., 6.
6. Ibid., 20.
11. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 5.
27. Ibid., 14.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 33.
40. Channing, “Unitarian Christianity.”
52. Ibid., 114.
57. Ibid.
59. Ibid., 11.
60. Ibid., 38.
61. Ibid., 52.
63. Ibid., 105.
67. Ibid., 111.
70. Ibid., 227.
71. Ibid., 227.
73. Ibid., 131.
74. “Section 30: Moral Education." The 190th General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
76. Prothero, Religious Liberty, 121.
77. Whall, Thomas J. "Thomas J. Whall, the Boston Boy, Cruelly Punished in 1859 for Refusal to Read the Protestant Bible Relates the Event after Forty-Five Years." The American Catholic Historical Researches 21, no. 2 (1904): 66.
78. Ibid., 70.
Chapter 3: Maintaining Racial Hierarchy in Virginia’s Education System

In Massachusetts, increasing diversity encouraged a new Board of Education to centralize schools. Fear over Irish Catholic immigrants led to a stronger free school system, where one government agency could control what all students, native or immigrant, were learning. In Massachusetts, centralization was used as a tool for assimilation. In Virginia, centralization was also used as a tool for social control. Virginians used the power of the state, almost paradoxically, to reinforce local control of the schools and, in so doing, maintain a separation of the races. This chapter will first explore Virginia’s attempts to centralize schools, investigating what prevented Southern states from developing as many common schools as Northeastern ones. Because its schools were not centralized until after the Civil War, we will then examine Virginia’s school system during the Reconstruction and Progressive Eras. It should quickly become clear that we cannot understand Virginia’s education reforms without discussing slavery and emancipation. Virginians’ strong lies to localism and white supremacy initially limited most forms of school centralization, but eventually Virginians found that they could use the state’s education system to maintain the hierarchies of slavery, encouraging segregation far beyond 1865.

Establishing Free Schools: Early Challenges and Attempts

The Southern states faced many challenges establishing free schools that Northern states never had to overcome. While there were common school movements across the Northeast, notably under Pennsylvania’s Robert Vaux and Connecticut’s Henry Barnard, the South did not experience a similar movement until the late 19th century. To understand why, we must go back
to colonial Virginia and examine how significant cultural patterns emerged. History does not suggest that all Virginians were completely uninterested with education. Children in Jamestown colony did receive some education, mainly at home.¹ There were multiple efforts to establish free schools in the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly for the poor.² However, the efforts were restricted, and they were not nearly as successful as they were up North.

The geography of the Southern colonies posed a problem unfamiliar to the North. The quintessential New England town described in chapter one, which had a village center and 40 to 60 homes in close proximity, would not have been found in 17th century Virginia. In the early 1600s, there were similar village centers and neighboring households, but this structure quickly disintegrated.³ As the 17th century continued, people began to own private, enclosed farms. Several forces expedited this trend. The massacre of 1822 killed hundreds of Native Americans and expelled those who survived, resulting in a complete separation between Virginia colonists and Native Americans and making land readily available.⁴ Combined with generous land grant policies to encourage colonization and the rising prices of the tobacco crop, Virginia had the tools to develop a largely agrarian economic system and culture.⁵ By 1700, 90% of the state’s population were small farmers.⁶

In the North, village centers allowed colonists to share ideas and communicate with one another. In the South, plantations encouraged isolation and self-sufficiency. This was only exacerbated as plantations grew, aided by the increase of slave labor from Africa. This had several consequences for schools. Schools could not be built without a convenient location to place them. In a town square, children lived close enough that they could walk to school each day. But in a colony with sprawling farmlands, no location could be central enough for a
significant number of families. Some students would likely have to walk several miles, or there would have to be a large number of schools, each with a small number of students. Neither possibility is attractive for those attending or funding schools.

But the physical distance also bred a mentality of individualism. For someone to be invested in and concerned for their neighbor, the two need to communicate. It is understandable why people who are indifferent towards their neighbors would be reluctant to fund schools for the whole community. If your child received a quality education at home or in a private school, why spend more money to help other children? In the Northeast, the answer to this question would have been Calvinism. Calvinism compelled New Englanders not only to learn to read themselves, but to ensure their neighbor could as well, because everyone’s ability to worship God independently helped ensure a pious community.

But Virginia was dominated by Anglicanism. By 1650, there were already 27 Anglican churches in Virginia, and in the 1640s, the state had banned any Puritan teaching. Both Calvinism and Anglicanism revered the Bible, and felt that God’s word alone could determine what was true and moral. However, unlike Calvinism, Anglicanism did not expect individuals to apply their own reason to scripture. Calvinism placed so much value on an individual’s interpretation of the Bible to prevent the corruption that occurred in the Catholic Church. But Anglicans did not feel so disconnected from Catholicism. In fact, their religions were fairly similar. In Anglicanism, the church hierarchy could interpret the Bible on behalf of the congregation. Not everyone had the education to understand the Bible, so if laypeople tried to comprehend it, they might misinterpret its teachings.
In Virginia, therefore, the religious impulse to teach children to read was not nearly as strong as it was in New England. Only those who needed literacy for their careers, like a lawyer, or those who did have an obligation to interpret the Bible, like a priest, had a motivation to develop literacy. This alone is noteworthy, because it eliminates any argument that school is necessary to be a devout Christian. But the effects of Anglicanism become even more significant when we combine this individual disinterest in literacy with the lack of any communal accountability, a major incentive for New England Calvinists.

People were physically far apart, and Anglicanism provided little incentive to care about your community’s education. Together, these compounded the effects of localism. This culture will remain significant for hundreds of years, and it was only strengthened by Virginia’s economic system. Southern economies were driven by cash crops, not by merchants or small businesses. Of course Southerners were interested in ways to develop or expand their own plantations for more profit. They felt no urgency to build any large government structures that would regulate their land -- the decisions they made on their plantations were their own.

Virginia’s localism is incredibly intertwined with its education policy. In Massachusetts, communities were generally willing to tax themselves to provide for the education of others. In Virginia, citizens were more likely to resent a tax increase for the purpose of supporting another child’s education. Why would citizens bother to create a fund for public schools? The schools had no way to serve all children, there was no religious or economic impulse to do so, and it would cost citizens money. Free schools were not nearly as attractive in the South as they were in the North.
This all being said, we must be careful not to overgeneralize the entire history of colonial and Revolutionary Virginia. It would be incorrect to argue there were no efforts to establish free schools. In 1643, the Virginia Colonial Assembly required guardians of orphans to teach children “according to their best endeavors in Christian religion and in the rudiments of learning.”\textsuperscript{10} This law was later applied to apprentices as well as orphans, and was expanded to require writing lessons as well.\textsuperscript{11} A 1748 law required that anyone incapable of supporting their children’s education will have their children “[bound to an] apprenticeship in the same manner as the law directs for poor orphan children.”\textsuperscript{12} By requiring apprenticeships for all children who did not receive an education at home, this 18th century law indirectly mandated education for all children in the colony. Unfortunately, there is no evidence this was enforced.\textsuperscript{13} Compared to Massachusetts, who passed a similar, yet effective, law a century earlier, this was an inadequate attempt to encourage universal education.

Though the government’s action was limited, a few wealthy philanthropists donated money to build schools for poor children. The Syms and Eaton schools were the most successful examples of this philanthropy. During the 1630s, Benjamin Syms and Thomas Eaton traded donations for farmland and animals, and instructed that their money go towards free schools.\textsuperscript{14} But schools like these were rare, and they were not the normal experience for students in Virginia.\textsuperscript{15} “Old Field Schools,” created when communities pooled their funds to build a school in an old field, were more common. But these schools generally charged tuition.\textsuperscript{16} Wealthier families hired tutors, who travelled between plantations to educate upper class children.\textsuperscript{17} Those with the means to do so could find education in Virginia, but throughout colonial times, there was very little done to ensure poor children had the same opportunities.
In the late 1700s and early 1800s, high profile officials began to call for free schools. James Monroe was elected as governor in 1799. During his 1801 address to the state, he urged the legislature to invest in free schools. John Tyler, also a future governor and U.S. president, criticized the Assembly in 1809 for not doing what Monroe had suggested. He argued only a “Wealthy man… can afford the means of educating one son.” Without an education, children’s opportunities for success and employment were limited. Only through education were the “wise and virtuous councils [of our government] formed.” Tyler warns Virginians that without education, the country would watch as “the pride and arrogance of the few [trample] on the rights of the many; usurping all power to themselves for centuries together.” Tyler, along with John Adams in Massachusetts, emphasized that the economic benefits of free schools, notably preventing massive wealth disparities and hostile class divisions, also strengthened the country’s democratic institutions and fostered an egalitarian society.

Of all the political figures who supported free education in Virginia, Thomas Jefferson is certainly the best known. He wrote the “Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge” in 1779 when he served on Virginia’s Assembly, where he also argued that without equal access to education, inevitably “those entrusted with power” will “[pervert] it into tyranny.” Jefferson alluded to another one of his famous works, The Declaration of Independence, when he argued that children should “be enabled to know ambition under all its shapes, and prompt to exert their natural powers to defeat its purposes.” If Tyler and Adams argued that the economic benefits of free schooling can combat unjust rule, Jefferson shows us that free schools can also teach typically American civic values, to encourage free expression, individualism, and national pride. This, in turn, will help future generations challenge oppressive regimes.
However, Jefferson was still a Virginian, and he was not immune to the localism that pervaded the state. In his bill, he suggested an extremely decentralized system of schools. Each county would elect three “Aldermen” who would divide the counties into precincts. The residents of each precinct would elect representatives, who would choose where to build a schoolhouse. He suggested that each child in the precinct would be allowed to attend this school for free for three years, after which their parents could choose to pay tuition.20 Jefferson’s plan failed, mainly because it was based on a general property tax. Virginians viewed this plan as a resource for the poor. People did not expect the rich, who could afford tutors, to attend common schools.21 The politicians above outlined how common schools were in the best interest of even the wealthiest colonists, because they create a more democratic society. But free schools provided no immediate benefit for the rich, and they were opposed to paying higher taxes to fund such a system.22

It was no secret that early schools were designed for the poor, a mindset embodied in the 1810 Literary Fund. This set aside “‘all escheats, confiscations, fines, penalties and forfeitures, and all rights in personal property accruing to the Commonwealth, as derelict, and having no rightful proprietor’” to schools.23 The law required that every county appoint an agent to “‘prevent misappropriation.’” of the fund away from the poor.24 The Literary Fund was devised by Charles Fenton Mercer, a contemporary of Horace Mann, who insisted that the wealthy had an obligation to help provide for the poor: “When war and invasion threaten, and hostile fleets blockade the entrance of those defenceless lowland rivers, shall the inhabitants of the mountains say to those of of the sea-coast, Fight your own battles?”25 While he acknowledged the
hyperlocal mentality of his constituents, he insisted a general tax for public education was worth the price.

Mercer’s most ambitious plan, “An Act Providing for the Establishment of Primary Schools, Academies, Colleges and an University” would have established a “Board of Public Instruction” in 1817, before Massachusetts created their state Board of Education. It also would have divided counties into districts, the leaders of which would have collected taxes from their residents and submitted reports on the condition of their schools to the state Board. The bill could not muster enough votes to pass, and in this case as well, the rich were the most reluctant. The wealthier members of the planter class, who were also the ones with political clout, refused to fund schools for the poor, no matter how much Mercer argued for such an action. When one Virginia county learned how much they would have to tax themselves to support public schools, they threatened to secede from Virginia.

In colonial Massachusetts, the sense of community, rooted in Calvinism, helped education laws become commonplace. Colonial Virginians instead developed a fierce sense of localism that remained powerful into the 18th century. But even Virginians who did support common schools failed to understand that for common schools to succeed, they had to attract a majority of students. Carter and Mann purposefully framed their common schools as a replacement for academies in Massachusetts, not an alternative. They knew that if the rich attended private schools, they would have no incentive to fund the common schools. With no motivation to create schools, hostility towards taxation, and no laws requiring schools be established, it is no wonder that public education in Virginia had such little traction prior to the Civil War. The money in the Literary Fund was slowly diverted to the war effort, particularly the
Virginia Military Institute. In 1851, the state spent four cents a day on its students, compared to Massachusetts’ $3.00. Schools that did exist were poorly funded, housed in crumbling buildings and had inadequate furniture -- one school used sloping boards from the wall as desks. Virginia entered The Civil War with failing schools and little motivation to improve them.

Reconstruction and Post-Civil War Education

When the South lost the Civil War, there was a lot of rebuilding to do. Questions of how to rebuild, and who should lead those rebuilding efforts, were fiercely debated in the years following the war. For the first several years of Reconstruction, Southern states were under strict control from the North. In 1867, all ex-Confederate states (except Tennessee) were split into five military districts, led by provisional governors appointed by President Johnson and U.S. military commanders. These governors were meant to register voters and schedule elections. They also needed to call constitutional conventions, because in order to be readmitted to the Union, Southern states had to form new constitutions ratifying the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments and guaranteeing Black male suffrage. Virginia did not fulfil these requirements until 1870, five years after the Civil War ended.

Without justifying slavery or mourning the South’s loss, one must understand why Southerners would become so resentful of these Reconstruction plans. Thousands of soldiers and civilians died for a war that the South ended up losing. A government they had just fought against was now dictating their legal code. By mandating Black suffrage, the North required the South to implement policies antithetical to the racist mission of the Confederacy. With support from military commanders who ensured Black representation at the polls, freed Black Virginians
elected Black delegates to their constitutional conventions.\textsuperscript{34} It should not be surprising that such radical changes led to outrage from Southerners, not conciliation. If anything, these reforms were going to intensify Virginia’s local mentality.

In October of 1867, 105 men attended the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867 - 1868, known as the “Underwood Convention” because of its president John Underwood. John Underwood himself was a New York federal judge, who had previously refused to grant Jefferson Davis bail when the former Confederate leader was charged with treason.\textsuperscript{35} Of the 105 delegates at the Convention, at least 65 were “Radicals,” meaning that they supported the Republican Reconstruction policies. Of these “Radicals,” only 14 were Virginian -- the Constitutional Convention included men from New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and other Northern states. 24 of the 105 delegates were Black.\textsuperscript{36} There were clearly a number of people on this convention who diverted from a typical Virginia lawmaker. J.N. Brenaman, the Assistant Secretary of the convention, described the gathering as a “‘hopeless minority of reputable Virginians trying to stem the tide of the majority in their attempts to humiliate and disgrace the fair name of Virginia.’”\textsuperscript{37} No longer was the political landscape dominated by white, male, land-owning Democrats. Suddenly there were limitations on the power of this old ruling class, giving authority to outsiders representing Virginia at their convention.

When Virginia’s new constitution was ratified in July 1869, one of its most striking features was its guarantee of a school system. The constitution required that within 30 days of ratification, the General Assembly must elect a Superintendent of Public Instruction. Within thirty days of this election, the Superintendent “‘shall report to the General Assembly for its consideration... a uniform system of public free schools.’”\textsuperscript{38} The new constitution outlined the
duties of the new Board of Education, led by the Superintendent, “‘which shall appoint, and have power to remove… all County Superintendents of public free schools.’” The Board also would control the “‘management and investment of all the school funds.’” Virginia’s first centralized education system was also a tiered system, like those in the Northern states.

In January 1870, Virginia was officially readmitted to the union. The act readmitting Virginia further solidified the new system of universal education: “The constitution of Virginia shall never be so amended or changed as to deprive any citizen or class of citizens of the United States of the school rights and privileges secured by the constitution of said State.” This was a remarkable change, not only because Virginia had been required by the federal government to create a school system, but also because the schools had to be for both Black and white children. A state rooted in its local governance was being forced by the federal government to pay higher taxes for a system they had no desire to implement, even when it would have only been for white children. Now, white landowners would now have to pay for Black schools as well. This was undoubtedly going to become a contentious issue in Virginia.

William Henry Ruffner was excited to take on this challenge. Ruffner was born in 1824 in Lexington, Virginia. In the Antebellum era, he had publicly denounced slavery and advocated for the “moral regeneration” of Blacks. Towards the end of the Underwood Convention, Ruffner began to campaign for the role of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Ruffner genuinely wanted to expand education for both white and Black children, and believed that the new constitutional mandate presented the perfect opportunity to do so. In March 1870, Ruffner was confirmed 174 - 1.
Immediately, the public began clamoring about what this new school system would look like. But one thing was certain: schools were going to be segregated. Slavery had ended less than a decade ago; Virginia was still a deeply racist state. In 1874, one legislator called Ruffner a “‘Negrophile,’” saying he “had gone ‘among the Negro members, putting his arms lovingly around their necks and talking sweetly in their ears.’” But even Ruffner supported segregated schools. When he met with University of Virginia professor John Minor to discuss his plan for the new school system, Minor warned, “‘There should be by all means, a provision that white and colored pupils should not attend the same schools.’” Ruffner explained that was his intention; his copyist had mistakenly “omitted the most essential section in the plan… ‘Separate schools shall be provided for white & colored pupils.’” No plan would pass in Virginia without ensuring school segregation. But Ruffner did not only call for segregation to appease his audience. He also felt strongly that the two races shouldn’t mix.

Ruffner wrote “The Co Education of the White and Colored Races,” in *Scribner’s Monthly*, which was a widely circulated magazine in the 1870s and 1880s. The magazine was an outlet for several high profile writers to comment on contentious issues in America. In accordance with the time period, they also published racist cartoons and promoted the superiority of the white race by comparing it to other, “inferior” races. *Scribner’s* was a prominent magazine that became a leading voice on American politics and culture. In Ruffner’s piece, he argued to readers that forced integration would jeopardize the future of schooling in the South.

He claimed it was natural for schools to remain segregated, because the two races were not intellectually equal: “[Blacks] move on a far lower moral plane than the whites, a class… the average character and habits of these people render it highly proper in the whites to refuse to
associate their children with them in the intimate relations of a school.”[48] He did not blame white parents for advocating for segregated schools. He compared racial segregation to gender segregation, both natural responses to parents’ demands: “The mere fact of separation in either case means nothing but common sense school economy, which employs the most effective methods of educating the people of both sexes and both races.”[49] If education could succeed without becoming co-educational, it could succeed without racial integration. Ruffner was a strong believer in Black schools, and thought they would help Black children assimilate to American society after only recently gaining their freedom. Ruffner saw benefits to segregated schools, and never suggested that mixed schools were in Virginia’s future.

Still, many argued that educating Black children, even in segregated schools, would be detrimental. Schools could help Black children rise above the expectations that whites had placed upon them, which were to remain as laborers and plantation workers. Presbyterian minister Robert Lewis Dabney argued that, “In every civilized country there must be a laboring class...who must work and not read.”[50] Dabney did not believe that both white and Black children could be educated. He reported knowing several “white brethren” who could no longer send their own children to school, “‘because they are compelled to keep them in the corn-field, laboring from year’s end to year’s end, to raise these taxes to give a pretended education to the brats of the black paupers, who are loafing around their plantations, stealing a part of the scanty crops.’”[51] Someone needed to work on the farm, and schools were a zero-sum game. By simply existing, Black schools jeopardized white childrens’ futures.

Common schools also received backlash because they required higher taxes. Paying taxes for a new public good, that only existed because the U.S. government required it to, was not
appealing. Superintendents in the 1870s reported that opposition to common schools was rooted in the belief that these schools were a Northern system, forced upon the South as a punishment for losing the Civil War. Of course, Virginians would not have felt so strongly if it did not jeopardize traditional racial hierarchies. Virginians were unhappy they had to pay more in taxes, but they were furious that these taxes encouraged Black scholarship and achievement, and disrupted the long-held belief that Blacks were meant to be subjugated by whites.

Despite the opposition to Black education, the federal government had made Black schools a prerequisite for Virginia’s statehood. Ruffner wrote The Act to Establish and Maintain a Uniform System of Public Free Schools, which would create a Board of Education in Virginia. Ruffner argued that freed slaves could either be a “‘blessing or a curse,’” depending on the treatment they received. If Whites choose to ignore Blacks, the entire race could “[sink] into vagrancy and pauperism, and... barbarism.” But with education, Blacks could become hardworking, respectful, and productive members of Virginian society. Ruffner, unlike many of his peers, did not view Blacks as helpless, but vulnerable. He fears the damage an uneducated Black man could do at the polls. Like John Adams insisted, Ruffner believed any uneducated voter was a dangerous voter, because “the ballot box could not be left in the hands of the illiterate.” However, Ruffner also worried that without education, Blacks would be “controlled by those with ulterior motives,” and would vote based on someone’s else command. This reminds us of anti-Catholic common school reformers who feared the influence of the Pope on the Catholic vote. In both cases, minority populations were presented as potential threats. But schools could teach them to assimilate into American society and become an asset for whites.
After much deliberation, The Act to Establish and Maintain a Uniform System of Public Free Schools was passed in July of 1870, though it required significantly less state funding than Ruffner had proposed.\(^5^6\) It outlined the duties of the new Board of Education, the County Superintendents, and the District School Trustees. Like the Constitution had begun to do, Ruffner’s act mimicked the three-tiered system that Northeastern states had established decades prior, dividing the powers between districts, counties, and the state government.\(^5^7\) The act required free schools for all children between the ages of 5 and 21, and it maintains that “White and colored persons shall not be taught in the same school, but in separate schools, under the same general regulations as to management, usefulness, and efficiency.”\(^5^8\)

In other words, this act not only permitted segregation, it mandated it. If they tried to attend a white school, Black students would be breaking state law. Of course, Black and white schools were supposed to be held to the same standards. But as American history classes will teach, “separate but equal” is not truly equal. Black schools have repeatedly been denied resources and funding, therefore preventing their students from achieving their maximum potential. Virginia was no exception: when forced to centralize their public school system, Virginians saw an opportunity to enrich white supremacy. Antithetical to their purpose, schools could become tools to stifle opportunities for Black students and discourage equality.

This act centralized the public school system by bringing all schools under the umbrella of the state Board of Public Instruction. However, this organizational structure alone does not constitute strong centralization. For centralization to be effective, the state authorities must utilize their regulatory power, setting standards and holding the lower authorities accountable to them. But consistent with Virginia’s traditions, the school system left a substantial amount of power
with the local communities. State officials allowed power to trickle down to the Country Trustees. These men, who picked the District Trustees, could ensure that district leadership was entirely white, male, and Democrat, even in the majority-Black districts. The centralized structure did not maintain much power at the top, but it did provide officials ample opportunities to institutionalize racism. County trustees were essentially given a map of districts and given the power to choose district leadership and divide funds between schools. Ruffner’s 1870 act streamlined the production of racist policies. In the late 1800s, white schools received double the funding of Black schools. Black teachers were paid less than White teachers, based off claims that Black teachers were less qualified. Black schools could accommodate 50% of the students attending, while white schools held 83%. Significantly more white schools had libraries than Black ones.

These disparities between districts were solidified because of the amount of power held by parents. Education was not compulsory in Virginia until the early 1900s. Schools only survived if parents chose to enroll their children in them, a process named “Free Market Schooling.” If schools could not prove that they had at least 15 students each day, the state would stop providing funds for teachers’ salaries. Schools had to compete, and the schools with the most popular teachers in the best locations survived. If parents were unhappy with the location of a school, they could petition the district trustees to change it. White parents, both because of racist ideologies and because of their higher tax contribution, had significantly more leverage over the schools than Black parents did. These families had the capital to ensure the school system was catered towards their children’s needs.
Though schools remained locally controlled, some elements were similar across the state: textbooks are one example of this. Ruffner originally tried to implement the same textbooks in all Virginia schools, but found this uniformity too difficult to enforce.\textsuperscript{66} However, districts were limited in their choices, because they tended to avoid Northern textbooks like the McGuffey Reader, which portrayed Southern secession in a negative light.\textsuperscript{67} But Southern textbooks were free to maintain white superiority. One common textbook, Mary Tucker Magill’s \textit{History of Virginia} wrote “‘God… makes one nation superior to another, and the history of the world shows that the inferior always gives place to the superior race.’”\textsuperscript{68} By making local control such a central part of their school system, the Virginia government had to accept the racism that individual parents instilled in their schools, even if it would have preferred other reforms. Of course, Ruffner’s writings do not imply a desire for racial equity, but even if Ruffner’s successors were to be more egalitarian, the local mentality ensured that racist ideologies trickled up.

By the end of the 19th century, Ruffner did expand schools across Virginia. The number of students attending school tripled between 1870 and 1900.\textsuperscript{69} The public school system, though off to a discouraging start, became immensely popular. Even in the first year of the school system’s existence, 73 out of 98 counties had voted to tax themselves in favor of public education.\textsuperscript{70} It turns out that people wanted free education -- unfortunately, there was little money to support it. The school tax was kept at the lowest possible amount allowed by the state constitution.\textsuperscript{71} Virginia’s districts spent an average of 19 cents a day per student, and some districts spent as little as 4 cents.\textsuperscript{72} The state began to transfer funds from schools to pay off Civil
For schools to succeed, the state needed to do more than just create a Board of Education, they needed to invest in it, and in all of its students -- white and Black.

**Turn-of-the-Century Reform**

Beginning in the late 1800s, improving Southern schools became a national crusade. In the early 20th century, Virginians experienced series of reforms by Northern philanthropists. Compared to the North, the South had lower attendance rates, less funding, and shabbier facilities. In 1906, for every dollar that the South spent per pupil, the North spent $3. The disparities were not only regional, but existed within Virginia as well. In the 1907-1908 school year, each of Virginia’s urban school districts spent over twice what rural ones did, and had over four times as much property per child. Reformers noticed these abysmal numbers and hoped to improve schooling for all Southern children, particularly in rural areas. The Conference for Education in the South met annually in the late 1800s and early 1900s to discuss reform, and formed an organization known as the Southern Educational Board (SEB) in 1902 to achieve its goals.

The SEB was meant to raise public opinion about schools in the South, and collect, handle, and divide funding from private donors to support public education. They held massive speaking events with guests from around the country to get Southerners excited about public education. Their primary goal was to vocalize the growing optimism towards public schools, not necessarily to create government-wide reform. However, they also hoped to use education to improve a region they viewed as desperate for reform. The SEB wanted to mimic the Northern economic boom and replicate it in Southern states. They wanted schools to modernize the whole
region, training people to distance themselves from their agrarian traditions and crave a more advanced society. The SEB used education as a means to combat Southern poverty and create an intellectual culture.

While this attitude may seem pretentious, it is important to remember that the SEB did not only consist of Northerners. When the SEB was first organized, 5 of its 8 members were Southerners. In the 14 years that it existed, it only had one Northern executive agent. While there were certainly opponents and dissenters, the SEB and other reform movements were not viewed as Northern invasions nearly as much as Reconstructionist reformers were. The SEB, and later a similar organization known as the General Education Board (GEB), knew they had to work locally to succeed in the South. They did not establish themselves as government programs or as directives from Washington. They spoke to individual people about their concerns, relying on local community groups to spread their beliefs on the importance of education. They preached that schools were not a Northern invention, but an embodiment of “‘pure Jeffersonian democracy.’” The knowledge that the SEB had to respect Virginia’s traditional localism, even in the 1900s, was crucial to their eventual success.

The SEB was also successful because of the speed with which it switched its priorities. Initially, the group aimed to expand Black education. But by the third meeting of the Conference for Education in the South, this was no longer their main concern. Robert Curtis Ogden, a leader in the movement, explained: “‘While we were originally interested in the South through negro education, our impulses have risen from negro education to the question of the entire burden of educational responsibility… throughout this entire section of the country.’”
The reformers began to recognize that improving the Black schools required increasing property taxes on whites. Though there were two school systems in the South, one white and one Black, the school systems were financed out of the same pot. White families owned nearly all the land and facilities for production, and therefore paid almost all of the taxes for schools. In order to support an even higher tax to finance better schools, they needed to believe schools were worthwhile. Once again, schooling was popular, so many white parents were content paying for their own children. But paying for Black schools was not as attractive. Wallace Buttrick, one of the leading philanthropists involved in the Conference, warned that “[demanding] too much from the white people of the South” will “invite defeat” of the public school system. Gone were the days of Ruffner trying to convince white Southerners that Black education benefitted them too. Reformers needed to appeal to whites, and from this point on, education reform aimed to improve white schools first, and Black schools second. White parents were the backbone of the education system, and their racism had to be considered.

Reformers were not only responding to demands of racist white parents; they should also be held responsible for the racism they perpetuated. In the Jim Crow South, it was expected that White children would grow up to dominate the Black population. The reformers did not problematize this power structure. Instead they encouraged it, by arguing there were ways for whites to use this power wisely. In order to convince white people that Black people should also be educated, white schools needed to be expanded and supported. According to one member of the Conference, “One properly educated white man will help to educate a dozen Negroes. . . . The education of the white youth of the South is the shortest road to the education of the Negro.” If Black students were educated without the approval of the dominant white class,
whites would not accept that their degrees held any value. But if white education taught racial
equality, then Blacks would receive more opportunities. To reasonably expect any Black students
to succeed, therefore, it was necessary to invest in white schools first. While both Ruffner and
later reformers thought that whites needed to be convinced of the benefits of Black schools, later
reformers were willing to delay the investment in Black schools until white leaders could
recognize those benefits.

The Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes were two Black colleges that embraced Black
inferiority. Even though Hampton was primarily a normal school, which trains teachers, both
schools’ curricula promoted manual labor over academia. The founder of The Hampton Normal
and Agricultural Institute, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, claimed he was devoted to expanding
Black education. But his attitude toward race remained hierarchical. He believed Blacks should
maintain a subordinate role in Southern life, and an industrial education would prepare them for
this role. Concurrent with his belief that allowing Blacks on the South Carolina legislature had
“‘ruined the credit of a great state,’” he encouraged restricting the number of Black politicians
and voters, and instead placing them in agricultural or service roles.\footnote{88} With this vision in mind,
he established one of the most popular Black colleges in Virginia.

Several Black schools began vocational programs like Hampton, and received the
compliments of men like Ogden, who described Hampton education as “‘[increasing] the
practical value of the negro not only to himself but to the South.’”\footnote{89} These schools did not provide
education for the purpose of intellectual growth or development. They aimed to replicate slavery,
under the guise of schooling. No one forced Black students to attend these schools. Five year old
Black children were not shuffled off into industrial schools. But as these schools grew in
popularity, so would the expectation that in ten years, that is exactly where those five year old children would go. This was an attempt to stifle the development of a Black intellectual class and maintain agriculture and service work as the primary reason for Black existence.

As the SEB continued to bolster support towards white schools and funnel Blacks into industrial schools, the divide between Black and white district schools grew, primarily because of funding. Constitutionally, districts needed to provide schools with equal access to school funds, but it was no accident that schools were treated so differently. The state educational funds were meant “for the equal benefit of all of the people of the State to be apportioned on a basis of school population; the number of children… in each school district being the basis of such apportionment.”*90 While state funding was supposed to be divided based on population, there was also a stipulation that local authorities could provide for schools based upon their “judgement [of what] the public welfare may require: provided, that such primary schools as may be established in any school year, shall be maintained at least four months.”*91 In practice, local authorities often only maintained and funded Black schools for this four month minimum, even though the state average was six months. Any leftover money was spent on white schools.*92

The Conference for Education in the South, the SEB, the GEB, and other reform efforts undoubtedly increased the role of the state in Virginia’s public education system. In 1904, small, local schools were consolidated, teachers received salary increases, and the school year was lengthened. The state Board of Examiners was also created as an additional source of accountability that would report directly to the State Superintendent.*93 Wagons were provided by the state government to transport children to schools that they were not able to walk to.*94 By World War I, the Virginia state government had clearly invested more money into its public
schools and had created a stronger, more centralized, and more bureaucratic system of educational leadership.

But these reforms were not equal. While state authorities turned a blind eye, local authorities, who the school system entrusted with significant power, took advantage of state funding to systematically deny Black students with adequate schools. Without the centralization of the Reconstruction Era, the state would not have had any funds to distribute to districts. And without the reform campaigns of the early 20th century, the amount of money the state distributed would have been far less. The Constitutional Convention of 1901-1902 reported an expenditure of $3.78 per white child and $1.89 per Black child. The school year remained under six months for Black students, while it increased to 8.5 months for urban white students. High school enrollment increased for all students but there were still 22,000 more white students than Black students in high school. School libraries were popularized, but were contained to white schools. The list of discrepancies between Black and white schools go on and on, but it is clear that there were purposeful efforts to divert funds and resources away from Black schools.

A basic history lesson on Jim Crow Laws will teach that segregated schools were not equal. What is less obvious is the way that Virginians capitalized on the centralized system of education to reinforce this inequality. The centralization was imposed upon them, and so Virginians did the bare minimum: they created a weak centralized structure that relied on the support of white parents. These parents became the most influential members of the school system. They were attached to the racial hierarchy that emerged under slavery, and were not willing to risk that schools would disrupt it. Any reforms the SEB made needed to reinforce a racist mindset and prioritize white schools. By encouraging Blacks to enter industrial schools and
favoring white common schools, Black schools lagged behind, widening the gap immensely by the 1910s. Virginia never wanted to centralize, but when it was clear that their statehood depended upon it, they found ways to use it to their advantage, by punishing Black children and maintaining racial subjugation.
Endnotes: Chapter 3

2. Ibid., 177.
6. Ibid., 592.
13. Ibid., 34.
17. Ibid., 13.
18. Ibid., 1.
20. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 2.
24. Ibid., 23.
25. Ibid., 62.
28. Ibid., 157.
32. Ibid., 36.
34. Ibid., 23.
36. Ibid., 23.
38. Ibid., 28.
40. "An Act to Admit the State of Virginia to Representation in the Congress of the United States (January 26, 1870)." Virginia Humanities.
42. Ibid., 260.
43. Ibid., 261.
44. Ibid., 278.
45. Ibid., 262.
47. Ibid., 61.
49. Ibid.
50. Dabney, *Universal Education in the South*, 158.
52. Ibid., 178.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., 264.
58. Ibid.
60. Ibid., 33-34.
61. Ibid., 40.
64. Ibid., 46.
65. Ibid., 38, 27.
66. Ibid., 64.
67. Ibid., 68.
68. Ibid., 40.
69. Ibid., 21.
72. Link, A Hard Country and a Lonely Place, 22.
75. Harlan "The Uses of Adversity,” 16.
80. Dabney, Universal Education in the South, 66.
82. Ibid., 91.
83. Dabney, Universal Education in the South, 7.
85. Dabney, Universal Education in the South, 44.
87. Dabney, Universal Education in the South, 39.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid., 132.
94. Ibid., 141.
95. Ibid., 140.
96. Ibid., 164.
97. Ibid., 163.
Chapter 4: The Clash of Ohio’s School Systems: Public and Parochial

As Americans on the East Coast developed cities and expanded plantations, settlers also began to move towards the Western frontier. The American government absorbed huge amounts of territory in the nineteenth century. Between 1800 and 1900, the number of states went from 16 to 45. In 1800, the country did not extend past the Indiana territory. In 1860, it encompassed the entire continental United States.1 This chapter uses “frontier” to refer to the Northwest Territory, but “frontier” has meant different things throughout American history. As the government fought for and bought land, individuals continued to settle upon areas previously inhabited by Native Americans. These settlers were confronted with similar challenges that the early colonists faced, and like these colonists, we can learn a lot from how they prioritized schools in their new home.

This chapter will examine the development of the public and parochial schools in Ohio, with a particular emphasis on Cincinnati. Ohio’s schools developed out of many of the same forces as those in Massachusetts: anti-Catholicism and nativism played large roles. However, the majority of this chapter will examine the Catholic response to this discrimination. Catholic schools are not unique to Ohio, because in many states, religious persecution led to an rise in Catholic schooling. But Ohio is an interesting case study because of the tremendous success of parochial schools, and because of the effects this system had on Ohio’s public school system.

Evangelical Interest in the West

The Northwest Territory added five states to the country, but Ohio was the first one to be formed. Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and a part of Minnesota were all adopted into the Union in the early 1800s.2 The Northwest Ordinance, the federal act that outlined how
these territories would become states, included a clause for the purpose of developing schools. Article 3 reads, “Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, Schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.” This text would become incredibly important not only when drafting Ohio’s constitution, but also when debating school legislation decades later. This text implied that one purpose of education was to teach religious doctrine. Of course, asking which particular religion this clause referred to would lead to sectarian conflict in the future.

Like the process to be readmitted to the Union after secession, proceeding from a territory to a state required ratifying a state constitution. Ohio’s Constitution of 1802 adopted language very similar to the Northwest Ordinance. Section 3 of Ohio’s Constitution reads,

> No preference shall ever be given, by law, to any religious society or mode of worship… But religion, morality, and knowledge, being essentially necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of instruction shall forever be encouraged by legislative provision, not inconsistent by the rights of conscience.¹⁴

The statute copies exactly what was written by the federal government in 1787, adding only that last line, which guarantees that Ohio’s legislation will help encourage this goal.

The Northwest Ordinance provides explicit instructions for joining this country. In 1787, the United States government still assumed that education and religion were intertwined. It was not radical to believe religion should be in the common schools. Our country had accepted a separation between church and state, but no one felt this was a violation. The only explanation for this seemingly contradictory assumption is that education was not yet seen as a civil service: since it was not primarily the government’s role, it did not need to be separated from religion. Schools could teach religion, not for the sake of expanding one’s knowledge of worldwide...
culture and diversity (as contemporary history classes do), but for the sake of inculcating piety. Ohio inscribed this purpose in its 1802 Constitution. Understanding this context helps us appreciate just how shocking the events of 19th century Ohio would have been.

Once Ohio became a state, it attracted a massive number of immigrants. Ohio’s population dramatically increased throughout the first half of the 19th century. In 1800, the population of Ohio was 45,365. Within the next 10 years, it jumped to 230,760. By 1850, the population was 1,980,329. To put this into context, in 1800 the United States population was 5.3 million, and in 1850 it was 23 million. The United States population multiplied about 5 times between 1800 and 1850, whereas Ohio’s population multiplied over 42 times. Cincinnati, Ohio’s largest city, also increased substantially during these years. In 1800 it had a mere 750 people, and in 1835, it had 29,000. Cincinnati quickly became one of the major Western cities, competing with places like Nashville and St. Louis.

A major reason that both Ohio and Cincinnati became so populated in the early 19th century was due to immigration, especially German immigration. German immigration began to dramatically rise around the 1830s, peaking in 1855. This was largely due to political unrest and oppression in Europe. The Hambacher Fest in particular, a protest causing many arrests and increased police surveillance, led to mass emigration to the United States in the 1830s. But unlike Irish immigrants, Germans were not poor. They could afford to migrate westward in search of more land. By the mid-nineteenth century, most cities in the Midwestern United States had a “Little Germany.” Cincinnati became a hugely popular destination for German immigrants, earning the nickname the “Over-the-Rhine” district.
By 1835, there were 10,000 Germans in Cincinnati, and they made up about one-third of the city. Of these, 7,000 were Catholic.\(^{12}\) This would set the stage for education reform in Ohio for the next century. The large population of Ohio was not a bad thing. Reformers in the Antebellum era were concerned with the overcrowding in the Eastern cities, and they, along with the federal government, encouraged people to move into the Western states. But this population boom was caused by Catholic immigrants, which ignited the same anti-Catholic fears that Mann and Carter experienced in Massachusetts.

The first educational legislation in Ohio was passed in 1821, which was only 18 years after it became a state.\(^{13}\) This is a much smaller period of time than other colonies and states waited before passing education laws, which is likely explained by the fact that in 1821, the nationwide sentiment towards education was much more favorable than it was in the 1600s. Education reform had become a popular movement by the nineteenth century, which it was not hundreds of year prior. So while it might not be fair to compare the legislators of the 1820s and the 1620s, we should still note that Virginia failed to pass effective education legislation until 1829. This is despite the fact that Virginia was settled by Europeans hundreds of years before Ohio, a reminder of the region’s apathy towards schools.

Ohio’s 1802 Constitution encouraged the use of “legislative provision” to help develop common schools. In the early 19th century, Ohio recognized that the benefits of common schooling were great enough to justify government intervention and support. Free schooling was not a new phenomenon; it was ordinary enough to include it in the state’s governing documents. It is interesting to compare this experience with our prior case studies. Ohio’s educational history begins after the normalization of free schools, and therefore its largest debates surround the best
ways to expand and support public schooling. But Massachusetts and Virginia’s histories are riddled with debates over the definition of free education, and whether or not to even provide it. Only later were these states faced with conflicts over expansion and development. This is surely a sign of the almost 200 years that passed between the establishment of the Massachusetts and Virginia colonies, and the ratification of Ohio’s 1802 Constitution. However, it would be unfair for us not to understand that this shift occurred because Americans were recognizing that schools were a crucial part of one’s childhood. We must credit this change to the early colonists that placed a strong emphasis on education, like in Massachusetts.

However, early Ohioans demonstrated little desire to centralize their schools. Both Ohio and Virginia placed a similar value on local control. Ohio set up a fairly weak executive branch, refusing to give the governor veto power until 1902.14 The common schools in Ohio were all locally run. The legislative branch was meant to lease school lands to buildings, but there was no effort to support schools with any local or state taxes.15 Some settlers did establish schools, but many more were concerned over clearing the land and building infrastructure to ensure Ohio was a livable state.16 Schools existed, particularly in the Northeast region of the state where New Englanders had settled, but there was no centralized school system in the early 1800s.17 Schools were independently run, and generally set up when a teacher would create an “article of agreement” committing him or herself to teach at a specific schoolhouse for a certain amount of time. The residents of the town would agree to pay the teacher a certain amount, generally one or two dollars per student. Attendance was not compulsory, and so children arrived sporadically.18 With little accountability or regulation, many children received a basic education at best.
In 1821, when the Ohio government stepped in to amend these conditions, they did not tackle the challenge alone. In the first half of the 19th century, education reform in the West, and particularly in Ohio, was led by a series of Eastern reformers dedicated to transforming the educational system on the frontier. One of the largest of these organizations was the American Home Missionary Society (AHMS), founded in 1826. The AHMS sent ministers, called missionaries, to the frontier to spread Protestant Christianity. The group feared that in the West, even those who did subscribe to Protestantism were not religious enough. For this reason, one of its main goals was to establish more Protestant churches. Without these churches, Protestants who were only loosely affiliated with their denomination might attend a Catholic church simply because it was the only one in the area, and might become vulnerable to Catholic conversion efforts. When the AHMS sent missionaries into Oregon in the 1840s, the board of directors justified it by explaining how the region had 16 priests. The AHMS’s purpose was to compete with the growth of Catholicism in the West. And as a major city with high rates of Catholic immigration, Cincinnati was a major target. In the 1840s, when the AHMS was most active in Ohio, the state had 103 missionaries, the most of any state in the country.

A number of Christian reform organizations arose during the Antebellum period, a reaction to the popularization of Evangelicalism, which was discussed in chapter 2. Though the AHMS was mainly made up of Congregationalists and Presbyterians, it attracted ministers from all Evangelical denominations, and was aided by a number of these reform organizations. The combined efforts of Evangelical organizations created a well-oiled machine to spread Christianity throughout the frontier. The American Education Society was responsible for training Evangelical ministers, who would establish institutions like schools, academies,
colleges, or youth groups. The AHMS would then support these men in the new areas of the country, providing them with the crucial network they needed to survive on the frontier. One missionary, surprised at the living conditions of the West, warned a friend, “‘It ought to be distinctly understood beforehand that there is nothing, at present, very inviting, but many things quite the reverse, in most of the situations, in this State.’”

Subsequent organizations like the American Bible Society and the American Sunday School Union would organize missionary activities and publish the literature for the ministers to distribute.

The AHMS missionaries were not part of the Cincinnati or the Ohio government, so they were not the agents centralizing Ohio’s public schools. However, they amassed incredible influence and often recommended policies to become law. One of the ways they chose to spread Protestant Christianity was by promoting the same nonsectarian education that was in Massachusetts. The organization campaigned to raise public opinion in favor of nonsectarian schools. As a reminder, these schools claimed to accommodate all Christian students, but repeatedly utilized the Protestant Bible (The King James Bible), and recited Protestant hymns and prayers.

The AHMS was overtly anti-Catholic. It published its own circular called Home Missionary, which aimed to evoke nativism in Protestants. In one article, Home Missionary reported that a girl was “solicited” to go to a Catholic School, where she quickly “ceased to attend sabbath school” and “carried home a book addressed, ‘To those who desire to know the truth.’” Its literature was blatantly anti-Catholic, and its message was gaining traction. Editors of other newspapers and magazines recognized the success of AHMS publications, and spread their own accounts of the “‘Papal Plot,’” a conspiracy based on a Catholic desire to influence
American government and institutions. The anti-Catholic mission of AHMS not only influenced its own policy recommendations, but the attitude of the whole region as well.

Calvin Stowe and Lyman Beecher help remind us why these reformers were so discriminatory. Calvin Stowe came to Cincinnati from Massachusetts to be the chair of Biblical Literature at Lane Seminary, a Presbyterian college. He became an influential education reformer when he published a report that encouraged Ohio to replicate the Prussian school system. Stowe’s anti-Catholicism stemmed from a belief in the vulnerability of German immigrants: “If the Germans in this country do not receive an English education, they will unavoidably fall below the general standard of intelligence among us, because excluded from the common sources of information, and will form an inferior caste… an easy prey to demagogues.” His view was similar to Massachusetts and Virginia reformers. Carter, Mann, and Ruffner all felt genuine concern for a minority group. They all saw Catholics or Blacks as potentially dangerous and in need of white, Protestant aid. Similarly, we can see Stowe’s sincerity in his report on Prussian education: “What parent is there, loving his children and wishing to have them respected and happy, who would not desire that they should be educated under such a kind of moral and religious influence?” Though patronizing from a 21st century perspective, in the 19th century, these reformers sincerely felt they were improving lives.

Beecher was a presbyterian minister from Connecticut, who came to Cincinnati to become president of Lane Seminary. He became a vocal supporter of common schools, especially to educate Catholic immigrants. Beecher believed in post-millennialism, meaning he thought the second coming of Christ would occur once the world was as perfect as it could be. As a result, Beecher was involved in a number of reform efforts to advance this cause.
also believed that the millenium would begin in the West, so it was particularly important that
the West remain moral. This mindset is embodied in his famous speech, *A Plea for the West*: “It
is equally plain that the religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the
West… The West is destined to be the great central power of the nation, and under heaven, must
affect powerfully the cause of free institutions and the liberty of the world.” Education was
absolutely necessary for the millenium to occur. “The conflict which is to decide the destiny of
the West, will be a conflict of institutions for the education of her sons, for purposes of
superstition, or evangelical light.”

This use of “Evangelical Light” is the first sign of Beecher’s anti-Catholic values. He was
not willing to jeopardize the second coming of Christ, but he believed that keeping Catholics
isolated in their own communities would do so: “Such masses of ignorance are the material of all
others most dangerous to liberty… [an] uneducated mind is an educated vice. But the safety of
our republic depends upon the intelligence, and moral principles, and patriotism, and property of
the nation.” Encouraging Protestant Christianity, and minimizing the spread of Catholicism,
was integral to creating a perfect society.

Beecher reiterated that Catholics were likely to vote according to the interests of the
Pope, allowing the clergy to “wield in mass the suffrage of their confiding people,” meaning they
could “decide our elections, perplex our policy, inflame and divide the nation, break the bond of
our union, and throw down our free institutions.” He perpetuated the stereotype that immigrants
were “multiplying tumults and violence, filling our prisons, and crowding our poor houses.”
Catholics were vulnerable to vice, crime, and the influence of a foreign government. Allowing
them to maintain their traditions threatens our society. But by teaching these children the
standards and practices that Americans value, like democratic elections, a free market, and a respect for a Protestant understanding of God, they can become an asset to our country.

The frontier was developed with instructions to establish free schools. But Evangelical missionaries ensured that these schools replicated Mann’s nonsectarian education. As we will see in the next section, during the first half of the nineteenth century a series of new laws emerged to encourage public schooling. But this school system developed in the context of anti-Catholicism. We can already expect that Ohio’s common schools were built to force Catholic children to conform to Protestant values, like in Massachusetts. Now, we should turn our attention to the Catholic community, and ask why their responses to this discrimination are so significant.

The Development of Two School Systems

Ohio’s 1821 law was the state’s first attempt to regulate its common schools. The law allowed local school districts to levy taxes to build schoolhouses. But this law did not instruct towns to build schools, it only recommended a process to do so, if the residents of each town desired. In 1825, Governor Morrow declared the 1821 law was ineffective because it was voluntary. He established a statewide property tax to create a school fund. In order for towns to receive money from the fund, they first had to organize school districts.

Unfortunately, the money raised from this fund was only enough to operate schools a few weeks out of the year. Nevertheless, this law helps us compare the local mindsets of Virginia and Ohio. While Ohio chose to tax citizens in support of education only 23 years after it received statehood, and Virginia did not tax citizens until after the Civil War, outside forces encouraged the development of both state’s education systems. New England reformers, familiar with the
concept of taxing residents to support public schools, transformed Ohio’s schools. Financing public schools was integral to their goal of spreading Protestant Christianity. In Virginia, Reconstructionists also required raising taxes to support public schools. Outside forces, whether they were reform organizations or the federal government, were necessary actors in both states; neither state government acted alone.

However, the reformers in Ohio successfully convinced the public that Catholic immigrants were a threat, requiring immediate reeducation. The public adopted these beliefs, and anti-Catholic propaganda soared, deepening hostilities between Protestants and Catholics. Meanwhile, Reconstruction policies in Virginia did not attempt to ostracize Black students. While both groups of reformers believed their actions bettered the community, the language used in Ohio was much more outwardly discriminatory than Republican Reconstructionists in Virginia. But unlike in Ohio, the public in Virginia did not adopt any new attitude; they rejected the reformers like Ruffner and maintained strong racist beliefs. It was not until the interference of the SEB, which allowed Virginians to maintain their racist policies, that the actions of outsiders were well regarded. Virginia’s acceptance of outside actors was reliant on the likelihood that the community could maintain their traditions. Unfortunately, one the strongest traditions in Virginia during this time was racism. But for Ohioans to accept the reforms of outsiders, New England philanthropists simply needed to appeal to their fears. By comparing Ohio with Virginia, we can see how much easier it is to create fears than to quell them.

Reform efforts in Cincinnati were effective before the rest of the state. In 1834, Cincinnati established a centralized school system, dividing authority among voters, district boards, and the city. Cincinnati divided each of their wards into two districts, and built a
schoolhouse in each district. The voters of the ward would elect a trustee, who would make up the “Trustees and Visitors of Common Schools in Cincinnati.” This Board would “employ teachers, superintend schools, and ensure that at least one school was open in each ward for six months.” In addition, the City Council would appoint seven members to the “Board of Examiners and Inspectors.” This Board would “certify teachers and… evaluate student improvement and report to the council.” This was also the board responsible for collecting taxes for schools. Most decisions regarding curricula were made by the Trustees and Visitors, so for the rest of this chapter, any discussion of the “School Board” refers to that branch. In 1853, Ohio replicated this system, appointing a Commissioner of Common Schools and instructing each town to create Boards of Education.

Now subject to more standardization and accountability, the new, centralized school systems could flourish. In 1836, 31% of the school-age population was enrolled in Ohio’s public schools. In 1850, this percentage rose to 50%, even as the city’s population expanded. In Cincinnati, between 1830 and 1850, public school attendance rose from 2,000 to 6,740. However, as more families became interested in public schools, the number of Catholic students also continued to rise. In 1835, there were between 1200 and 1500 Catholic children in Cincinnati. There were only 2,400 students in the city’s public school system in 1835. We do not know how many Catholic children were in the public school system at this time. But the efforts to increase their enrollment in public schools implies that many were not. Hypothetically, if most of those 2,400 students were Protestant, and most of the 1,200 (or more) Catholic students chose to attend Catholic schools, then one-third of all the children attending school in
Cincinnati would be enrolled in Catholic schools. To someone who views parochial schools as a threat to safety and democracy, this is terrifying.

The first response to this was to accommodate German Catholic students. To cater to foreign students who resented that public schools were taught in English, the city established dual-language schools. However, before being implemented at the state-level, these schools were established by Evangelical missionaries. The Emigrants Friends Society, led by Calvin Stowe, opened a German English School called the Emigrants School, which quickly enrolled over 100 German students, and established a Sunday School with more than 125 children.49 Seeing the popularity of these schools, officials begin to debate them on a state level. Some believed that the language spoken was less important than the values being inculcated. If the children could understand the lessons, then dual-language schools were, according to John Talbott, an Evangelical reformer, the “‘most likely way to Americanize and to republicanize strangers.’”50 But others feared that isolating immigrants from the general population would harm assimilation efforts. Soon after its founding, the Friend School was discontinued.51

Following an outcry from the Catholic community, the Cincinnati school board felt compelled to reinstate dual-language schools. On March 9th, 1840, they “decreed that schools for German children within the common school system must be provided. The teaching of German language in the common schools became compulsory upon request of the citizens.”52 The Board declared that if they requested lessons be taught in German, immigrants were entitled to this accommodation. This was a major victory for the German community, which created a coalition strong enough to affect the decision of the legislature.53 It cannot be emphasized enough that immigrants who faced massive discrimination within the school system persuaded
the Board. Germans had the knowledge to work within the system to enact change. Irish
immigrants fled poverty, but Germans fled violence and political instability. They were not
necessarily poor, and because the police at the Hambacher Fest targeted groups of intellectuals
like professors, there was actually a higher probability they were educated. This group, much
more than the Irish, had the capital necessary to become a potent force in society.

But neither groups of Catholic immigrants had to face the institutionalized discrimination
that Black communities faced in Virginia. Jim Crow policies were meant to limit the potential of
Black schools. These racist policies made the Black population easier to control than the German
immigrants. In Ohio, there was a fear that a growing number of students would attend Catholic
schools, which would teach harmful values. But in Virginia, that feared was less relevant. Black
schools were under the arm of the government - the white political elite had the power to stifle
their development. It was only because the German schools were privately owned, and free to
regulate themselves, that they posed a threat and required some conciliatory efforts from the
government. But by limiting what resources were given to Black schools, Virginian legislators
could ensure their labor source remained second-class citizens. Black children no longer posed a
threat, so there was no need to appease them. But once again, German communities were
wealthier than other marginalized groups. Recently freed slaves would not have been able to
fund or attend private schools that would have provided them with any political clout.

Because Ohio’s parochial schools did create this threat, Protestant leaders were intent
keeping Catholic students in public schools. And so when they felt that these dual-language
schools were being given too much freedom, the Board pulled back. Dual-language schools
began to receive less funding. And while these schools flourished in Cincinnati in the 1840s, in
1849 the Board abolished them, replacing them with German departments in the normal district schools. Within two years, even the German departments shrunk. By the 1850s, a small portion of Ohio’s district schools still taught German, but any cultural knowledge was stripped from the curriculum.55 When legislators realized their common schools were accessible to immigrants, they were unsure how much to change the curriculum. If they altered it too much, the point of nonsectarian education -- assimilation -- would vanish. But if they kept the curriculum in tact, they would further isolate these immigrants, who had the capital to escape to private schools.

Meanwhile, the state also tried to accommodate Catholicism, though this quickly became a heated issue. Evangelical reform groups that had encouraged nonsectarianism were resistant to abandoning this tactic. But at the 1836 meeting of The Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers, one of the most influential reform groups, members of the Catholic community were very vocal over their concerns with nonsectarian education. While they were generally opposed to using the King James Bible, at first Catholic representatives tried to compromise with Protestant authorities. Stephen H. Montgomery, a Dominican friar, felt that “‘more is understood than expressed’” in Scripture.56 This reminds us that Catholics believed analyzing the Bible required a developed and mature understanding of faith, which might be too complex for teachers to comprehend. Trusting them to teach the Bible risks misinterpreting it. Montgomery compared teachers interpreting the Bible for their students “to throwing pearls before swine.”57 Montgomery was well aware that teaching “without note or comment,” which nonsectarian schools required, violated Catholic tradition. However, wanting to compromise, he suggested teachers be allowed to select which Biblical passages they teach, focusing only on “‘all that is most necessary for instructions on the principles of Christianity and morals.’”58 His
suggestion would weaken the authority of the Cincinnati Board, who generally had the power to choose the textbooks for the district.

Meanwhile, John Baptist Purcell, the second bishop of Cincinnati, felt that any use of the King James Bible violated Catholicism. He proposed schools schedule time during their day to separate children by religious affiliation, so each denomination could study the Bible with someone who was knowledgeable about their faith. Purcell’s suggestion was ignored, and instead the College of Teachers formally recommended “the use of the Bible in all our schools, to be read as a religious exercise, without denominational or sectarian comment...[so] that the Bible may be so introduced in perfect consistency with religious freedom, and without offence to the peculiar tenets of any Christian sect” This was not a concession to Catholic communities: it simply continued the existing policy favoring nonsectarian education. Another one of Purcell’s complaints, school libraries that gave children access to anti-Catholic reading material, was taken seriously. In 1842, the Board required parental permission to use school libraries and ruled that no child could be forced to read the Bible without parental consent. In 1852, the Board allowed parents to choose which translation of the Bible their student could use, as long as the notes or comments were not read aloud. These laws seem lenient, and reflect a government that was much more willing to compromise than the Evangelical reformers attached to the King James Bible. However, there is not much evidence that the 1842 or 1852 laws were actually enforced.

With a more complete understanding of the growth of the free schools, we can now turn our attention toward parochial schools. The first parochial schools in Cincinnati were created in 1829, by Bishop Edward Fenwick and a group of nuns. During Purcell’s tenure as bishop, many more Catholic schools were established. When he first became bishop in 1832, there were
four Catholic schools in Ohio. In 1848, there were nine. In 1839, Catholic schools educated 500 students. In 1850, they educated over 2000 students. By the time Purcell died in 1883, there were 236 schools. Catholic schools were rapidly growing, and there were reasons for Protestants to fear the system’s popularity.

One reason Catholics opposed common schools was the anti-Catholic curriculum. One history textbook used in district schools, called Parley’s First Book of History, reported that Cortez “‘could make war on defenceless people, slay them by the thousands, plot the destruction of their government, and pursue his schemes by falsehood, treachery, and violence’” because “‘All these things were consistent with his notion of religion.’” Public schools often used the McGuffey Reader, which lacked the presence of Catholics, as well as other minorities like Jews or Blacks.

Because of passages like this one, Catholic schools used their own textbooks. Sadlier’s Excelsior Studies in the History of the United States, commonly used in Ohio, depicted Catholics as the first ones to introduce Christianity to North America. It credited Catholics with “civilizing” Native Americans: “Long before the English had made any permanent settlement on our shores, whole tribes on the Rio Grande had been converted and civilized, and many a red man of the forest had even learned to read and write.” Though much more appealing to Catholics, for Protestants, this would have exacerbated existing fears. These textbooks claimed Catholic heritage was synonymous with American heritage. But public schools taught that in order to learn American values, children had to read the King James Bible. Catholic schools were promoting a different sense of morality. Would these students learn that being “American”
was following commands of priests and popes? Anti-Catholic Evangelicals argued that Catholic schools taught children to blindly accept orders from others, instead of finding their own truth.\textsuperscript{72}

Even more frightening than the rising number of Catholic schools were the number of Protestant students enrolling in them. In 1843, Purcell reported that over half the students in St. Xavier’s College, a Catholic school, were Protestant.\textsuperscript{73} An advertisement for The Atheneum declared, “‘We are averse to all religious bigotry. And the student who differs with us in creed, will be not the less cherished, than his companion.’”\textsuperscript{74} While The Atheneum did not deny Protestant students, it did make all students attend Catholic mass.\textsuperscript{75} Before Catholic schools receive criticism for inculcating Protestant students just as public schools did towards Catholics, we should remember that Catholic schools were explicitly for Catholic children - public schools were meant to serve all children. While it is hard to estimate how many Protestant students were in Catholic institutions, media reports imply people felt a significant effect. In \textit{A Plea for the West}, for example, Beecher condemned this phenomenon.\textsuperscript{76} Another writer asked why private Protestant schools did not have “‘as high a rank [as parochial schools], conducted by men as eminently qualified for advancing the student in the paths of science.’”\textsuperscript{77} Parents tended to enroll their children in the academically strongest institution, regardless of religious affiliation. Because of the academic achievement of Catholic schools, priest and nuns taught some Protestant children as well.\textsuperscript{78}

The number of students in Catholic schools, Protestant or Catholic, only grew. In New York City, in 1877, there were 30,000 children enrolled in Catholic schools.\textsuperscript{79} This was out of a school-age population of 250,353.\textsuperscript{80} This is approximately 12% of their children. In Cincinnati, almost 10 years prior in 1868, almost 35% of the population of school-age children attended
Catholic schools. German Catholic immigrants refused to accept the nativism and anti-Catholicism in the public school’s nonsectarian curriculum. In some instances, the governments provided accommodations. But when their laws failed to make any meaningful change, Catholics fled to parochial schools. As the percentage of students in public schools slowly declined, the percentage in Catholic schools rapidly increased. In nineteenth century Ohio, a substantial number of Catholic immigrants were not being exposed to the Protestant values that would help them assimilate into American culture.

The Clash of Public and Parochial Schools

In 1842, Bishop Purcell described three problems with public schools. He mentioned the textbooks, the King James Bible, and the anti-Catholic library books, all of which have been discussed above. But his list leaves out a popular fourth complaint, a grievance Purcell also shared. As residents of Ohio, Catholics had to contribute taxes towards their local public schools. But their parochial schools also charged tuition. Families in parochial schools were essentially paying for two school systems. As a solution, Catholics hoped a portion of the school fund could be “applied to schools where their children could be educated in the same religious faith as themselves.” In other words, Catholics wanted taxes to fund parochial schools.

In a letter requesting this proposal, Purcell recalls the humiliation that Catholic students endured in public schools, specifically noting “a lady teacher [who] answers the appeal of a little boy from the taunts of his young schoolmates that ‘the Catholic Religion is very bad to be sure, but that he must belong to it, as it the religion of his father.’” He called the public schools “hypocritical” for only accepting one version of scripture. He denounced Protestantism for its
“innate consciousness of her weakness and error.”\textsuperscript{86} There is no doubt tensions were rising in the mid-1800s. Purcell, originally interested in compromise, became a vocal critic of public schools.

In the summer of 1869, 10 Catholic members of the Cincinnati Board of Trustees and Visitors proposed incorporating Catholic schools into the public system. They hoped the Cincinnati school board would purchase the Catholic schools and provide them with public funding. The city required that if this proposal were to be adopted, Catholic schools would have to end any sort of religious teaching.\textsuperscript{87} Seemingly contradictory to the purpose of Catholic schools, this concession actually received support from both Protestants and Catholics. Catholics recognized that it was costly to maintain so many Catholic Schools, and with the rising rates of immigration, there was little chance that this financial burden would lessen.\textsuperscript{88} Their willingness implies that Catholic leadership was less concerned about teaching their children specific Catholic doctrine. They were more focused on freeing their children from the discrimination in public schools. Consolidation would severely limit the amount of Catholicism that could be taught in Catholic schools, without ending the nonsectarianism in the public schools. But it would also allow Catholic children to attend a school only for Catholics, at no cost.

Samuel A. Miller, a fellow member of the board, offered an amendment to this plan. He suggested the Board, “‘allow the children of parents of all sects and opinions in matters of faith to enjoy alike the benefits of the common school fund.’”\textsuperscript{89} This would not provide Catholic schools with funding. Instead, it would have prohibited the Bible in all of Cincinnati’s public schools.\textsuperscript{90} Miller’s plan, not consolidation, became the primary focus of the public. The press wrote of a Catholic conspiracy to remove the Bible from schools. The \textit{Western Christian Advocate} called it “astonishing” that Catholics “[intend] to continue their sectarian schools…
and secure the public funds for their support” when the common schools “make ample provision for the education of all children.” Pro-Bible meetings were held around Cincinnati, with one preacher warning that any “‘man who does not do his duty’ to vote the Catholic school board members out of office ‘‘is not fit to be a representative of this Bible-loving republic.’”

This anti-Catholic rhetoric became even stronger when Purcell, now Archbishop of Cincinnati, claimed he needed to get approval from the Pope before supporting consolidation. The Board was shocked. Purcell had confirmed the fears of reformers like Beecher. One Board member called it strange that the “‘Ohio School Board should be made to await the action of a representative of a church, who, without authority to act here...must go across the ocean and consult a foreign prince.’” The plan for consolidation was ultimately scrapped because of Purcell’s lack of support and the hostility towards it. But Miller’s amendment did come up for a vote, causing city-wide debate in newspaper articles, protests, and sermons. Ultimately, Miller’s amendment was approved, by a vote of 22 - 16. The Board had voted to remove the Bible from all of Cincinnati’s public schools.

The Miller Amendment might not seem so different from the earlier laws of 1842 and 1852, which also loosened Protestant’s religious restrictions in schools. However, aside from the fact that those laws were not always enforced, the amendment is significant because it prohibits the use of any sort of Bible in the classroom. If allowing Catholic Bibles in public schools did not slow the growth of Catholic schools, maybe eliminating the Bible all together would. The Miller Amendment was still an attempt to educate Catholic students in public schools. Catholics were angry over the discrimination in public schools, and having to pay for two school systems at once. Perhaps without any trace of religion in the classroom, Catholics would finally
attend public schools, in order to save money on parochial school tuition. According to Miller, Catholic students were better off in schools without a Bible under a central authority, than in a school that used the wrong Bible, with no supervision.

Thirty-nine citizens sought an injunction to the Miller Amendment on November 3rd of 1869, beginning the case of Cincinnati v. Minor. This case, and its subsequent appeals, became known as the Cincinnati Bible Wars. The plaintiffs requested the court stop the enforcement of the Miller Amendment. Their argument was based on the clause in the Ohio Constitution that quoted the Northwest Ordinance, claiming that Ohio had promised to pass legislation encouraging “religion, morality, and knowledge.” They argued that banning the Bible, and ending religious teaching, was unconstitutional.

The injunction first went to the Superior Court of Ohio. The defense team was led by Stanley Matthews, who used a religious argument to support removing the Bible. He drew on Evangelical Christianity to argue the court must uphold “‘The Gospel according to Matthew,’” referring to the Golden Rule: “‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.’” Because God intends for us to treat others with respect, Protestants are obliged to maintain religious liberty. Matthews believed that conversions to Protestantism can make someone “magnanimous, and liberal and great,” and the best way to encourage conversions was “to vindicate the truth of the religion you privately profess by showing how equal, how just it is!” Matthews, who personally subscribed to the “‘sterner’” God of Calvinism, reminds us of a key tenet of Protestantism: individually interpreting the Bible. “Privately [professing]” one’s devotion to God was the best way to practice the religion. He urges the Court to remember that
Protestantism is most appropriately observed in the private sphere. Matthews is a few years ahead of his time: we will see this impulse arise again in the mid-20th century.

Matthews also believed that forcing the use of Protestant Bibles on to Catholics creates hostile divisions between the two denominations. Meaningful conversions are only possible through encouragement, not force: “‘Children had to be saved through the voluntary efforts of the churches, not through the compulsive power of the state.’” Converting Catholic children against their will is fruitless. If schools continue discriminating against Catholic students, Catholics will become even more distant from the Protestant community, to which even Matthews hopes they will assimilate.

Ironically, this argument, which was meant to appeal to the two Evangelical judges, only appealed to the third. Alphonso Taft, a Unitarian and the father of future President Taft, ruled to uphold the Miller Amendment. But the two other judges believed that the Ohio Constitution required using the Bible in schools. In his dissent, Taft called Bible reading sectarian. He argued that the School Board had “‘complete discretionary power’” over its district schools. He drew on a precedent from the Ohio Supreme Court which ruled that Christianity was not “‘entitled to any higher or other privileges, before the law.’” He called the use of the King James Bible and the singing of Protestant hymns “‘offensive to Catholics and to Jews.’” Taft did not want to deny the injunction because it would harm Evangelicalism. Instead, he based his argument on the separation of church and state and the legal rights of the Cincinnati school board. His dissent radically claimed that Protestant students did not deserve any privileges just because they were a part of a religious majority. He implicitly questioned that Protestantism and
Americanism were one and the same, completely denying one of the foundations of American

culture. America was no longer only Protestant, and we should not treat it as such.

Luckily for Taft, the ruling was challenged. On June 24th, 1873, the Ohio Supreme Court
reversed the lower court’s ruling. This time, a panel of three judges unanimously sided with the
School Board. They also cited the fact that the public schools were under the jurisdiction of
School Board, giving the Board the right to decide the books used in the classroom. Chief
Justice Welsh, in the majority opinion, argued that the word “Religion” in Ohio’s Constitution
could not be assumed to mean Protestant Christianity: “If Christianity is the law of the State,
like every other law… adequate penalties must be provided to enforce obedience to all its
requirements and precepts. No one seriously contends for any such doctrine in this country.”
He wrote that the duty of the Constitution is to protect the minority, not the majority: “‘The
majority can protect itself. Constitutions are enacted for the very purpose of protecting the weak
against the strong; the few against the many.’” This echoed Taft’s belief, which challenged the
assumed superiority of Protestant denominations.

It must be discussed here just how revolutionary this ruling was. In ruling with the
Cincinnati School Board, Ohio’s justice system accepted that education could exist without
religion. This assumption had been ingrained in the United States for centuries. In the 1600s,
schools were created to teach religion. Minor had successfully challenged that precedent. The
benefits of public education were no longer just religious. They were now understood to be so
significant that all children needed to receive them, even those who do not read a Protestant
Bible. This was a radical shift in the way that the public viewed the purpose of schooling. They
were built to inculcate piety. They were reformed to instill morality. But as the 19th century came to a close, schools could no longer find their purpose in religion.

However, we also must recognize that while legally, the Cincinnati School Board had the right to remove the Bible from its public schools, the justifications that people used to do so were not all equal. While Matthews rooted his argument in Christianity, Taft rooted it in civil society. Both of these men argued in favor of the Miller amendment, but their political fates differed. Matthews became a U.S. Senator and United States Supreme Court Justice. When running for Congress, he did not face any criticism over the Bible Wars. But when Taft ran against Rutherford B. Hayes for the Republican nomination for governor, he was accused of supporting a Catholic plot to steal tax money for parochial schools, was branded as the “‘Unitarian Atheist,’” and lost. There was clearly a preferred way to defend the loss of the Bible in public schools. Taft used legal precedent to explain that our country had become more diverse. But he also conceded that Protestantism should not receive any advantages over other denominations, jeopardizing the rest of his career.

Ohio’s Supreme Court ruling did not ban the Bible in public schools; it allowed districts to use or prohibit the Bible to their liking. For this reason, the Bible remained in some districts until the 1960s. But this ruling still made a nationwide impact. In 1875, President Grant proposed an amendment banning sectarian religious instruction in schools. The Blaine Amendment did not pass, but came close, representing the major shift the country was approaching. In Cincinnati, Evangelical students remained in the common schools, largely because they did not have alternative institutions to attend. The ruling in *Cincinnati v. Minor* was upheld, and religious instruction became a job for Sunday Schools.
The Ohio Bible Wars were a result of the increasingly heated debate between Catholic and Evangelicals. While Catholics remained frustrated with religious persecution, Evangelicals were worried that the Miller Amendment might ban the Bible in their classrooms. Technically, the Catholics won the Bible Wars. They could go to school without having to read the King James Bible. But when Taft tried to argue that Protestant Christianity was no longer the “correct” form of religion, he received major backlash. It was only acceptable, therefore, to support secularization if it was in the name of Protestantism.

The next chapter will explore how the United States Supreme Court formalized the separation of church and state in public schools. We can view Ohio’s experience as an intermediary step, linking what occurred in Massachusetts, where Protestants designed a system of education to control and assimilate Catholics, and the secularization we will see in the next chapter. The Bible Wars represent a gradual transition between the two poles. Evangelical Protestants allowed the school system to become more inclusive, but only because in the long run, it would benefit their religion. In this chapter, we’ve learned how the political clout of the Catholic community forced Protestants to consider Catholic children. But they were not interested in accommodating atheism. As we will see, this conflict emerges in the 20th century.
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Chapter 5: Taking God Out of the Classroom

Once Mississippi enacted its compulsory school law in 1918, every state in the union required school attendance. By the 20th century, going to school was a typical part of an American childhood. Each state had decided that all children needed to learn some knowledge, whether or not they had the means to afford a private education. Each state’s schools were being regulated by their respective state governments. Since we have established that our contemporary education system is also largely locally run, some might believe that there is nothing more to discuss, or no more centralization to occur, after the early 1900s.

But in the 1960s, the Supreme Court took on a number of cases affecting public schools across the country. Based on their rulings, the composition of the public schools and the public school curriculum changed drastically between the early and the mid twentieth century. This chapter will explore those key decisions, specifically focusing on Everson v. Board of Education, Engel v. Vitale, and Abington v. Schempp. We will then examine the reactions to these decisions, focusing on proposed legislation meant to amend the problem, and alternative school systems meant to circumvent it. This chapter will ultimately explain how the formerly Protestant school system became a symbol of alienation among religious Protestants.

Cementing The Wall of Separation

The phrase, “The Separation of Church and State” is not written anywhere in the United States Constitution, yet government officials are expected to abide by it. Colloquially, it is understood to mean that our state institutions cannot promote or restrict any particular religion. It protects our individual rights and ensures no one religious group is favored over another. We
understand this idea in this way because the Bill of Rights declares, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”² Within this line are two clauses, the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. Despite their seemingly straightforward intention, these phrases have brought a number of contradictory cases to court.

Before we can understand how the Supreme Court applies these clauses, we must understand their implications. The Free Exercise Clause, simply, allows people to practice their chosen religion. However, the First Amendment also prevents the government from “abridging the freedom of speech” of Americans.³ Unlike this clause, the Free Exercise Clause focuses on actions, not speech. By using the word “Exercise,” the framers implied not only do Americans have the right to verbally worship any deity, they also have the freedom to perform actions in support of that religion.⁴

With that in mind, suddenly the Free Exercise Clause becomes a bit more complicated. What if religious actions contradict the already-existing rules of American society? It is difficult to prioritize the rights of religious individuals over the laws meant to protect the majority of citizens. A number of examples demonstrate this conflict: “Could a city permit a church to serve wine in communion without a liquor license… What about a church claiming a right to hire its religious employees based on their religion, and thus to be exempt from the general civil rights law that prohibits discrimination in hiring?”⁵ While some cases might seem obvious -- yes, it is reasonable to expect a Catholic church to only hire Catholic Sunday School teachers -- others bring up complicated civil rights issues. In the latter cases, it is unsurprising that local, state, or even federal courts need to get involved.
By allowing individuals to express their own religion, the Free Exercise Clause provides Americans with more rights. In contrast, the Establishment Clause limits the rights of the federal government. By prohibiting an established religion, the Framers were likely avoiding an institution like the Church of England.\(^6\) The Church of England is Britain's established church, and has been for centuries. Being “established” means that the church is funded by the government and receives a portion of tax revenue. While our founders had no intention of creating a similar institution in the United States, they expressed no concerns over established churches on the state level. Some colonies had established churches at the time of the founding, and four of them maintained their established churches into the 19th century. Other states that did not have established churches nevertheless restricted government jobs to Protestants. New Jersey and New Hampshire, for instance, did not technically allow non-Protestants to hold office until the 1870s.\(^7\) It has been mentioned that the last state to disestablish its church was Massachusetts, in 1833. The founders likely supported some government aid towards religion, evidenced by their acceptance of state churches. But the Establishment Clause was meant to ensure that on a federal level, no denomination could receive more financial support than another.\(^8\)

150 years later, *Everson v. Board of Education* asked Americans to rethink the Establishment Clause. In the 1940s, Ewing, New Jersey, did not have a public high school, so students were sent to neighboring towns. The students had to take public buses, so Ewing reimbursed parents for the cost of bus fare.\(^9\) *Everson* began over a New Jersey law that allowed students attending both public schools and parochial schools to be reimbursed.\(^10\) In the fall of 1942, the Board of Education in Ewing paid families a total of $8,034.95 in reimbursements.
$357.74, about 4% of this total, went to families with children in parochial schools. The Vice President of the New Jersey Taxpayers’ Association, Arch R. Everson, felt these payments were unconstitutional under the Establishment Clause. At first Everson won the case, but it was overturned on appeal, because “the reimbursements… violated neither the New Jersey Constitution nor the United States Constitution.” Then Everson appealed to the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court took up this case in 1947, and the precedents it set would become integral in future decisions regarding religion and public education. The Supreme Court ruled, in a 5-4 decision, that this New Jersey law did not violate the Establishment Clause. However, at first glance, the language used in Justice Hugo Black’s majority opinion might lead us to think otherwise. Black, appointed to the court under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, used historical precedent to prove that Ewing was not violating the Constitution. He referenced Thomas Jefferson’s “wall of separation” by citing a letter Jefferson wrote to the Danbury Baptist Association in 1802, the document that first coined the phrase. Black believed that the First Amendment drew heavily from Jefferson’s “Virginia Bill for Religious Freedom,” a 1786 statute establishing religious freedom in Virginia. According to Black, “This Court has previously recognized that the provisions of the First Amendment, in the drafting and adoption of which Madison and Jefferson played such leading roles, had the same objective [as the Bill for Religious Freedom].” If a bill successfully establishing religious freedom in a state influenced the creation of our First Amendment, it was worthy of discussion.

Black provides a history lesson about the ideologies of Jefferson and Madison, and then describes the fight for religious freedom in 18th century Virginia. He then defines the Establishment Clause for the American public:
Neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another… No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion… In the words of Jefferson, the clause against establishment of religion by law was intended to erect ‘a wall of separation between Church and State.’

This concrete definition would become a reference point for many future Supreme Court Justices. Everson has been cited in over 80 Supreme Court cases since the 1940s. Jefferson’s “wall of separation” created distance between the federal government and individual citizens. But Black applied this reasoning to the states as well. This was done by incorporating the Establishment Clause into the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

The Fourteenth Amendment, passed after the Civil War, forbids states from “[depriving] any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.” This is the “Due Process Clause,” which ensures Americans receive fair and equal treatment under the law. It was adopted from the Fifth Amendment, which uses the exact same language, but directs it towards the federal government. When the Fourteenth Amendment applied due process to the states, it practiced “incorporation.” By incorporating certain clauses from the Bill of Rights, the Supreme Court can hold states accountable for what previously only applied to the federal government. Incorporation occurred throughout the 1900s, but Everson was the first time it was applied to the Establishment Clause. In other words, after Everson, states and the federal government were both expected to uphold the Establishment Clause. What was particularly impressive about Everson was that all justices actually agreed that the Establishment Clause could be incorporated. They just debated whether this case was a violation.
Black described a world where civil society and religion were completely separated. He suggests there should be no public support for any religion and believes the wall of separation “must be kept high and impregnable.”\(^{23}\) This is surprising when we remember that Black was arguing that the New Jersey township could reimburse parochial school students. But according to Black and his four concurring Justices, “New Jersey has not breached [the wall].”\(^{24}\) The majority based their decision on the “Child Benefit Theory,” an idea coined in *Cochran v. Louisiana State Board of Education* (1930). In *Cochran*, the court allowed public funds to be used to buy textbooks in parochial schools. They reasoned that the money did not help the parochial school or the sponsoring Catholic church; it helped the students.\(^{25}\)

The same logic was applied to *Everson*: “‘We must be careful, in protecting the citizens of New Jersey against state-established churches, to be sure that we do not inadvertently prohibit New Jersey from extending its general State law benefits to all its citizens without regard to their religious belief.’”\(^{26}\) Black was concerned that if the town did not provide public transportation to Catholic school students, Catholic schools would be put at a disadvantage, which would threaten the students’ right to practice Catholicism. This infringement could violate the Free Exercise Clause. Black argued that cutting off services from church schools like “Ordinary police and fire protection, connections for sewage disposal, public highways and sidewalks” would not be done, because it would threaten the existence of these schools. Buses should be treated the same way.\(^{27}\)

By utilizing the Child Benefit Theory, *Everson* framed children as independent from their schools’ religious affiliations. This was a child-centered court case, in which the central concern was ensuring children would receive the benefits of an education. *Everson* became the first case in a series of Supreme Court rulings on religion in public schools. Each of these cases prioritized
the right of the child to be in school over all else. The Court ruled that the United States
government had an obligation to protect the right to a free education - a right that is written
nowhere in our legal code, but has slowly been accepted as truth. By incorporating the Due
Process Clause, *Everson* called upon all states to ensure their institutions acted in line with the
United States Constitution, making all violating school districts vulnerable.

Earl Warren was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 1953 - 1969. The Warren
Court, known for its liberal rulings, extended the guarantees of the Due Process Clause to protect
a larger number of Americans. The Warren Court is often praised for the strides it made
towards egalitarianism. But the Court does not necessarily deserve that same credit for its rulings
on school prayer and Bible reading. When the Cold War was at its peak in the 1950s, limiting
school prayer or Bible reading would have been radical. In order to distance itself from the
atheist Soviets and emphasize their commitment to morality, the United States inserted religious
symbols throughout its society. Congress placed “In God We Trust” on our currency, added the
words “Under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance, and created a national day of prayer. But the
justices had the opportunity to take up cases regarding school prayer during the 1950s, and they
declined those cases. Instead they took up the following cases in the 1960s, after the hottest part
of the Cold War had subsided. So while we shouldn’t necessarily give all the credit to the
Supreme Court, we should note that even if individual Americans were less religious in the
1960s, it is probable that many Americans still viewed this country as a Christian nation.

In 1958, North Hempstead, Long Island, mandated that students read the “Statement on
Moral and Spiritual Training in the Schools” at the beginning of each school day. The New
York State Board of Regents (a division of New York’s education department) encouraged this
prayer, also called the Regents Prayer, to promote morality and spirituality in schools.\textsuperscript{34} Although this statement was not affiliated with any one denomination of Christianity, it clearly promoted adherence to a higher power: “‘Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our country.’”\textsuperscript{35} Like nonsectarian education in the 19th century, it promoted a general sense of virtue, without requiring specifics. Parents could excuse their children from reciting the prayer, but they expressed concerns that if they did so, fellow classmates might judge their children.\textsuperscript{36}

A group of five parents, who would be primarily identified by Steven Engel, claimed that mandating the Regents Prayer violated the Establishment Clause. The group of parents was diverse: Engel was Jewish, but the other plaintiffs were Unitarian, atheist, and members of the Society for Ethical Culture.\textsuperscript{37} The trial court and New York appellate court ruled against the plaintiffs, accepting that the prayer could be read each morning.\textsuperscript{38} But when the Supreme Court accepted \textit{Engel v. Vitale} in April of 1962, they immediately favored Engel. The Regents Prayer was unapologetically religious. In a statement publicizing the prayer, the Board wrote that it was “‘[essential]’” to “‘[teach] our children… that Almighty God is their creator, and that by Him they have been endowed with their inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.’”\textsuperscript{39} This prayer had a religious intent, and by mandating such an exercise, the Board was establishing Christianity, no matter how general the prayer may seem.\textsuperscript{40}

Two of the nine justices did not participate in the case, so the Court ruled 5-2 in favor of the plaintiffs.\textsuperscript{41} Justice Black once again wrote the majority opinion. According to Black, nondenominational religious practices were still religious practices, and were therefore unacceptable:
To those who may subscribe to the view that, because the Regents' official prayer is so brief and general there can be no danger to religious freedom in its governmental establishment, however, it may be appropriate to say in the words of James Madison, the author of the First Amendment: ‘Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other Religions, may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians, in exclusion of all other Sects?’

Even small violations of the Establishment Clause are dangerous. They set precedents that lead to larger violations. A seemingly harmless Christian prayer today could promote exclusion or intolerance tomorrow. Black’s logic completely undermines nonsectarian education. If even the smallest act of religion in the public schools violates the Constitution, reformers cannot suggest schools use the Bible to promote morality. The Regents Prayer is a more contemporary example of religious symbols being used to incur virtue and patriotism within students. But requiring the prayer - especially in a time period marked by liberalism and the expansion of civil rights - justified the interference of the Supreme Court.

*Engel* was so shocking because it explicitly accommodated people who weren’t religious at all. During the oral arguments, William Butler, the lawyer for Engel, was asked, “Is it your position that our public schools, by virtue of our Constitution, are frankly secular institutions?” Butler responded, “‘Absolutely yes… the public school system can never be used by the State for religious purposes.’” *Engel* implied that the federal government, not the states, could determine whether the wall of separation had been breached. The coverage *Engel* received reported the same message. *Newsweek* reported that *Engel* had decided that “fostering religion in the young is properly the job of church and home.” JFK suggested that anyone who disagreed with the ruling had an “‘easy remedy, and that is to pray ourselves… we can pray a good deal more at home, we can attend our churches with a good deal more fidelity.’”

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JFK’s comments should remind us of Stanley Matthews, the lawyer during the Cincinnati Bible Wars. Matthews had also encouraged religion be practiced privately. Not because it was no longer important, but because Matthews embodied the Calvinist belief that everyone should read the Bible and honor God independently. JFK, on the other hand, expresses the same belief, but because he felt every child, religious or not, must feel comfortable in a public school. Matthews and JFK make the same comments, but Matthews’ were made with a religious intent, while JFK’s reasoning was secular. In the 1960s, there was no longer a need for a religious justification to remove school prayer.

*Abington v. Schempp* is similar to *Engel* in many ways. It occurred a year after, and it similarly limited Christianity in public schools. *Schempp* combined two cases: one challenging a law in Maryland and the other challenging a law in Pennsylvania. Both laws required public schools to start each day by reading the Bible (without comment) or reciting the Lord’s Prayer.\(^{46}\) The Schempp family had three children in the Pennsylvania public schools, and even though they were Protestant, they felt the law violated the Constitution.\(^{47}\) Once again, *Schempp* was an easy case for the Supreme Court. Pennsylvania and Maryland school districts compelled students to read and recite sectarian material.\(^{48}\) The lawyers for the Abington township argued the practice was designed to discourage materialism and promote American institutions. But reading American historical documents could have achieved these goals; the Bible was unnecessary.\(^{49}\) Ruling 8-1, the Court set a precedent that would end compulsory Bible reading in public schools.

After the court decided *Engel*, the media claimed the justices were removing religion from the public schools. So in *Schempp*, the bench tried to avoid similar critiques. The majority opinion, written by Justice Tom Clark, explained the Court was not on a crusade against religion:
“The State may not establish a ‘religion of secularism’ in the sense of affirmatively opposing or showing hostility to religion… We do not agree, however, that this decision in any sense has that effect.”50 These decisions did not forbid prayer in schools, despite media portrayals of the sort. They forbade mandatory prayer and Bible reading; individual students could still practice their religions silently. In a concurrence, Justice Brennan wrote “‘To what extent, and at what points in the curriculum religious materials should be cited are matters which the courts ought to entrust very largely to the experienced officials who superintend our Nation's public schools.’”51 Religious materials, as long as they were not coercive, were allowed.

However, we should not diminish the transformative impact of these cases. Any future lawsuits regarding school prayer or Bible reading would be forced to comply with Engel and Schempp. School districts had to change their practices. The decisions implied that our country’s future was secular, and this produced a massive backlash. There were over 600 constitutional amendments proposed in response to Engel and Schempp.52 We will examine why this reaction was so substantial below. It is important to establish that in simply taking on these cases, the Supreme Court expanded the applicability of the Free Exercise and the Establishment Clauses, challenged nonsectarian education, and encouraged the development of private religious institutions. In ruling on such divisive cases, Engel and Schempp gave religious conservatives more opportunities to publicize their opposition and increase their time in the public eye. These opportunities came in two forms: legislative lobbying and the formation of Evangelical schools.

Backlash: Constitutional Amendments and State Noncompliance
After *Engel* was decided, politicians immediately called to overrule it. Two former presidents, Herbert Hoover and Dwight Eisenhower, denounced the decision, and Hoover even encouraged representatives to “‘at once submit an amendment to the Constitution.’”\(^{53}\) *Engel* actually received much more criticism than *Schempp*. It was because of the outrage following *Engel*, such as Hoover’s comments, that explains why Supreme Court justices were so careful to praise religious institutions in the *Schempp* decision. Interestingly however, while individual voices were much louder after *Engel*, more actions were taken to combat *Schempp*.\(^{54}\) It is possible this is because the ruling in Schempp felt much more personal. It is estimated that the Bible was read in 76% of Southern schools, for example.\(^{55}\) 26 states required or allowed Bible reading prior to *Schempp*.\(^{56}\) *Engel* represented the beginning of secularization in public schools, producing outrage. But the direct implications of *Schempp* encouraged states to actively defy the Court’s ruling.

We will examine the legislative backlash on two levels: federal and state. Once *Engel* was decided, the House unanimously voted to inscribe the motto “In God We Trust” behind the desk of the Speaker of the House. Democratic Congressman from Missouri, William Randall, explained that this was a “‘not so subtle way’” to express disapproval over the ruling.\(^{57}\) The most ambitious attempts to reverse the Court's decisions were proposed constitutional amendments. *Schempp* was decided in June of 1963. By May of 1964, over 145 amendments had been submitted to the House of Representatives that would have reversed *Schempp*.\(^{58}\) The most famous was the Becker amendment.

Congressman Frank Becker was a Catholic Republican from New York. Though Catholic, he valued the current religion in public schools and believed the Protestant teachings
were beneficial.\textsuperscript{59} The day after \textit{Engel} was decided, Becker proposed an amendment to reverse it. The Becker Amendment, as it came to be known, proposed: “Nothing in this Constitution shall be deemed to prohibit the offering, reading from, or listening to prayers or Biblical scriptures, if participation therein is on a voluntary basis, in any governmental or public school, institution or place.” It maintained that the Constitution could not prohibit “invoking the aid of God or a Supreme Being in any governmental or public document, proceeding, activity, ceremony, school, institution, or place, or upon any coinage, currency, or obligation of the United States.”\textsuperscript{60} The Becker Amendment granted the government permission to do exactly what the Supreme Court had just ruled was unconstitutional.

At first, Becker received tremendous support. One congressman estimated that of the letters he received regarding the amendment, they favored its adoption 200 - 1.\textsuperscript{61} But once the House began to debate the specifics of the amendment, they ran into the same problems that had forced the Supreme Court to rule in favor of the parents. They began to ask complex questions, like what the words “nonsectarian” or “nondenominational” actually meant in practice.\textsuperscript{62} As the hearings went on, the complexities became impossible to ignore. Support for the amendment waned. The Wall Street Journal reported that the discussions “‘trailed off to a whisper,’” and the amendment lost traction.\textsuperscript{63}

At the July 1962 Governor’s Conference, after \textit{Engel} was decided, all the governors (aside from New York’s, who abstained) voted to pass a resolution calling for “an amendment to the Constitution of the United States that will make clear… the acknowledgment by our nation and people of their faith in God and permit the free and voluntary participation in prayer in our public schools.”\textsuperscript{64} But while condemnation was national, calls to action were regional. Governor
Wallace of Alabama, also famous for his rejection of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which ruled that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, asked “the people of Alabama to be in defiance of such a ruling. . . . I want the State Board of Education to tell the whole world we are not going to abide by it.”65 In Kentucky, Wendell Butler, the State Superintendent, told school districts to “continue to read and pray until somebody stops you.”66

On the other hand, in 1967 it was found that approximately 93% of Northeastern school districts abided by the rulings. In Massachusetts, the Attorney General Edward Brooke instructed that: “‘No official of government of whatever station can… disobey the mandate of the Supreme Court.’”67 In the South, only 21% of school districts complied.68 In the 1964-5 academic year, it was found that 57% of Southern schools still conducted Bible readings, compared to 20% in New England and 12% in the Midwest.69 In Tennessee, seventy school districts continued to follow the 1915 Tennessee law that mandated recitation of Bible selections in school, even after *Schempp.*70 Many school districts did not establish an official policy specifically promoting school prayer or Bible reading, allowing them quietly continue practicing religion.71 Other districts found creative ways to continue practicing religion in their schools. For example, they would learn Biblical hymns and prayers in music class, or they would study the Bible as a piece of “literature,” without actually analyzing it as an English class typically would.72

In defying the Supreme Court’s order, states were reacting to a type of centralization that had not yet occurred in American educational history: federal centralization. The Supreme Court of the United States issued decisions that affected local school districts, representing an unprecedented level of regulation in education policy. Each state already had their education
systems and compulsory school laws in place by the 1960s. States all had functioning public school systems, centralized on a state level. But this was a step further.

In Virginia, mandatory school centralization during Reconstruction allowed individual districts to capitalize on new resources to reinforce segregation. School districts used the structured bureaucracy and the state financial aid to perpetuate a racial caste system. In the twentieth century, we can also see states, particularly Southern states, resisting federal centralization. But unlike Virginia, *Engel* and *Schempp* didn’t provide resources for school districts to stifle minority rights; in fact, *Engel* and *Schempp* didn’t provide any resources at all. By the 1960s, the local school districts were already organized; *Engel* and *Schempp* did not provide tools to help schools organize or expand operations. They did not give school districts more opportunities to subjugate non-Protestant students. They were purely regulatory cases, meant to liberate underrepresented religious populations from discrimination in public schools.

This does not mean, however, that the Supreme Court was not using centralization as a tool to influence and control the population. In prior chapters, we saw state governments centralizing their school systems to restrain a minority population. In the 1960s, the Supreme Court was purposefully trying to protect a minority population. But their actions still restricted the rights of religious conservatives advocating for the homogenous religious curriculum. The mid-twentieth century Court tried to encourage, as opposed to stifle, diversity. This type of centralization aimed to safeguard civil rights and increase school accessibility. We often associate “control” with suppression. But in the 1960s, the Supreme Court used their regulatory power to protect multiculturalism.
Prayer in public schools did decrease after *Engel* and *Schempp*. But for rulings that should have banned prayer and Bible reading, there was a significant amount of noncompliance. This might have happened for a number of reasons, apart from hostile reactions to the Court’s decisions. First, it was difficult to locate who in each district was meant to keep schools accountable. The court did not specify who should ensure the rulings were followed. If no member of a school’s administration had a strong desire to enforce the decisions, there was little incentive for one to do so. It was also difficult to challenge an individual violating school. Doing so would have required a lengthy and costly lawsuit, which, if the plaintiffs were in a religious community (and they likely would have been, if their community were ignoring these rulings), may lead to social ostracization. With no channels to discreetly challenge a violating school district, it was likely schools would continue practicing religion beyond the 1960s.

This defiance is surprising, when we remember that *Engel* and *Schempp* came right after Eisenhower’s decision to send in federal troops to enforce *Brown v. Board of Education*. One would think that after this demonstration of executive power, districts would fear the government’s interference. But Eisenhower’s reaction to *Brown* was an anomaly. In the mid-twentieth century, education was still a local system. Between 1862 and 1963, Congress had considering giving federal aid to schools 36 times. 36 times, Congress rejected the idea. Their opposition was rooted in the Tenth Amendment, which reserves all powers not in the Constitution -- including regulating schools -- for the states.

*Brown* ruled segregation unconstitutional in 1954, but the reaction from segregationist states was initially “muted.” With such strong views opposing integration, it is hard to believe these states would have been anything other than hostile. But states felt no need to comply. It is
likely authorities were relatively quiet because they felt they could still get away with segregated schools. The federal government only began to have a relevant role under LBJ, who passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965, two years after Schempp. ESEA was part of Johnson’s “War on Poverty,” and was necessary because it had become clear that Southern school systems were failing to desegregate public schools with any speed, further hindering Black students from receiving equal educational opportunities.79

Only beginning in the mid-1900s did it become commonplace for the federal government to regulate public schools. From the Individuals with Disabilities Act to Race to the Top, the federal government stopped shying away from creating education programs. Today, states often alter their schools to meet federal standards or receive financial benefits. But prior to the mid-1960s, these programs were uncommon. This likely was because people still thought of schools as local institutions, as they were for three hundred years. It also explains the initial quiet reactions to Brown, and the noncompliance with Engel and Schempp.

Similarly, the federal government’s role regarding religion has always been to preserve freedom, not impose regulations. This is a hands-off role, leading to little legislation surrounding religion, other than to ensure religious freedom. Race, on the other hand, had been a public policy issue for centuries. Abolishing slavery required a federal initiative. In order to even make slavery a race-based system, laws had to restrict rights based on race. When Eisenhower sent in troops to enforce Brown, he used the power of the executive branch to classify school integration as necessary and beneficial. Therefore, his action made states aware that if desegregation was not attempted, there would be consequences.
Because our government’s first priority when legislating on religion has always been to maintain freedom (although the definition of “religious freedom,” of course, has changed over time) it is understandable why people would not actually expect the government to interfere with people’s right to practice religion, even if they were practicing in a government-funded space. America was founded on religious freedom, not racial freedom. No matter how much they didn’t like the government legislating on racial issues (when Eisenhower wrote a brief directing everyone to follow Brown, Southern states argued that integration efforts should be left up to the lower courts\(^8\)), people understood why the government had the right to do so. But there was no precedent to convince Americans that the executive branch would bother following through on a centralized attempt to strip religion from the curriculum. Without this belief, why would states bother enforcing decisions they disagreed with?

Immediately after Engel and Shempp were passed, Congress rushed to condemn them. States openly ignored or rejected the rulings, finding ways to circumvent them. Their willingness to defy a Supreme Court ruling explains that people still thought of schools as local institutions, and felt no obligation to impose unpopular regulations upon them, even if the Supreme Court instructed they do so. For these decisions to be followed, all branches of government would have needed to collectively enforce them. Though Kennedy asked Americans to support the decisions of the Court and pray privately, he did not threaten action similar to Eisenhower’s under Brown. The substantial amount of noncompliance, particularly in Southern states, demonstrates the fear that surrounded losing religion in the classroom.

*Backlash: Evangelical Schools*
Conservative Christians felt that because of Engel and Vitale, public schools were no longer moral and virtuous spaces. Americans in the 1960s encountered rapid and radical cultural change, in no small part because of the decisions made by the Warren Court. After the turmoil and sacrifice of World War II, the American people found comfort in the traditionalism of the 1950s, placing value on the free market and traditional gender roles. Even the policies of the 1950s reflected this mindset. The American government spent the 1950s “fighting atheistic communism within and without national boundaries,” according to a Christianity Today article.\textsuperscript{81} The hostility towards the Soviet Union may have been primarily a conflict over economic ideology, but it was also a conflict of cultural values, namely, atheism.

But even before the 1960s began, the Warren Court began to dismantle those structures of traditionalism. In Brown, the Court disrupted the hierarchies that had encouraged middle class white dominance. The Court adopted the belief that every child deserved to reap the benefits of a public education. Of course, whether or not the Court’s egalitarian goals were actually accomplished is a debate for another time. However, the Court did at least attempt to promote these new values of the 1960s. A huge victory for civil rights advocates, Brown worried Evangelicals. Engel and Schempp were no different. All of these cases represented a Supreme Court that was distancing itself from America’s homogenous and racist past. Of course, Evangelicals wouldn’t have seen it that way. That same Christianity Today article went on to claim, “‘It is one of the ironies of the American government and its people to be fighting atheistic communism… while at the same time condoning a secularized educational system that banishes God from the universe he created.’”\textsuperscript{82} Evangelicals did not see these cases as progress, but believed they caused a rapid loss of society’s morals. And when people feel too much change
is occurring too quickly, they not only reject it; they resist it. They will create institutions that counter this change, trying to desperately preserve the values they had enjoyed.

By removing mandated prayer and Bible reading from the classroom, conservative Christians feared the Court was removing God from the classroom. The implications of this were huge. To many, the new limitations imposed on schools felt like an endorsement for all forms of expression besides religious ones. Taking God out of the classroom was not only a signal of moral decline in the schools, it was a representation of the secularizing society, a drastic difference from the virtuous country that had existed only a decade prior. Conservative Evangelicals felt that schools were now teaching a new religion: secular humanism.

Humanism regards the individual at the highest value. Humans are the most capable of decision making and have the greatest sense of logic and rationality. Therefore, humanists want to create institutions that foster the individual’s development, without drawing on concepts of the supernatural. Adding the word “Secular” to the philosophy emphasizes that humans should define “morality” for themselves. A higher power should not help us designate what is moral and immoral. People must decide that for themselves, and then put it into practice. Fundamentalist Pastor Tim LaHaye, a leading advocate for private Christian schools, blamed post-Engel and Schempp schools for indoctrinating students with secular humanism, which had “‘all the markings of a religion.’” It “monopolizes the minds of [the] nation’s 43 million public-school children.”

In our contemporary world, where a secular education has been deemed appropriate by many people in the public education system, it might be hard to understand why there was such a fear of secular humanism. Contemporary Americans would more likely grasp why a
nondenominational prayer would make marginalized religious groups uncomfortable. It forces them to subscribe to something they do not believe -- or if they choose not to read the prayer, to accept ostracization. But secular humanism did, in many ways, promote values oppositional to Christianity. Critics of secular humanism often pointed to a popular elementary social studies curriculum as a reason for their disapproval. In this curriculum, called, *Man: A Course of Study*, three questions are central: “What is human about human beings? How did they get that way? How can they be made more so?”

Even asking these questions is an affront to Conservative Evangelicals. The answer to these questions should be God. Humans are human because God them made them so, and wondering how to improve on God’s creation is fruitless -- and even blasphemous. Unlike secular humanists, Evangelical Christians did not trust humans to decide upon an appropriate standard of morality without any guidance from God. If schools utilized this curriculum, and others like it, every individual would form their own definitions of “just” and “unjust.” Not everyone would learn the most Godly and virtuous values, which were in the Bible. For instance, *Man: A Course of Study* taught natural selection: “In time, survival depended increasingly on the capacities of the tool-user and tool-maker not only his opposable forefinger and thumb, but the nervous system to go with them.” Humans dominated their natural habitats because their intelligence allowed them to utilize their physical strengths, not because God willed it. For Evangelicals, this gross distortion of human development was a sign of an immoral curriculum.

While the major concern of Evangelicals was this loss of morality, some also felt personally attacked by the school cases. Many Evangelicals concluded that the Court was forcing them out of mainstream American culture. We must remember that Evangelicals aimed to
evangelize non-Protestants. Public schools were reliable sources of conversion. If most teachers and administrators were proselytizing Protestant values, children would adopt Protestant beliefs. But by removing Christianity from schools, classrooms could no longer teach those correct beliefs. The core mission of the Evangelicals was now more difficult to achieve, and was discredited by the Supreme Court.

The Evangelical community, feeling attacked, began to distance themselves from the mainstream. They had determined that the Supreme Court was anti-Christian, and they began to embrace it. They painted a picture of Evangelicals versus the world. A 1964 Wall Street Journal editorial called the attempt to remove God from classrooms “The wildest kind of discrimination, not least against the children it would deprive of pleasure and spiritual profit.” Evangelicals cared about the development of children; it was the Court that no longer cared whether children learned the morals that their ancestors did. Not only was the Court secularizing American society, they were abandoning the traditions that built America. An Alabama politician nicely summarized the two main concerns of many Evangelicals: “They put the Negroes into the schools and now they have driven God out of them.” In that brief quote, we can understand the two largest impulses behind the growth of Evangelical Christian schools.

If the mainstream institutions no longer respected Evangelicals, Evangelicals may as well create their own schools. Private organizations began to establish private, nondenominational Christian schools. These did not begin in the 1960s: up to 150 of these schools were established between the 1920s and 1960s. But there was definitely a clear expansion in the mid-1960s. A 1964 meeting of the National Association of Christian Schools, an organization to establish Christian day schools, reported that in 1962, 21,000 students had been enrolled in these schools.
As of December 1964 there were 37,000. The total number of students in Southern private schools was only .9 percent of the school-age population in the 1953-54 school year. By 1971, this percentage ranged between 6% to 12%. This range is large, because often these schools refused to report enrollment statistics to accrediting agencies. Schools were reluctant to associate with the state in any way. By maintaining this attitude, they further cemented the “wall of separation” that had been built in *Everson*. They had at first rejected the wall, but soon embracing it became the only way they could continue teaching their faith.

It’s important for us to understand what these schools were teaching in order to grasp the Christian Day School movement. Generally these schools were nondenominational. Even the ones sponsored by churches generally welcomed any Protestant student. Like Mann’s common schools, these were not meant to inculcate denominational piety, but a reverence for scripture and Christ. These schools, echoing JFK and Matthews, also argued that God had meant for students to develop their religions at home. An education professor at Liberty University, an Evangelical university, wrote that “‘The fundamental reason for the formation of Christian schools is a biblical one… Ephesians 6 and other Scriptures instruct parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admiration of the Lord.’” Some Christian school organizations emphasized that ideally, students would be educated at home. In the guidebook, *How to Start a Christian School*, the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) listed five basic principles of Christian Schools, including “‘God has given to parents the responsibility of educating children.’” In some communities, this led to a rise in homeschooling rates. But the ACSI simply promised to work closely with the families as well the students.
The emphasis on families also explains how *Engel* and *Schempp* reinforced the “outsider status” of Evangelicals. The Supreme Court had began to regulate how people could practice their faith (Once again, it did not prevent students from practicing in school; it prevented schools from mandating religious exercises). In response, Christian schools emphasized that faith should be kept as private as it could. If homeschooling was not possible, a Christian Day School was an alternative. This was exactly what the justices in *Engel* and *Schempp* had called for - they hoped religion would be become a job for private institutions. In response to *Engel*, one columnist suggested that “Our Bible societies and colportage agencies should embark upon a massive attempt to get every American home to read the Bible and pray daily.”

The Supreme Court asked that if religious practices were coercive, they should not occur in public schools. Christian schools provided an alternative.

But perhaps an unexpected consequence of *Engel* and *Schempp* was the lack of supervision over Christian schools. Immune from federal or state interference, Evangelical schools were far from standardized. But one popular curriculum was the “Accelerated Christian Education” (ACE) model. Under ACE, each student sat at individual cubicles and worked through a series of workbooks. These schools produced their own workbooks and textbooks, including reprinting the 19th century McGuffey Readers. Every action these schools performed supported their God-given mission to educate children through a love for Jesus and the Bible. Perhaps most telling is the ACE logo, a “superimposed bald eagle clutching an American flag over an open Bible.” But the American flag used was not the flag of the 1960s, but the 1770s. The 13 stars of their flag represented the 13 colonies that had fought for independence. In using this particular flag, ACE underscored that a loss of Christianity was a
loss of American tradition. Christianity was an integral part of this country. Removing it from schools removed it from our history. These schools did the noble job of placing it back where it belonged - they were honoring United States culture.

However, we should also draw a second meaning from this flag: it longed for a time when America was homogenous. This brings us to consider the other impulse, other than *Engel* and *Schempp*, that encouraged religious schools. Many scholars agree that the most influential factor in the establishment of Christian schools was *Brown v. Board of Education*.\(^{108}\) In 1954, the Warren Court ruled that public schools could not be purposefully segregated. (The addition of “purposefully” is important - because of school screening and housing segregation, as well as a myriad of other factors, schools are actually more segregated today than the late 1960s).\(^{109}\)

Many Christian schools were segregationist academies that only permitted white students. Jerry Falwell, a fundamentalist pastor, founded the all-white Lynchburg Christian Academy in 1967. That was also the year schools in Lynchburg, Virginia were required to desegregate.\(^{110}\) Of course, schools rejected accusations of racism. According to one Christian educator, “‘The racist stronghold claiming also to be a 'Christian school' is, by definition, an imposter, a fraud.’”\(^{111}\) Whether or not these schools had policies refusing Black students, did accept Black students in small numbers, or utilized practices that placed de facto restrictions on Black enrollment, like refusing to provide financial aid, most private Christian schools continued to be predominately white into the late 1980s. In 1987, only 4% of students in Christian schools were minorities. Nationwide, minorities made up 26.7% of students.”\(^{112}\)

Because Christian schools were largely free from regulation, they could admit or deny students as they pleased. Why, then, would segregationist schools bother to cloak themselves
under the guise of a Christian school? By the mid-nineteenth century, being blatantly racist could be politically and socially damaging. Of course, the Civil Rights Movement had -- and has -- a ways to go to achieve social equality. But the Jim Crow Era was over. Many people did not approve of blunt racial hostility. But by disguising themselves as Christians, motivated by a loss of patriotism and morality, these schools were just protecting their religion and culture.

The patriotic picture of Christian schools served them well; Christian schools thrived in the 1980s. In the 1980-81 school year, there were 1482 schools educating 289,001 students. By 1992, students in Christian schools made up 20% of the private school population and 2-3% of the national population. This was staggering, compared to the 37,000 students these schools had served in 1964. This growth is largely due to the rise of the “Christian Right.” This group deserves much more research and discussion than what is provided, but they are an important element of this cultural shift. We can understand them as Evangelical and Fundamentalist Christians reacting against the social movements of the late 20th century, like abortion or gay rights. These leaders became involved in politics to combat the progress the left had achieved. They promoted legislation that allowed them to maintain their religious lifestyle, such as ensuring parents could review textbooks before they were circulated to public schools. As the movement grew, it shifted from the fringes of society to the political mainstream. It is widely agreed upon that this group, which also became known as the “moral majority,” is largely responsible for the election of President Ronald Reagan.

*Engel and Schempp* were only two of the factors that led to the growth of this coalition. After the Soviets successfully launched *Sputnik* into space, the public schools changed their science textbooks to make sure they could compete with the Soviet education system. These
textbooks taught evolution as the sole theory of human development. Opponents of sex-ed spread unverified stories of teachers “stripping naked in the classroom and teachers herding seven-year-olds into dark closets to ‘feel’ each other.” Conservative Evangelicals were shocked by the changes that were occurring in the public school system, explaining the rise in alternative Christian schools.

These additions to the curriculum can explain why Christian schools grew so quickly, but their initial founding was a reaction to cases like Brown, Engel, and Schempp. These cases did not disappear from people's’ memories, even into the 1970s and 1980s. People argued that the immorality in the school system could be traced back to the loss of religion. If God had been kept in the classroom, children could have rejected immoral lessons like evolution or sex-ed. A letter to President Carter explained that “The main reason we favour private Christian schools is that, by and large, the public schools do not adhere to, or even set, acceptable moral and/or academic standards for our children.” Into the latter half of the 20th century, Christian schools remained the only acceptable place for children to learn proper, Protestant, morals.

Protestants felt ostracized from the public school system because of the federal centralization that occurred in the 1960s. Of course, the irony of this trend is that centralizing the public school system was originally a Protestant movement. The most religious Protestants in Massachusetts created the first school boards in the United States. The Evangelical coalition spread common schools in the Northeast to assimilate Catholics. And Evangelical missionaries transplanted these schools to Western communities. Schools and Protestantism went hand in hand. They were so connected that their schools were hostile to Catholic students, who became
forced to create their own parochial school system. And while Protestants were immensely successful in expanding free schools and convincing Americans that American children should have access to an education, the 1960s centralization went a bit too far. Driven by a motivation to protect all children's rights, the Supreme Court regulated the public school curriculum, the first interference of the sort. The schools that originally isolated Catholics now isolated Protestants. They had to escape the school system that they had created, over fear it became too secular.

A 1952 article in *King's Business*, a Protestant publication, commended the “‘Evangelical Christians [who] traditionally have been vigorous and loyal supporters of the public school system’ ”because “‘the children of foreign-born have been received without antagonism [and] have been educated in the American way of thinking.’” But circumstances changed when the school system’s leadership was “‘[infiltrated] by radicals, fellow travelers, so-called liberals’” who were “‘antagonistic to Christian doctrine and life.’” The irony noted above was not overlooked by the Protestant community. It was understood, and the fact that the system they had created could no longer accommodate them contributed to their anger.

Politicians used the government to try and reverse the school prayer decisions, but individuals took matters into their own hands. Acting on the belief that the public schools had become corrupt, their independent Christian schools were portrayed as an ideal alternative: they were committed to children’s moral development. A number of factors encouraged the growth of these schools throughout the latter half of the 20th century, all of which contributed to the rise of the “Religious Right.” However, Christian schools can root themselves in the integration brought on by *Brown* and the moral degradation brought on by *Engel* and *Schempp.* In creating,
attending, and expanding Christian schools, Evangelicals highlighted how a system that was originally created to serve their communities had suddenly pushed them out.
Endnotes: Chapter 5

3. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 24.
8. Ibid., 134
11. Ibid., 29.
12. Ibid.
17. Drakeman, "‘Everson V. Board of Education,’” 120.
20. Ibid.
23. "Everson V. Board of Education of the Township of Ewing."
24. Ibid.
25. Flowers, That Godless Court, 64.
26. "Everson V. Board of Education of the Township of Ewing."
29. Ibid., 135.
31. Ibid., 541.
32. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., 105.
38. Ibid., 106.
39. Ibid., 104.
45. Ibid., 526.
47. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
55. Ibid., 486.
59. Beiser and Beaney, “Prayer and Politics,” 494,
60. Ibid., 494 - 495.
61. Ibid., 495.
63. Ibid., 524.
64. Beiser and Beaney, “Prayer and Politics,” 481.
65. Ibid., 486.
66. Ibid., 487.
67. Ibid., 489.
72. Ibid, 488.
75. Ibid., 117.
78. Ibid., 62.
82. Ibid.
85. Ibid., 1155.
86. Coleman, “"Give Me My Child Back,” 197.
89. Ibid., 11.
98. Ibid., 7.
106. Ibid., 67.
107. Laats, "Forging a Fundamentalist ‘One Best System,’" 72.
115. Ibid., 249.
116. Ibid., 244; 249.
117. Laats, "Forging a Fundamentalist ‘One Best System,’" 60.
121. Ibid., 126.
Conclusion

This thesis has examined the impacts of centralized school systems on underrepresented populations, particularly Catholic immigrants in Massachusetts and Ohio, recently freed slaves in Virginia, and religious minorities in the wake of Engel and Schempp. The American public education system today allows each state to determine a number of important education policies, including the curriculum, budget, and teacher licensure requirements. Given how important education is in a republic that allows people to determine their own leaders, it is, perhaps, surprising how little our federal government helps decide what knowledge will be imparted to our future business leaders, politicians, parents and teachers. This is the result of 400 years of thinking about education as a primarily local system.

Educating one’s children was originally a job for parents, the church, or, if people had the money, a private tutor. This was done for a number of reasons, both practical and religious. This practice changed when states, beginning with Massachusetts, began to realize that such an unstandardized education system was risky. They believed it could create an ungodly and immoral generation, ignorant to the best ways to interpret the Bible. The intensity of their piety was enough to mandate towns take action on education, creating schools where the population demanded it.

Today, it is hard to relate to this religious impulse, but we can relate to the fear of a completely unstandardized system. For any society to function, individuals must agree on some values on which to build their communities. For example, Americans agree that the United States government gets its authority to rule from the people, not from God. We all have a similar understanding of what “justice” and “freedom” mean. Only once basic beliefs such as these are
accepted can people build a sustainable government. If every child in a town was homeschooled, it would be impossible to ensure children learned any of the same knowledge. Hundreds of families would not only teach different strategies to solve a math problem; they would impart different ways to interpret the world, resulting in dramatically different sets of values. This scenario seems unimaginable, yet we do support a education system that allows each state to determine their own curriculum. This also, albeit on a much smaller scale, creates a variety of standards for American students. There are wide gaps between states like Massachusetts, with the highest performing public schools, and Louisiana, with the lowest.¹

People are incredibly passionate over the values that are taught in their schools, and the 19th century was no different: families did not want to pay for schools that they believed were teaching children harmful values. People feel ownership over their local public schools. One reason for this is that parents have understandably high expectations for a system that spends significant amounts of time educating their children. But another reason is that our public schools would not exist without taxation. Since town residents have been funding free schools, a precedent started in the 1600s, people have felt entitled to a voice in the decision making processes. When contemporary Americans pay taxes for highways and roads, we expect the roads will be paved. When we pay taxes for public schools, we expect those public schools will reflect our interests and priorities. This mindset has remained the same for centuries.

What has changed, of course, are what those interests and priorities are. Our demography is no longer primarily English Calvinist. America is known for its diversity: whether that is racial, ethnic, or religious. The American government oversees so much more territory, even expanding beyond the North American continent, than what we claimed in 1776. These centuries
of development and expansion have allowed for more progressive policies, from the abolition of slavery to the granting of women’s suffrage. People are far more accepting of different social identities today than even just 50 years ago. Our modern school system tries to reflect that diversity. And though they might not always successfully do so, they often receive backlash and media attention when they fail to meet acceptable standards.

Public schools were built for the poor, immigrants, and groups of people who couldn’t access existing forms of education. But the architects of our schools quickly realized that if the government expected everyone to fund a public school system, the schools needed widespread appeal. So today, public schools are built with the expectation that most American children will attend. How is it possible for millions of families in a state to agree upon a list of facts and a set of values their children must learn? The short answer is that it’s not. That’s why these debates are so fiercely contested. But despite the inevitable arguments, we have, as a society, developed a set of values today that differ markedly from some of the values of our country’s past: slavery was a horrific and racist institution, women’s suffrage was a brave campaign and a victory for our country, and Japanese internment camps are a stain on our history.

How a country determines its values is rooted in the historical context -- widely agreed upon beliefs today could have easily been rejected 200 years ago -- but also in geography. Geography, including things like topography and climate, influence the economy, and economic systems have always been both the result and the source of communal values. In such a massive country, regional differences are bound to create different views of the best value systems. This is true in the 1800s, where education was not nearly as well regarded in the South as in the North, as well as today. In his book, “American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional
Cultures of North America,” Colin Woodward identified 11 different regions of America with drastically different cultures - in 2013. According to his research, education is still held in the highest regard in the “Yankeedom” region of the country - the Midwest and the Northeast.³

This is why it is so difficult to generalize the history of the education systems in our country. Because each one of our colonies was settled independently, by a different group of European immigrants influenced by different ideas, each colony was formed with a different culture. Virginians, because of the geography, economic system, and dominant religion, were much more attached to individualism. Massachusetts towns, largely because of their religious affiliation, created a more collectivist culture. We cannot say one factor encouraged or stifled the centralization of all American education systems.

But we can note that many of our state education systems expanded because schools capitalized on a vulnerable segment of our population. Chapters 2 through 5 have each explored one of these groups: Irish immigrants, Blacks, German immigrants, and all religious minorities. Each of these groups were vulnerable for a different reason, and some - as we saw with Germans in Ohio - were actually far less vulnerable than the native population had expected. Schools aimed to manage these groups. For Irish and German immigrants, “management” meant assimilating to Protestantism. For Blacks in Virginia, “management” meant stifling opportunities for social mobility. But as we began to see in Ohio, and as we saw culminate with the decisions of the Warren Court, eventually that “management” meant encouraging more egalitarian values, similar to those we admire today.

In the mid-20th century, beginning with Brown, the federal government adopted a larger role in our public education system. The Supreme Court began to enforce education policy that
affected every state in the union. No longer could the best schools be reserved for white students.  
*Brown* was not the first time the Court issued decisions regarding public education, but it did reflect a much larger cultural shift that many Americans feared. *Engel* and *Schempp* continued this trend -- all students, no matter their religion, had the right to feel comfortable in a publically funded, government-run school. These cases were signs that progressivism was slowly seeping into this culture. Free schools were originally meant to provide an education to the most disadvantaged students. But the white Protestant majority had taken advantage of this resource. In the mid-20th century, the Supreme Court tried to amend this.

Throughout the past 60 years, our schools have become even more progressive. President Clinton passed the Individuals with Disabilities Act, districts have created dual-language schools, and Congress has provided more funding for English Language Learners who recently arrived in this country. All of our centralized systems of education task state officials with creating curriculums that reflect diverse ideas from a range of perspectives. Whether or not states live up to this goal is debatable, and certainly not uniform across all 50 states. But hypothetically, our modern system of centralization should reinforce multiculturalism in our schools. This certainly has not been the goal for the entire history of our republic. People longed for schools to indoctrinate students with discriminatory and offensive ideas. And while it is important to reflect on the progress we’ve made, it’s also important to understand that 19th century school leaders thought they were doing immense good. They truly believed that promoting one value system and disparaging all others, or maintaining a racial hierarchy, was the best way to educate American children.
Each case study shows us how state -- or, in the case of chapter 5, federal -- governments can use their authority over public schools to reinforce, or dismantle, a system of religious or racial hierarchy. Massachusetts and Ohio tried to stifle the rights of Catholics, the former with more success. Virginia successfully created unequal, segregated schools. But the Supreme Court began to combat this history in the mid-20th century. This precedent has been set, allowing the federal government to interfere in public schools to defend the rights of all students. It has an obligation to help build education systems that, adjusted for a secular society, still reflect their original intent: to provide opportunities that allow all children to fulfil their maximum potential.
Endnotes: Conclusion

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