ABSTRACT

NICK ROLADER
INEQUALITY, OPPRESSION, AND PESSIMISM: THE GOALS OF EARLY AMERICAN EDUCATION?
(Under the Direction of DR. STEPHEN MIHM)

After the successful conclusion to the American Revolution, the architects of the new nation faced a host of pressing issues to solve and disparate ideologies to reconcile. While working to safeguard their political present, these men also looked to ensure the security and longevity of the nation by instituting educational reforms. Historians of education have studied the unique integration of "republicanism" into these plans, but little attention has been given to how these proposals fundamentally contradict the ideals of the revolution and even, perhaps, republicanism itself. Thus, while the men we look to as the "Founding Fathers" of the United States make the ideals of equality, liberty, or progressivism central to their educational plans, many of their proposals hamper the cultivation of such ideas or draw into question the extent of their faith in these beliefs.

This thesis examines various ideas on education of American thinkers in the post-revolutionary era, taking note of plans and beliefs that run counter to the larger spirit of the Revolution's ideology. The contradictions reveal that the American Founders may have had a more conservative definition of equality, liberty, and other republican ideas than we perceive today. In addition, although the American Revolution is popularly celebrated for its successful creation of a progressive society through a fusion of diverse ideologies, the incongruity between aspects of education proposals and the new nation demonstrate that the struggle to adapt idealism to reality forced a series of pragmatic sacrifices on the part of the Founding Fathers.

INDEX WORDS: Education, American Revolution, Republicanism, Diffusion of knowledge, Equality, Liberty, Progressive, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, Samuel Harrison Smith

INEQUALITY, OPPRESSION, AND PESSIMISM:

THE GOALS OF EARLY AMERICAN EDUCATION?

by

NICK ROLADER

A Thesis Submitted to the Honors Council of the University of Georgia

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

BACHELOR OF ARTS

in HISTORY

with HONORS

Athens, Georgia

2009

INEQUALITY, OPPRESSION, AND PESSIMISM:

THE GOALS OF EARLY AMERICAN EDUCATION?

by

NICK ROLADER

Approved:

Dr. Stephen Mihm_____ 05/05/09_____
Dr. Stephen Mihm Date
Faculty Research Mentor

Approved:

Dr. Ari Levine_____ 05/05/09_____
Dr. Ari Levine Date
Reader

Approved:

Dr. David S. Williams_____ 05/08/09_____
Dr. David S. Williams Date
Director, Honors Program, Foundation Fellows and
Center for Undergraduate Research Opportunities

Approved:

Dr. Pamela B. Kleiber_____ 05/08/09_____
Dr. Pamela B. Kleiber Date
Associate Director, Honors Program and
Center for Undergraduate Research Opportunities

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the inspiration and guidance of Dr. Stephen Mihm. Thanks also go to all who offered guidance and support throughout the process, to every history teacher who ever encouraged me, and to the historians whose cynical interpretations of the American Revolution inspired my own.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"The education of youth is, in all governments, an object of the first consequence. The impressions received in early life usually form the characters of individuals, a union of which forms the general character of man."[1] So begins a tract by Noah Webster on how best to educate the children of the newly independent United States. While the Founding Fathers had many concerns to occupy their time in creating a nation based on a wholly new system of government, many, like Webster, recognized the importance of adapting an education system to the needs of their unique society. A struggle to conceptualize this society permeated all such discussions on forming new institutions, as numerous men put forth their own opinions, many of them drawn from the eddies of Enlightenment thought. Historical debate continues today over this complex web of ideologies and the radicalism of the finished product, but despite such a diversity of both historical and modern opinions, it is hard to ignore certain commonalities. Though specific ideas on the structure and character of a United States of America differed widely, collective works like the founding documents suggest a somewhat shared commitment to individual rights, equally guaranteed to all ("all" typically meaning some proportion of white men) and to a spirit that encouraged society to always improve upon itself. Many aspirations for education accordingly incorporated the continued development of these republican characteristics.

With all aspects of building the new country, the Founding Fathers sought inspiration primarily from various Enlightenment thinkers, so much so that the period of colonial intellectual history that gave rise to the American Revolution and its resultant ideas is sometimes called the

"American Enlightenment." Precisely defining the European Enlightenment is beyond the scope of this paper, but for the purposes of understanding the intellectual origins of American republicanism and educational doctrine, it is important to note its overarching emphasis of reason as the basis for authority and the ideas that subsequently developed from this reliance on rationalism. John Locke's belief in a *tabula rasa* at birth, a "blank slate" that has no pre-existing ideas, redefined conceptions of natural order, inspiring American thinkers to create a new formulation of natural rights. Other of his writings advanced the idea that government was based not on absolute rule or a "divine right of kings," but on the consent of the governed. Jean-Jacques Rousseau furthered this idea of Locke, arguing that a "social contract" should define legitimate government, and his work *Emile* specifically dealt with education's role in such a society. Baron de Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* showed how the separation of powers in government could ensure the protection of liberties brought on by this new definition of society. The ideas of these three men were not alone in the intellectual origins of the American Revolution, but their work reflected many of the most prominent themes of the Enlightenment.

The revolutionaries' ideas also came from sources other than the Enlightenment. The city-states of ancient Greece and republican Rome inspired the construction of the United States. This reverence for Classical thinkers like Plato or Aristotle and a general affection for the culture of the time was often times more ebullient in early American thought than the spirit of the Enlightenment. The failures and collapse of Classical society also drove the Founding Fathers to use Enlightenment thought in designing a more perfect republican system. Another important component of American thought came from Puritanism. The core of Puritanism largely clashed with rational thought, but stripped of its theocratic and Calvinist core, the system's devotion to intellectualism, ironic applications of science, and spirit of exceptionalism penetrated American

Revolutionary thought, especially through the efforts made by descendants of early Puritanism, like John Adams. The ideological origins of the American Enlightenment do not end here, but these are the principles that were most evident in republican thought of the time.[2]

Numerous works extend the examination of this evolution of American republicanism into the realm of education. Frederick Rudolph calls the study of his selections of eight early educational proposals "as essential and useful as the familiar economic, political, and artistic documents in any effort to understand the American past."[3] Robert Heslep recognizes Jefferson's educational proposals are a reflection of the "economic, political, social, and cultural factors of the milieu in which [he] lived."[4] Countless contemporaries of Noah Webster echoed variations of the importance he gave to education, and much historiography has accordingly focused on such sentiments. In his comprehensive *American Education* series, Lawrence Cremin claims, "No theme was so universally articulated during the early decades of the Republic as the need of a self-governing people for universal education."[5] Gordon Wood's *Radicalism of the American Revolution* examines the nature of the new society ushered in by the revolution. In emphasizing the American commitment to Lockean ideas, Wood states that the Founding Father's "preoccupation" with education include not just an interest in schools, but "a variety of means to create new attitudes" that included everything from "the histories they wrote and the advice manuals they read to the icons they created–including Jefferson's Virginia capitol, John Trumbull's paintings, and the design of the Great Seal."[6] There thus was no question of the need and want for education, but the task of incorporating the new, still-evolving, concept of republicanism was not so simple.

The resultant myriad of education proposals have thus provoked much historical analysis of the specific aspects of republicanism the plans hoped to teach and the various methods that

would be used. Thomas and Lorraine Smith Pangle's *Learning of Liberty* offers one of the most complete analyses, examining both the Enlightenment principles that the Founding Fathers incorporated into their plans and the variety of systems proposed by the leading education advocates of the day.[7] The work of historians like Cremin tends to focus more on the successes and failures in implementing these plans, while Daniel Walker Howe, studies both proposal and practice, calling the "discrepancy between the founders' grand plans for education and the paucity of their actual accomplishments" a "striking anomaly" in American history.[8] Other historians too have observed what Howe terms the "strange passivity" on the part of the Founders and have proposed many possible causes for the large-scale failure of education plans in the early republic. Cremin suggests competing political philosophies created a roadblock for bills on education, and Howe concurs, adding that other grand schemes of the Founding Fathers (like universal emancipation) also had little success, possibly because of a hope that future generations might better handle controversial issues. These issues no doubt made complete fulfillment of republican goals impossible, but historians have often overlooked a critical problem with many early plans for education.

More surprising than an inconsistency between the words and deeds of the Founding Founders in regard to education are contradictions between their educational philosophy and some of their commonly agreed upon principles of republicanism. For example, how can Thomas Jefferson simultaneously have claimed that "all men are created equal, with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and yet at the same time support the ascendancy of a "natural aristocracy" to lead the country? With the mass and variety of literature compiled by some of these men, it is not surprising to find an occasional belief that contradicts what one may have written elsewhere. On the other hand, contradictions of

a fundamentally incompatible nature, like the one noted above, must be said to have some significance.

Educational historiography has not always picked up on these contradictions, and even when acknowledged, historians often do not endeavor to offer a comprehensive explanation. Cremin largely ignores contradictions altogether, and Howe notes inconsistency only indirectly in attributing the failure to execute plans for a national university to the reluctance of Congress to express implied powers. As discussed below, the idea of a national university violated more than the concept of enumerated powers. He only briefly discusses education in the early United States in his *The Good Citizen*, but Michael Schudson does wonder "how to reconcile the rhetorical praise of the diffusion of information with the willingness in practice to limit or oppose the spread of knowledge."[9] He mostly strives to show differences between modern sanctification of the Founding Father's dedication to free speech and the limitations that were in actually imposed. Understanding how popular perception of key ideals is indeed one way to explain some apparent contradictions, but Schudson offers a cynical view, musing that the Founders may have been simple hypocrites, or at the very least, intended to create "obedient, not critical" Americans.[10] Order, no doubt, appealed to education advocates, but obedience would be antagonistic to men who fought a war to overthrow established notions of hierarchy.

Other historians have offered broader explanations for contradictory ideas but still do not explore the greater significance of their ideas. Robert Heslep juxtaposes Jefferson's commitment to free inquiry at the University of Virginia with his insistence on a particular curriculum to a law professor, and suggests that this contradiction arises from "expediency" on Jefferson's part.[11] Heslep nearly stumbles upon an important concept, but circumscribes Jefferson's expediency as an attempt at enforcing personal political doctrine within Virginia at the expense

of his greater ideals. David Hawke, a biographer of Benjamin Rush, shows that Rush's language, and that of other Founding Fathers, suggests a need for not just unity, but conformity of opinions and morals. Hawke cites David Tyack to spell out this paradox. Tyack does so aptly, describing the difficulty in freeing the United States "from one centralized authority" and then needing "to create a new unity, a common citizenship and culture, and an appeal to a common future." Tyack and Hawke clearly recognize the problematic nature of finding in education "a balance between order and liberty, for the proper transaction between the individual and society," but then diverge in analyzing the implications of this tension. Tyack concludes that this conflict exhibited itself in the classroom as "the injunction to teachers to train students to think critically but to be patriotic above all," which, while capturing the spirit of the situation faced by the Founding Fathers, does not adequately encompass the entire reason for contradictions. Hawke then resumes his narrative and bizarrely claims that, "If Benjamin Rush is to be censured for the views he promoted [over] months and years, it is only because he wrote more often and fully than perhaps any American of the day on education."[12] A good defense of contradictions in general, yes, but not in context of Tyack's argument.

Finally, Pangle and Pangle come most close to an explanation for the wide range of ostensible hypocrisy in the Founding Fathers' theories on education. They do well in extricating subtleties of Enlightenment thought to analyze the construction of education theories and in recognizing the "ambiguities of republicanism and of human nature" that affect our judgment, just as they did for early Americans too.[13] They cite examples of men whose writings contradicted their principal beliefs within the space of a few sentences, and they point out that vocal cries for uniformity in education called for "centralization…impossibly alien to the spirit of American republicanism."[14] Their shortcoming is not in their recognition of fundamental

contradictions within education proposals, but in their dismissal of its significance. In describing the uniquely American aspects of educational thought, the authors stress the "meaning and centrality of enlightenment" in education. By this, Pangle and Pangle mean the teaching of European Enlightenment concepts like natural rights or the "pursuit of happiness," as opposed to classical republican values of "piety, obedience to law, and farsighted prudence or judgment." They acknowledge the "question of how to cultivate" such qualities "judged essential for self-government…remained a lively and troubling issue among the Founders," but they "take issue" with scholars who devalue the novelty of this idea of spreading enlightenment through education.[15] Thus, although they discover and contextualize a number of problematic inconsistencies in the Founding Fathers' thoughts on education, Pangle and Pangle choose not to explore what this overall pattern might mean. This is especially noteworthy when they repeatedly emphasize the importance of principles like egalitarianism and an innately progressive, capable populace to the American Founders without examining cases of educational opinion where these ideas did not seem to hold true.

This thesis, in contrast, delves further into the apparent self-contradictions on the part of the Founders when discussing education. The object of this thesis is not, however, to present the thoughts of those whose views on education wholly dissented from the majority or from the systems that came into practice. More significant is an examination of men whose educational doctrines contradict either their own thoughts or popular opinion on the principles most vital to the meaning and survival of the American republic. On a basic level, these self-contradictory remarks may call into question widely held assumptions about the sincerity of these men's ideology. On a more insightful level, the discord between many of the Founding Fathers' thoughts on education and the republican ideals by which they had established the country reveal

the extent to which our conceptions of republican ideals have evolved and demonstrate the challenge of applying the ideas of the American Revolution to reality.

CHAPTER 2

EQUALITY

"State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, and often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules."[16]

"Education…controls, by the force of habit, any innate obliquities in our moral organization….Education…engrafts a new man on the native stock, and improves what in his nature was vicious and perverse into qualities of virtue and social worth."[17]

At first glance, it appears that two men of the post-Revolutionary era had strikingly offsetting views on the innate virtue of men and the role of education in shaping such virtue. Surprisingly, however, Thomas Jefferson penned both of these lines. Much has been written on his glaring contradictions when it came to issues like slavery, but little has been made of his inconsistent views on education. He is often praised as one of the most progressive voices on early education,[18] and scholarship that does note his inconsistencies excuse most of them as oversight or plans specific to Virginian society.[19] Detailed studies of his views on equality and on slavery have shown that it would be unfair to paint Jefferson as a simple hypocrite, so why might not similar comparisons of his egalitarian beliefs to his ideas for American education reveal more about his complex character?[20] As will be shown, this does turn out to be the case, with contemporary society and a respect for practicality influencing Jefferson's puzzling decisions concerning both slavery and education. Since historical work on Jefferson's contradictions regarding slavery have yielded insight into his character and the society in which

he lived, similar work examining the contradictions of his generation between ideas for promoting education and republican principles unveils equally valuable information.

Jefferson's comparison of a ploughman to a professor began this section, because egalitarianism is one of the most celebrated tenets of the American Revolution, especially for opening opportunities of education. Pangle and Pangle argue that the Founding Fathers sought to solidify the growing sense of egalitarianism that came about through the Revolution through the promotion of education for all, including the poorest of Americans.[21] And indeed, many of the Founders held high regard for education's ability to level social classes. "I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people," wrote Jefferson to a friend. "The tax which will be paid for this purpose is not more than the thousandth part of what will be paid to kings, priests and nobles who will rise up among us if we leave the people in ignorance."[22] Jefferson clearly thought education to be the best safeguard against the development of aristocracy in the United States, as did Noah Webster, who claimed that, "In monarchies education should be partial and adapted to the rank of each class of citizens….In a republican government, the whole power of education is required."[23] But in reality, how true were the Founding Fathers' systems of education to their other political and philosophical beliefs? What can we learn about the intellectual history of equality, as it may have evolved from this era?

There is no better starting place to examine these views on equality and education than with the quotes by Thomas Jefferson that opened this chapter. In his comparison of a ploughman and a professor's morals, Jefferson implied two key components about his belief in the relationship between equality and education: all men are born with an equal judgment of morality, and education does not improve this sense of morality, but instead pollutes it. This

statement seems straightforward enough in positing that all men have the same "moral compass" that is not a product of select birth or education. In an abstract letter to an Italian-English painter, Jefferson further delineates his view on morality's place in humans. He writes to the painter, Mrs. Maria Cosway, telling her of an internal debate between his heart and his head. He lapses into a direct discussion with his head, representing reason, and states that, "Morals were too essential to the happiness of man to be risked on the incertain combinations of the head. She laid their foundation therefore in sentiment, not in science. That she gave to all, as necessary to all."[24] Many of Jefferson's writings therefore indicate that he truly believed in a universal morality, a quality that could not be taught in schools.

Yet, Jefferson at other times seemed to envision a society of uncouth citizens governed by those that had been taught proper morals and virtues. In his famous *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he writes at length on the nature of children and their ability to learn. At their youngest stage of education, he hopes that the "first elements of morality too may be instilled into their minds," a lesson that would seem unnecessary if all citizens' morals are equal.[25] Yet he clearly believes that morals depend on a proper education. In a report to the legislature of Virginia, on the objectives for education in the state, Jefferson noted that among the many goals of a child's education, he hoped "to develop the reasoning faculties of our youth…cultivate their morals, and instill into them the precepts of virtue and order" as well as "to form them to habits of reflection and correct action."[26] This evidence of self-contradiction when pressed to form specific plans for education helps to illustrate, possibly, the tension between idealistic desire and practical necessity that echoed through much of the Founding Fathers' writings. This does not excuse Jefferson though of the paradox into which he placed himself. If he truly believed that all citizens have an equal moral sense, then education would impose his feared "artificial rules," no doubt

endangering the moral judgment necessary for republican citizens to maintain their government. On the other hand, if education is necessary for the teaching of morals, there exists a fundamental inequality among Americans that must be solved by education, a presupposition opposite that of the Lockean *tabula rasa* of birth. It may appear that this would engender an egalitarian spirit, but education would have greater potency in the structure of the republic, and the co-optation of education by those in power could redefine basic notions of equality. This ambiguity on the subject underscores the interaction between themes of equality and personal observation on human nature, as well as trouble Jefferson and others had in defining the system of education best suited for the United States.

In fact, Jefferson sometimes wrote as though he had no desire at all for education to equalize society completely. As early as in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, a published and widely-read work, Jefferson wrote unfavorably of many fellow Americans. In describing his "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge," Jefferson explains the system of schools that should be set up as children advance in education. His 1779 bill marked one of the earliest attempts to establish a republican mode of education in proposing the political structure necessary to "illuminate…the minds of the people at large" to prevent the spread of tyranny.[27] At the second stage of schooling, that of grammar schools, he hoped that "trial" might be conducted at the grammar schools to select the "best genius of the whole" and dismiss the "residue." While the word residue might simply appear to be a bit jarring in modern contexts, it is even more disconcerting that in the next sentence, Jefferson explains that, "by this means twenty of the best geniuses will be raked from the *rubbish* annually." [28] Again, this might be simply dismissed as a standard choice of words in Jefferson's time if not for other, more explicit writing. Nearly thirty years after his letter to Peter Carr in which he wrote of the morals of a ploughman and a

professor, Jefferson again wrote to Carr, outlining a detailed hierarchy of education. For all his talk of diffusing knowledge more generally, Jefferson here makes an odd distinction about who should receive this knowledge. To Carr, Jefferson muses that all should receive an education, "proportioned to the condition and pursuits of his life." Further, he believes that those pursuits are dependent upon the two classes into which all citizens are divided: "the laboring and the learned."[29] While it is natural to assume that some will pursue more schooling than others, it is surprising to see Jefferson divide Americans into two separate "classes" and imply that one class will be given access to education denied to the other class. Most striking is his subdivision of the "learned" into two more classes. He sees the learned as a combination of "those who are destined for learned professions, as means of livelihood" and of "the wealthy, who, possessing independent fortunes, may aspire to share in conducting the affairs of the nation."[30] Again, it is not troublesome to accept that the wealthy can pay for additional schooling, but this statement directly implies that society will continue to include a wealthy class and that education will render government leadership more accessible to this class. Was it not Jefferson himself, in his prized Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge, who said leaders "should be called to that charge without regard to wealth, birth, or other accidental condition or circumstance"?[31] Striking, then, for the Founding Father often held as the champion of American egalitarianism to contradict the core of his ideology by offering educational privileges for the wealthy.

Jefferson's hope to advance a select few by education is even more startling when viewed in context of his idea of a "natural aristocracy." After the conclusion of his presidency, Jefferson attempted to rebuild his friendship with John Adams through a correspondence that provides much insight into the thoughts of each man. Amidst a discussion on aristocracy in 1813, Jefferson wrote Adams, "For I agree with you that there is a natural aristocracy among men. The

grounds of this are virtue and talents….The natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature, for the instruction, the trusts, and the government of society."[32] Jefferson distinguished this natural aristocracy from that of an "artificial aristocracy" of the sort that saw European leaders distinguished by birth or wealth. He also implies that natural aristocracy would enjoy the same powerful status as artificial aristocracy, namely the control of government. He asks whether the best form of government is that "which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of these natural aristoi into the offices of government?"[33] The means, of course, for selecting this natural aristocracy, these men of the learned class fall to education. Jefferson at length laments the failure of his bill for the general diffusion of knowledge, for "this on education would have raised the mass of the people to the high ground of moral respectability necessary to their own safety…and would have completed the great object of qualifying them to select the veritable aristoi, for the trusts of government."[34] Jefferson again contradicts his views on moral equality and reinforces his belief that Americans should be divided into two spheres of life. Those who are not capable of leadership would select from among those few who are naturally qualified. Yet, how can such a clear cut division exist between those who have the skills to govern and those that recognize men who have the proper skills?

Another example of self-contradiction illustrates the point perfectly. Speaking of the country's finances, Jefferson claims, "The accounts of the US. ought to be, and may be, made, as simple as those of a common farmer, and capable of being understood by common farmers."[35] Although he is strictly referring to finances here, issues regarding the budget and national debt are naturally more a concern of elected representatives than of the citizenry. Evoking the image of his ideal yeoman farmer, Jefferson thus implies that the ordinary masses must have more than a basic grasp of virtue and government, a principle that he actually devalues in his educational

plans. Education would thus serve different purposes for different people and enhance this inequality among the people.

John Adams' response to Jefferson's letter demonstrates this most basic flaw in Jefferson's argument: a natural aristocracy is still an aristocracy. Adams comes straight to the point in his reply to Jefferson's letter, agreeing that a natural aristocracy exists, but writing that a "distinction between natural and artificial Aristocracy" does not seem "well founded."[36] Adams argues that besides wealth, birth, or strength, genius, science, and learning can be qualities of an aristocrat, perhaps even with the former standards developing over time from the latter. Adams pointedly shows the danger any aristocracy, be it artificial or natural, thus poses to a republic. As he conceptualized it, an aristocrat, by means of a special virtue or talent, has the ability to influence and control more than the single vote allotted to him by government. Here lies the most significant flaw in Jefferson's proposals for education. Though Jefferson believed in an equal, basic foundation in schooling, his desire to provide select men of talent and virtue with a better education than the majority of Americans could undermine the equality in government that he himself so fervently championed in the *Declaration of Independence* and elsewhere. That turned out to be the case, as noted by a French minister who, while visiting the country in 1786, observed that although there might not be American nobles, men referred to as "gentlemen" "aspired to a preeminence which the people refuse to grant them."[37] Contemplating his own definition of the word, Adams says that gentlemen are not necessarily "the rich or the poor, the high-born or the low-born, the industrious or the idle: but all those who have received a liberal education."[38] A farmer's son who managed to achieve a college education might therefore come under attack for aristocratic pretensions thanks to nothing other than his education. Even though this new class of gentlemen earned their status through individual accomplishment, Jefferson's

proposal would have artificially elevated their status and created a slippery slope toward more autocratic rule.

It is important, however, to remember when examining unequal channels of educational advancement and concepts like that of a natural aristocracy, that these ideas may strike a more discordant note when not viewed in the proper historical context. The Founding Fathers sought not to create a democracy, for fear of mob rule, and instead formed a federal republic, so it is not surprising that many education proposals mimic the structure of a republican government. Jefferson, Adams, and others believed that a select group of men would *represent* all other Americans, rather than every citizen playing an equal role in government, so it would certainly seem beneficial to provide the best possible education for these superior leaders (the education by which citizens are supposedly equipped to select these men will be discussed below). Adams provides additional insight into a contemporary republican viewpoint.

Briefly outlining his historical understanding of aristocracy, Adams essentially defends the existence of an aristocracy, asking how a few men of property should defend their holdings in the face of the property-less people if they should "feel the power in their own hands to determine all questions by a majority."[39] He comments that the multitude, like the nobles, must have a check, much as James Madison advocated in *The Federalist*, hinting that the higher education of a minority (elected representatives) might arm them with a safeguard against mob rule by the masses. Here Adams is acknowledging the historical precedent for an aristocracy, but note that he does not justify the actions of this class. In fact, he disparages "the discerning few, the Choice Spirits, the better sort" for believing talents "indulged by Nature to very few, and unattainable by all the Rest" so that they might " distinguish themselves in arts and sciences or in the execution of what the World calls great Affairs."[40] Not questioning the assumption that some

are born with superior capabilities, he instead proposes a broader measure of worth, stating that if men of genius were to be redefined, "the world swarms with them," for, "planting corn, freighting Oysters, and killing Deer" were "worthy employments in which most great Geniuses are engaged," where one could find "as many instances of Invention as you will find in the works of the most celebrated Poets."[41] In a sense then, the Founders did strive for a new equality, albeit a more relative, republican one than the fully democratic, egalitarian vision we have come to worship in our modern mythos. As Gordon Wood argues, the American revolutionaries did indeed hope for nothing less than the destruction of "kinship, patriarchy, and patronage," so that a more moral and virtuous government might be established.[42] Only in the decades after the Revolution, he argues, did the common man destroy all notions of gentry status and a natural aristocracy. Thus, while Jefferson's ideas were certainly tinged with an elitism and classism that seems especially repulsive today, he deserves criticism not for the failure to promote complete egalitarianism through education, but for the flaws within his education proposals that would endanger republican rule through the continuation of an aristocracy in a different form. Rather than presume that Jefferson was, at best, negligent in his education theories and, at worst, a hypocritical politician, let us examine the nature of contradictions in context of another commonly cherished ideal.

CHAPTER 3

LIBERTY

"The plain, the simple and honestly well-meaning are…infinitely more free, than those whose self-affections are exalted by a mere formal education. Practical knowledge only is valuable,"[43] proclaimed Bostonian John Perkins, in the years leading up to the American Revolution. What initially comes across as anti-intellectual sentiment turns out to inadvertently provide keen insight to the nature of early education plans. From the incipient moments of the American Revolution, when Jefferson enumerated the inalienable rights of all men, the Founding Fathers were obsessed with securing liberty. The concept of liberty is far more complex and multi-faceted than that of equality, making it a harder idea to safeguard in practice. Nevertheless, there are some aspects shared in common by many Founding Fathers that still persist today. Among these, as made clear by the list of abuses described in the *Declaration for Independence*, is a loathing for a centralized, unrepresentative government that oversteps its consent of the governed. Aside from assuring representation in government via a social contract, the Founders also sought to protect specific individual freedoms. Though the variety of opinions was greater in debating the spectrum of freedom to be given to citizens, those listed in the *Bill of Rights*, such as the freedom of speech or of religion, should also be treated as essential components of liberty. Finally, although it is arguably the most abstract facet of liberty, early ideas of libertarian philosophy shaped critical roots of our society and are vital when examining models of education. Robert Molesworth's criticism of state religion as a means of cultivating obedience inspired the disestablishment movement, while the work of men like John Trenchard and

Thomas Gordon linked uninhibited reasoning and thought (except when it infringed upon the freedom of others) to the growth and prosperity of a society.[44] This more generalized version of liberty is evident in the "pursuit of happiness," for the two are inextricably linked. Pursuing one's own conception of happiness is dependent upon the freedom with which one is allowed to do so.[45] Jefferson vocalizes his opinion of the degree to which liberty should extend, advocating "a government rigorously frugal and simple," that has "political connection with none" and protects "against all violations of the constitution to silence by force and not by reason."[46] And though he might presume too much, he claims, "The people through all the states are for republican forms, republican principles, simplicity, economy, religious and civil freedom."[47] Unlikely as it is that all citizens shared Jefferson's exact views, certain principles were elemental to the character of the new nation. To that end, how did the Founding Fathers plan to teach liberty and ensure its continuation? More precisely, as the opening quote to this section tempts us to ask, would their proposed plans hamper or enhance liberty?

Just as Jefferson's proposals for education could have encouraged the growth of aristocracy, an enemy of the American Revolution, so too did other proposals tempt the centralization of power, arguably the most fundamental force in propelling the colonies toward independence. Jefferson showed the degree to which concentrated power frightened the Founders when he asked, "What has destroyed liberty and the rights of man in every government which has ever existed under the sun? The generalizing and concentrating of all cares and powers into one body…whether that of the autocrats of Russia or France, or of the aristocrats of a Venetian senate."[48] (Such a statement brings into question the ability of Jefferson's "natural aristocracy" to destroy not only equality, but liberty as well.) As a check against the corruption and dominance of a centralized government, the delegates to the Constitutional Convention devised a

system of federalism that distributed power among multiple levels of government. Jefferson reasoned that an educational system might mimic the "dividing and subdividing [of] these republics from the great national one down through all its subordinations, until it ends in the administration of every man's farm by himself," since "by placing under every one what his own eye may superintend, all will be done for the best."[49]

Indeed, this sense of liberty and self-governance prevailed in many plans. Jefferson believed that if a ward voted not to have a school, it should not have one.[50] In his will, George Washington bequeathed land for a university in the District of Columbia, because, in watching young Americans turn to European schooling for lack of avenues of education at home, he had developed a "serious regret" as these men returned home with "principles unfriendly to Republican Government…rarely overcome."[51] Benjamin Rush, one of the most outspoken advocates for a detailed plan of education, advanced the notion of a public school system with four tiers for the state of Pennsylvania. He assigned specific roles to each of the four school types, commenting that each tier lends itself to a particular form of instruction because of its size, but leaving the level of advancement in education in parents' hands.[52] This mirrors Jefferson's idealistic system of federalism in the recognition of particular strengths for each level of complexity and in placing control ultimately in the lowest, most self-sufficient level.

Though some methods of education worked hand in hand with federalism to ensure liberty, other proposals directly threatened the new system of government. Procuring the funding for an education system perplexed the Founding Fathers, requiring them to stretch slightly the limits of liberty. Of the methods by which the British monarchy trampled American colonists' liberties, none became a stronger rallying point than "taxation without representation," so it should come as no surprise that taxes were a touchy subject with the American Founders.

Though men like Jefferson hoped to leave all decisions of education to individual discretion, the Founders clearly recognized the necessity of a general education and the impossibility of attaining one through individual effort alone. As Samuel Harrison Smith, winner of a 1795 American Philosophical Society contest to devise the best plan of public education, put it, "Society must establish the right to educate, and acknowledge the duty of having educated, all children. A circumstance so momentously important must not be left to the negligence of individuals."[53] A sound schooling structure requires collective funding, whether or not all benefit equally from the schooling. While this seems like a comparatively trivial aspect of government to oppose, a mandate to a farmer to pay taxes and send his sons to school no doubt could reek of oppressive control from a distant outsider. In his autobiography, Jefferson lamented the defeat of his bill for the spread of general knowledge at the hands of a provision placing the passage of the bill in control of each county's court justices. Generally from wealthy classes, not a single group of justices enacted the bill, out of a desire to avoid paying for the education of the poor.[54] Jefferson's sorrowful reflection on the bill again displays hypocrisy, as it seems in hindsight that instead of leaving the decision in the hands of federalist principles, he would prefer to have more directly enforced the establishment of schools. As for Rush, while he does intrude on personal liberty by assuming that "*every* member of the community is interested in the propagation of virtue and knowledge," he makes a novel defense of the system in asserting that education lessens future taxes by teaching efficiency and enabling the progress of civilization.[55] Still, a populace that saw potential similarities to a government they had just declared independence from, could quickly have grown wary over the nature between education's supposed defense of liberty and the means by which education would be established.

While the Founding Fathers publically acknowledged the paradox in seeking funding for an education system to promote liberty, other proposals threatened federalism more directly. Chief among these was the design for a national university. While American leaders felt, rightly so, that citizens would best learn principles of the United States from an American, rather than European, institution, the specifics of a proposed national university smack of unrestrained power. As mentioned previously, Washington endowed part of his will toward the creation of a university "in a central part of the United States, to which the youth of fortune and talents from all parts thereof might be sent for the completion of their Education."[56] In addition to promoting union and fellowship among American students, Washington also hoped the university might "spread systematic ideas through all parts of this rising Empire, thereby to do away with local attachments and State prejudices."[57] He advised Congress, "The more homogeneous our citizens can be made" in regard to "the principles, opinions, and manners of our countrymen…the greater will be our prospect of permanent union."[58] Again, as crucial as a sense of unity might have been to the fledgling nation, this language borders dangerously close on autocratic rule. In fact, why might not students at this proposed university, in "associating with each other, and forming friendships in Juvenile years…enabled to free themselves in a proper degree from those local prejudices and habitual jealousies," form a distinctly American aristocracy?[59]

Multiple factors contributed to the failure of the idea, but some men did take notice of the contradictions insinuated in the plan. When the Congressional power to establish a university was suggested near the close of the Constitutional Convention, Roger Sherman cast his vote against the power on the grounds that it violated states' rights.[60] Largely, Congress cast doubts on the ability to provide enough funding and guidance, to find enough land for construction of the university, and to invite pupils who might have to travel long distances. Grounded in

practicality, this latter point subtly hinted at the danger of centralization, which did color some men's rationale for opposition. Despite the multitude of problems with the proposal, Congressman William Craik mused after the vote that some Congressmen voted against the bill by "insinuating" that it contained "some secret poison…which would some time produce baneful influences…connected to convey something which may extend further than it seems to carry its object."[61] Washington's vision was untenable for many reasons, but its ability to erode federalism underlay much of the opposition.

In the critics' eyes, Washington's proposal merely left the door open for future abuses of power, whereas Benjamin Rush's plan directly calls for strong centralization. Like Washington, he advocated for a federal university as the ultimate destination for learning. Interestingly, to keep his federal university abreast with modern discoveries, Rush proposed having four young men sent to Europe, at the public expense, to report back to the university's professors on "improvements that are daily made in Europe."[62] Not only does Rush place the burden of such a task in the hands of only four individuals, he suggests, despite the contemporary rhetoric of American exceptionalism, that the new nation must look to the Old World for advanced learning. He also hoped that a similar system would operate at home in maintaining knowledge of natural resources. Curiously, he deems only two men capable of this task, charging them with passing discoveries on to the "professor of natural history."[63] Here again seemingly trivial language reveals a great deal. In referring only to a single professor of natural history, Rush may be indicating that he would place the education of the finest students in the country under a single individual for any one branch of learning. Albeit somewhat speculative, if this is indeed Rush's meaning, he places extraordinary power at the feet of each professor of the federal university. Rush proposes a far more autocratic principle for the university, however. "In thirty years after

this university is established, let an act of Congress be passed to prevent any person being chosen or appointed into power or office, who has not taken a degree in the federal university."[64] Coupled with the potential singular power of the university's professors, as well as with Washington's selective group of mingling students, a national university might have easily led to a corruption of government and reversion to consolidated autocracy. No plan at all for higher education would certainly not present a better alternative, but the Founding Fathers should have more carefully considered the centralized power structure of a single, compulsory institution.

These proposals to consolidate the means of education would also promote a uniformity of ideas that, while a necessity to the operation of a unified state, in turn gave rise to notions of conformity. The Founders saw the establishment of national unity as a critical piece in the new society's survival. Obviously, a tighter union presented greater safety, so the strong hand displayed in educational policy should not be terribly troubling, if not for another key aspect of national identity. To protect their independence, Americans had to have an identity distinctly separate that of Europe. A few men who wrote on education saw some utility in sending men to Europe for part of their education, but often times, the idea of looking to Europe for learning earned strong rebukes. In the midst of a diatribe against teachers of immoral character and little talent, Webster disparages the pre-revolutionary practice of employing European convicts as private tutors. It isn't just that they are convicts, but "wretches who have forfeited their lives and been pronounced unworthy to be inhabitants of a *foreign* country" that cannot now be "entrusted with the education, the morals, the character of *American* youth."[65] Likewise, in response to a query on the best school in Europe to send a child, Jefferson briefly weighed the pros and cons of Geneva and Rome, before launching into a tirade against the idea of attending school anywhere in Europe. The same subjects can be learned in America, Jefferson argues, only without learning

"fondness for European luxury and dissipation," forming "friendships which will never be useful to him," or developing "a spirit for female intrigue…a passion for whores."[66] Rather than a simple assault on the exposure to autocratic principles of European governance, he condemned the totality of European society for making an American student lose "in his knowledge, in his morals, in his health, in his habits, and in his happiness."[67] By the end of the letter, it is almost as if Jefferson must bring himself back to his senses, as he blames his "sermon" on his "sin, through zeal" when discussing the "alarming…consequences of foreign education."[68] This severe reaction to European life, couched in terms of morality, may therefore have so incensed proponents of American education systems that they trampled individual liberty in order to protect the new country's freedom from the trappings of the Old World.

Many American thinkers ordained, usually vehemently, the morals they thought proper in distinguishing the U.S. from Europe and in ensuring a holistic republic. Jefferson's call to use education to correct moral faults and engraft virtue is but a milder form of morality policing. Benjamin Rush's infamous claim that men should be converted into "republican machines," so that they "perform their parts properly in the great machine of the government of the state," immediately stands out as a more unsettling example.[69] Rush's use of the word machine may be far more innocuous than it seems to modern readers, as a recent analysis of Rush's statement indicates that he may have merely been drawing on the popularity of scientific language in the wake of the Enlightenment.[70] If his language is obscured to the modern reader, his repeated uses of words like "inculcate" seem ambiguous in determining his intent. However, he clearly equates a moral education to republican success by attributing the vice of criminals to a lack of proper education.[71] Based on this assumption, he considers himself morally superior and sees the need to fix, in a sense, the problems in men that might damage republican harmony. As Jefferson

made a list of the depraved morals of Europeans, so Rush mirrors him by creating a laundry list of proper morals that one must learn, including the submission of one's free will to become "public property."[72] While some of his word choices may be confusing and forgivable, an examination of Rush's view on humanity shows that he wanted to teach Americans not just a list of proper morals, but rather to sacrifice personal liberty in support of the livelihood of the republic.

Once more, it is important to understand the way in which a drive for national unity and a strong belief in republican morality intertwined to, ironically, threaten individual liberty, a principle each force attempted to protect. When Jefferson responded to John Banister's letter on European education, he concluded, "Cast your eye over America: who are the men of most learning…most beloved by their countrymen and most trusted and promoted by them? They are those who have been educated among them, and whose manners, morals, and habits are perfectly homogeneous with those of the country."[73] This homogeneity represented a symbol of republican pride and unity to Jefferson, not a conformity which, disjointed from the spirit of federalism, stood in the way of each individual's right to pursue their own definition of happiness. It would be irresponsible to assume that a novel education system, and least of all, the new nation itself, might have functioned without some form of restrictions employed for the benefit of society as a whole. Thus, as when examining the role of equality in early American educational thought, we must be careful to avoid the projection of any modern libertarian notions into our judgment. Nevertheless, the length to which some Founders were willing to go in order to enforce "right" thinking illuminates a medley of both educational and republican ideologies and the desire of each American Founder to help shape the character of the country.

CHAPTER 4

A SENSE OF PROGRESS

"And I am…not for…to repose implicitly on [the vision] of others; to go backwards instead of forwards to look for improvement; to believe that government, religion, morality, and every other science were in the highest perfection in ages of the darkest ignorance, and that nothing can ever be devised more perfect than what was established by our forefathers."[74]

"American exceptionalism," "a spirit of progress," and the "American dream," are all terms that are not properly applied to the period immediately following the revolution, but that nonetheless characterize the sentiments of the time. Quoted above, Jefferson may have given the most eloquent summation of these values. John Adams, too, felt such resolve in forging a country with so great a destiny wherein "Many hundred years must roll away before We shall be corrupted. Our pure, virtuous, public spirited federative Republick will last for ever, govern the Globe and introduce the perfection of Man."[75] Naïve and arrogant as some of these sentiments might have been, they were of great importance to the cultivation of nationalism, so it is hardly surprising to find desires to inculcate this spirit through education. Further, the Founding Fathers saw education itself as the means by which to channel this spirit for the improvement of their society. Before listing the proposed subjects of study for the University of Virginia, Jefferson extolled the evolutionary nature of education. "And it cannot be but that each generation succeeding to the knowledge acquired by all those who preceded it, adding to it their own acquisitions and discoveries…must advance the knowledge and well-being of mankind, not *infinitely*, as some have said, but *indefinitely*…"[76] However, at the same time as they looked

forward, it almost seemed as though they occasionally looked backwards, doubting the capabilities of citizens to carry out their republican vision. It is therefore the disjunction between this optimistic, progressive mindset, nestled in proposed curriculum, and pessimistic, anti-republican means of control that best explore the reason behind a multitude of self-contradictions.

The courses of study within proposed education systems looked to enable the improvement of American society over time and to equip citizens with the mental capability to do so. Many plans promoted a rigorous study of the sciences unlike that ever seen in Europe; one of Jefferson's proposals listed 11 fields of science to cover, more subjects than all others he proposed combined.[77] Rush celebrates chemistry for its ability to help men understand the "wonders of nature," but he also praises the general ability of science to "explain the principles of both…improvements in agriculture and manufacture," which "should be considered an object of the utmost importance."[78] American thinkers also critically analyzed traditional modes of study to select only what would be useful to the course of the country. Many advocated the study of French and German (sometimes Spanish too) for the interaction of Americans with important cultures of the world, and Rush accordingly led a movement to supplant the study of Latin and Greek as they did not meet the objectives of a liberal education "to prepare youth for usefulness here, and for happiness hereafter."[79] In addition to the learning of these new skills, some also hoped that Americans could be taught new ways of thinking that would better engender a progressive spirit. Webster expressed this sentiment in extolling Americans to "unshackle your minds and act like independent beings," hoping that Americans would both "*believe* and *act*" on their purpose.[80] Jefferson's proposed purposes for education at the University of Virginia included objectives to "instruct" and to "expound," but he also listed the needs to "enable [a

citizen] to calculate for himself" and to "develop the reasoning faculties of our youth."[81] Educational proposals, geared toward continual progress of society, would give Americans both the skills and mindset to achieve their goals.

At the same time, there are many instances of the Founding Fathers either directly or indirectly expressing doubt in the virtues of society as a whole. Samuel Harrison Smith, despite his embrace of "*what ought to be*, instead of clinging to *what is*," argued that the number of men of wisdom and virtue was small compared to the numerous horde of men of vice that resented them, attacking them with "malice" and by "the most unworthy means."[82] Webster seems to doubt the innate goodness in his fellow men that other Founders claimed to observe, as he sees education to be "the great art of correcting mankind" for his vices.[83] Thomas Jefferson, meanwhile, argued that newspapers should be organized into sections on "Truths, Probabilities, Possibilities, and Lies," the first of which he thought would be very short,[84] while an 1817 bill he proposed suggested to take away citizenship from any children over 15 who had not learned literacy.[85] Rush interrupts his discourse on forming the behavior of children in schools by lamenting that "three-fourths of all our school-masters, divines, and legislators would profit very much" from a course on "the art of forgetting" the rampant "traditional error of various kinds, in education, morals, and government."[86] Such negative attitudes imply a hesitancy to buy completely into the imagined future of an ever-advancing civilization or possibly even a distrust of all but a select few to uphold the ideals of republicanism. Perhaps Rush's proposed instruction on the "art of forgetting" can help to more explicitly decode this stark contrast.

Before further consideration of Rush's statement, let us again return to Jefferson to examine one of his more strident contradictions. The Founding Fathers individually conceptualized republican principles each in his own way, as reflected by inconsistencies in their

education plans. Jefferson, as we have seen, championed the doctrine of equality, and yet, seemed to favor some men over others. Perhaps one explanation lies in his definition not of equality's meaning per se, but rather in who would be most qualified to partake in an equitable society. Though he proclaimed universal moral equality, he seems to have other times favored the morality of an agrarian society. When he wrote, "those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people, whose breasts He has made His peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue," he could hardly have provided a more ringing endorsement of a society of farmers.[87] Therefore, equality and the benefits of education may have applied to *his* idea of the proper American, but not to other definitions of citizens. In his eyes, "tavern keepers, Valets de place, and postilions" were "hackneyed rascals of every country" that "must never be considered when we calculate the national character."[88] Jefferson then provides unique insight into an overall perspective held by the Founders. In a twisted form of classism, it is possible that the luminaries of the American Revolution did hold genuine hope for the prevalence of republican ideas but only for those of their already-enlightened social status. Certain vices would no doubt permanently be excluded from the national character, but returning to Benjamin Rush's proposal, we can see how the Founding Fathers' progressive vision might one day be realized. Rush's art of forgetting, in erasing forms of traditional error within the minds of the people, would pave the way for an eventual understanding of republican principles. Education could then be viewed as an attempt to force the principles upon a people the Founders thought unqualified, in the hope that they might one day embrace such sentiments on their own. As polarizing as sentiments of hope and doubt are, the Founding Fathers found ways to harmonize the two. Smith exemplifies the proposals that resulted from these tensions in advocating that "the second leading object of education should be to inspire the mind with a

strong disposition to improvement."[89] Uncertain of their generation's ability to aspire to their ideals, the Founding Fathers directly indoctrinated a progressive spirit.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Many of those among our Founding Fathers struggled at times to figure out precisely what it was that they were actually founding. Frequent debate and lively discussion no doubt altered men's opinions over time. It would be unrealistic in such an intellectually prolific climate to expect each man's rigid adherence to static beliefs. Self-contradictions of one form or another would not be terribly surprising. Throughout this thesis, the focus has been not on such possibly trivial instances, but on cases that reflected a fundamental difference with another of the thinker's own beliefs or with ideas that resonated within contemporary thought as a whole. This is not to imply that these men did not change their views or convey different thoughts to different people, but such an explanation cannot account for all of the contradictions. Some contradictions may also arise from the tension between the predominant political philosophies of the day, but another form of tension between need and ideals may account for many of the inconsistencies. Frederick Rudolph recognized this tension in a slightly different form, framing it as a bias for the "good of society" over the "good of the individual."[90] When considering how best to implement education policies, thinkers of the time found that an idea greatly benefiting immediate concerns for society as a whole might hurt the future rights of individuals. Contradiction then is a sign of particular need for one quality over another, or of an attempt to balance two forces.

As a case study to understand urgent needs outweighing lofty ideals, let us again look at Washington's call for a national university. As already mentioned, the inability of such plans to gain any traction in Congress centered on the issue of funding, but also raised questions of travel,

size, and other various, practical concerns. Men like Sherman questioned the legality of a federal university and Representative Craik hinted that it might induce sectional conflict or overstep its bounds, but on the whole, yearnings for well-trained, principled leadership overrode concerns for the potential imperiousness of the idea. The committee that studied Washington's proposal for a fund to create a national university eagerly recommended the idea for its "utility." When the bill came up for debate on the House floor, many Congressmen touted the benefits of the idea, some even claiming that merely establishing a means to later fund such a university was completely harmless. Defeated by a vote of 37-36, this fervent support nearly buoyed the bill against a myriad of concerns, including the sinister aspects of the plan that lurked in the back of some men's minds.[91] Shortly after he voiced aloud the concerns many had for the dangerous latent qualities of the proposal, Representative Craik, perfectly summed up the overzealous sentiment that characterized this episode: "Were I in the situation of the president, I am free to confess, had I studied my own feelings and the great use of the institution, I should have recommended it."[92]

Other education proposals besides plans for a national university surely followed similar fates. Since we have the benefit of seeing the finished products of the American Revolution, it may be hard for us to imagine not only the difficulty of navigating the maelstrom of ideologies that prevailed in the day, but also the novelty and foreignness of the resulting principles. This foreignness is especially responsible for part of the contradictions in education. Wood's consideration of the United States under forms of monarchical, republican, and democratic tradition helps to illustrate the point. Forces of democratization have shaped the nation's ideology for two hundred years since the American Revolution, so as has been stated previously, what we may see as contradictory to our standards today might be more in harmony with the nature of early American republicanism. As Wilson Smith puts it, "The pace of American life

has usually been more rapid than our plans for it," meaning that this pace "has often nullified educational systems and practices" that seemed appropriate at one time.[93] Even more important is how totally alien concepts like innate equality or free inquiry must have seemed to a mass of people that had been taught a respect for hierarchy and obedience to the demands of the British crown. The innate characteristic of many republican ideas was unquestionable to the learned Founding Fathers and also central to the definition of some principles, but if the majority of the American people had no recognition of their natural rights, they would need to learn them and learn them thoroughly, so as not to take a chance on the country's future. The problem then was how to teach such new ways of thinking when there was little reference and sometimes outright hostility to old ideas. If the morals and virtue needed to maintain the republic could not be learned through an appreciation for their effect on society, how else might they be learned, if not by "instilling" or "inculcating"? Because of this novelty, education represented a case where the Founding Fathers faced the creation of "something out of nothing," which would have proved too monumental and uncertain of a task. In this light, could Rush's urging to commit oneself wholly as "public property" and Jefferson's mandate to achieve literacy or lose citizenship not be seen as necessary evils to establish an effective system of education? Can the plans of education that contained proposals antithetical to republicanism thus be explained as a realization of practical concerns?

In conclusion, a metaphor on the roles of government, education, and republicanism helps to illustrate how the Founding Fathers may have viewed their interaction within the state. One might say that the *Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution* and accompanying institutions of government represented what the Founding Fathers envisioned as the republican spine of the United States. That is to say, the Founders established the *Constitution* as a

permanent anchor to guide what they hoped would be inevitable growth and improvement of their ideals and their society. Their education proposals, although considered just as vital as the government's structure, play a critically different role in this metaphor. The glaring, fundamental contrasts between the elucidated principles of government and of education proposals mean that many of these plans could not have successfully acted as the bones of the state, as they would not have meshed with the backbone. Instead, education proposals reflect a unique form of pragmatic compromise. The incompatible motives of the Founding Fathers' vision of education, such as instilling ideals, unifying a national character, and forming correct habits, is instead a steroid for the state. Incompatible with long-term healthy development, these aspects of education would quickly strengthen the flesh, the citizenry of the new country, until it would be strong enough to stand on its own. Used for too long, a steroid erodes a body's foundation, but once all citizens truly recognized their inherent moral equality, their right to individual freedom, and their ability to constantly better their society, what need would there be to continue such educational practices? In these terms, perhaps the American revolutionaries found it necessary to compromise key republican principles for the present to ensure the later fulfillment of their larger vision. If so, in their formulation of education systems, our Founding Fathers hoped the ends would justify the means.

---

[1] Noah Webster, "On the education of youth in America," in *Essays on education in the early republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), 43.
[2] For more on the ideologies of the American Enlightenment, see Bernard Bailyn, *The ideological origins of the American Revolution*, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967; Lewis Perry, *Intellectual Life in America: A History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984; or Gordon S. Wood, *The radicalism of the American Revolution*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.
[3] Frederick Rudolph, *Essays on education in the early republic*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), ix.
[4] Robert D. Heslep, *Thomas Jefferson & Education*, (New York: Random House, 1969), 5.
[5] Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876*, (Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1980), 103.
[6] Gordon S. Wood, *The radicalism of the American Revolution*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 190-191.

[7] Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas L. Pangle, *The learning of liberty: The educational ideas of the American Founders*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993.
[8] Daniel Walker Howe, "Church, State, and Education in the Young American Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 22 (Spring 2002), 8.
[9] Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life*, (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 71.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Heslep, *Thomas Jefferson & Education*, 110.
[12] David Freeman Hawke, *Benjamin Rush: Revolutionary Gadfly*, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1971), 285.
[13] Pangle and Pangle, *Liberty of Learning*, 7.
[14] Ibid, 143.
[15] Ibid, 5.
[16] Thomas Jefferson, letter to Peter Carr, Aug. 10, 1787, in *The papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd, vol. xxii, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 15.
[17] Thomas Jefferson, "Excerpts from the report to the legislature of Virginia relative to the University of Virginia," August, 1818, in *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, (New York: Willey Book Company, 1944), 402.
[18] Cameron Addis, *Jefferson's vision for education, 1760-1845*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003.
[19] Heslep, *Thomas Jefferson & Education.*
[20] For more on Jefferson's holding of slaves while simultaneously proclaiming that all men were equal, see John Chester Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*, New York: Free Press, 1977.
[21] Pangle and Pangle, *The learning of liberty.*
[22] Thomas Jefferson, letter to George Wythe, August 13, 1786, in *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, (New York: Willey Book Company, 1944), 534-535.
[23] Webster, "On the education of youth in America," 65.
[24] Thomas Jefferson, letter to Mrs. Maria Cosway, October 12, 1786, in *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, (New York: Willey Book Company, 1944), 542-543.
[25] Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on Virginia," 1781-1785, in *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, (New York: Willey Book Company, 1944), 150.
[26] Thomas Jefferson, "Excerpts from the report to the legislature of Virginia relative to the University of Virginia," August, 1818, in *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, (New York: Willey Book Company, 1944), 401.
[27] Thomas Jefferson, "A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge," 1779, in *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, (New York: Willey Book Company, 1944), 40.
[28] Jefferson, "Notes on Virginia," In *Basic writings*, edited by Foner, 150.
[29] Thomas Jefferson, letter to Peter Carr, September 7, 1814, in *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, (New York: Willey Book Company, 1944), 731.
[30] Ibid, 732.
[31] Thomas Jefferson, "A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge," 40.
[32] Thomas Jefferson, letter to John Adams, October 28, 1813, in *Correspondence of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Wilstach, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1925), 90.
[33] Thomas Jefferson, letter to John Adams, October 28, 1813, in *Correspondence of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Wilstach, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1925), 92.
[34] Ibid., 94.
[35] Thomas Jefferson, letter to James Madison, March 6, 1796, in *The papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg, et al., vol. xxix, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 6.
[36] John Adams, letter to Thomas Jefferson, November 15, 1813, in *Correspondence of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Wilstach, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1925), 101.
[37] Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 241.
[38] Ibid, 195.
[39] John Adams, letter to Samuel Adams, October 18, 1790, in *The American Intellectual Tradition, Volume I: 1630-1865*, ed. David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 172.
[40] Quoted in Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 238.

[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid, 229.
[43] John Perkins, *Theory of agency, or, An essay on the nature, source, and extent of moral freedom in two parts: with occasional observations and reflections*, (Boston: Printed for and sold by John Perkins, 1771), 19-20.
[44] Joel Spring, "The Public School Movement vs. the Libertarian Tradition," *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1983).
[45] Joe Mattern, "Individual Liberty as a Fulfillment of Jefferson's Vision for America," unpublished essay, Elon University, 1997. http://www.monticello.org/library/pdfs/Elon1997Mattern.pdf.
[46] Thomas Jefferson, letter to Elbridge Gerry, January 26, 1799, in *The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford, vol. *ix*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), 18.
[47] Thomas Jefferson, letter to Edward Livingston, April 30, 1800, in *The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford, vol. *ix*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), 132.
[48] Thomas Jefferson, letter to Joseph C. Cabell, February 2, 1816, in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1984), 1380.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid, 1379.
[51] George Washington, "Last Will and Testament," in *Creating an American Culture: 1775-1800*, ed. Eve Kornfeld, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 125.
[52] Benjamin Rush, "Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools," in *Essays on education in the early republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965.
[53] Samuel Harrison Smith, "Remarks on Education," in *Essays on education in the early republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), 190.
[54] Thomas Jefferson, "Autobiography," in *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, New York: Willey Book Company, 1944.
[55] Rush, "Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools."
[56] Washington, "Last Will and Testament," 126.
[57] Ibid, 125.
[58] Quoted in David Madsen, *The National University: Enduring Dream of the USA*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966), 31-32.
[59] Washington, "Last Will and Testament," 126.
[60] Madsen, *The National University*.
[61] U.S. Congress, *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States*, 4th Cong., 2nd Sess., VI, 1706.
[62] Benjamin Rush, "Plan of a Federal University," in *The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush*, ed. Dagobert D. Runes, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 103. 101-105
[63] Ibid, 104.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Webster, "On the education of youth in America," 60.
[66] Thomas Jefferson, letter to John Banister, Jr., October 15, 1785, in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1984), 838-839.
[67] Ibid, 839.
[68] Ibid, 840.
[69] Benjamin Rush, "Thoughts upon the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," in *Creating an American Culture: 1775-1800*, ed. Eve Kornfeld, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 115.
[70] Colleen Terrell, "Republican Machines: Franklin, Rush, and the Manufacture of Civic Virtue in the Early American Republic," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1.2 (2003) 100-132.
[71] Rush, "Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools."
[72] Ibid, 90.
[73] Jefferson, letter to John Banister, Jr., 839.
[74] Jefferson, letter to Elbridge Gerry, 19.
[75] Adams, *Correspondence*, 102.
[76] Jefferson, "Report on University of Virginia," 402.
[77] Thomas Jefferson, letter to Dr. Joseph Priestly, January 18, 1800, in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1984), 1071.

[78] Benjamin Rush, "Thoughts upon the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," 116-117.
[79] Benjamin Rush, "Observations upon the study of the Latin and Greek languages, as a branch of liberal education, with hints of a plan of liberal education, without them, accommodated to the present state of society, manners, and government, in the United States," in *Benjamin Rush: Essays: Literary, Moral and Philosophical*, ed. Michael Meranze, (Schenectady, NY: Union College Press, 1988), 13.
[80] Webster, "Education of Youth," 77.
[81] Jefferson, "Report on University of Virginia," 401.
[82] Samuel H. Smith, "Remarks on Education," 174; 186.
[83] Webster, "Essays on Education," 64.
[84] Schudson, *The Good Citizen*, 76.
[85] Howe, "Church, State, and Education."
[86] Benjamin Rush, "The Amusements and Punishments which are Proper for Schools," in *The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush*, ed. Dagobert D. Runes, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 115.
[87] Jefferson, "Notes on Virginia," 161.
[88] Quoted in Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 28.
[89] Samuel H. Smith, "Remarks on Education," 196.
[90] Rudolph, *Essays on education*, xv.
[91] Madsen, *The National University*.
[92] U.S. Congress, *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States*, 4th Cong., 2nd Sess., VI, 1706.
[93] Wilson Smith, *Theories of Education in Early America, 1655-1819*, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973), xxii.

WORKS CITED

Adams, John. Letter to Samuel Adams, October 18, 1790. In *The American Intellectual Tradition, Volume I: 1630-1865*, ed. David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper, 170- 173. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Adams, John. Letter to Thomas Jefferson, November 15, 1813. In *Correspondence*, ed. Paul Wilstach. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1925.

Addis, Cameron. *Jefferson's vision for education, 1760-1845*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003.

Bailyn, Bernard. *The ideological origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967.

Cremin, Lawrence. *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876*. Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1980.

Hawke, David Freeman. *Benjamin Rush: Revolutionary Gadfly*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1971.

Heslep, Robert D. *Thomas Jefferson & Education*. New York: Random House, 1969.

Howe, Daniel Walker. "Church, State, and Education in the Young American Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 22 (Spring 2002), 1-24.

Jefferson, Thomas. Letter to John Banister, Jr., October 15, 1785. In *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson, 838-839. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1984.

Jefferson, Thomas. Letter to George Wythe, August 13, 1786. In *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, 534-535. New York: Willey Book Company, 1944.

Jefferson, Thomas. Letter to Mrs. Maria Cosway, October 12, 1786. In *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, 536-545. New York: Willey Book Company, 1944.

Jefferson, Thomas. Letter to Peter Carr, Aug. 10, 1787. In *The papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd, vol. xii, 14-18. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950.

Jefferson, Thomas. Letter to James Madison, March 6, 1796. In *The papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg, et al., vol. xxix, 6-8. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Jefferson, Thomas. Letter to Elbridge Gerry, January 26, 1799. In *The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford, vol. *ix*, 15-26. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905.

Jefferson, Thomas. Letter to Dr. Joseph Priestly, January 18, 1800. In *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson, 1069-1072. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1984.

Jefferson, Thomas. Letter to Edward Livingston, April 30, 1800. In *The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford, vol. *ix*, 131-133. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905.

Jefferson, Thomas. Letter to John Adams, October 28, 1813. In *Correspondence of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Wilstach. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1925.

Jefferson, Thomas. Letter to Peter Carr, September 7, 1814. In *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, 730-735. New York: Willey Book Company, 1944.

Jefferson, Thomas. Letter to Joseph C. Cabell, February 2, 1816. In *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson, 1377-1381. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1984.

Jefferson, Thomas. “Autobiography.” In *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, 409-485. New York: Willey Book Company, 1944.

Jefferson, Thomas. “A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge,” 1779. In *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, 40-46. New York: Willey Book Company, 1944.

Jefferson, Thomas. “Excerpts from the report to the legislature of Virginia relative to the University of Virginia,” August, 1818. In *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, 400-408. New York: Willey Book Company, 1944.

Jefferson, Thomas. “Notes on Virginia,” 1781-1785. In *Basic writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Philip S. Foner, 50-181. New York: Willey Book Company, 1944.

Madsen, David. *The National University: Enduring Dream of the USA*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966.

Mattern, Joe. “Individual Liberty as a Fulfillment of Jefferson’s Vision for America.” Unpublished essay, Elon University, 1997. http://www.monticello.org/library/pdfs/Elon1997Mattern.pdf.

Miller, John Chester. *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*. New York: Free Press, 1977.

Pangle, Lorraine Smith and Thomas L. Pangle. *The learning of liberty: The educational ideas of the American Founders*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993.

Perkins, John. *Theory of agency, or, An essay on the nature, source, and extent of moral freedom in two parts: with occasional observations and reflections*. Boston: Printed for and sold by John Perkins, 1771.

Perry, Lewis. *Intellectual Life in America: A History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Rudolph, Frederick. *Essays on education in the early republic*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965.

Rush, Benjamin. "The Amusements and Punishments which are Proper for Schools." In *The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush,* ed. Dagobert D. Runes, 106-116. New York: Philosophical Library, 1947.

Rush, Benjamin. "Observations upon the study of the Latin and Greek languages, as a branch of liberal education, with hints of a plan of liberal education, without them, accommodated to the present state of society, manners, and government, in the United States." In *Benjamin Rush: Essays: Literary, Moral and Philosophical*, ed. Michael Meranze, 13-33. Schenectady, NY: Union College Press, 1988.

Rush, Benjamin. “Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools.” In *Essays on education in the early republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph, 1-8. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965.

Rush, Benjamin. “Plan of a Federal University.” In *The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush*, ed. Dagobert D. Runes, 101-105. New York: Philosophical Library, 1947.

Rush, Benjamin. “Thoughts upon the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic.” In *Creating an American Culture: 1775-1800*, ed. Eve Kornfeld, 110-119. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001.

Schudson, Michael. *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life*. New York: The Free Press, 1998.

Smith, Samuel Harrison. “Remarks on Education.” In *Essays on education in the early republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph, 163-221. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965.

Smith, Wilson. *Theories of Education in Early America, 1655-1819*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973.

Spring, Joel. “The Public School Movement vs. the Libertarian Tradition.” *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 61-79.

Terrell, Colleen. “Republican Machines: Franklin, Rush, and the Manufacture of Civic Virtue in the Early American Republic.” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1.2 (2003) 100-132.

U.S. Congress. *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States*. 4th Cong., 2nd Sess., VI.

Washington, George. “Last Will and Testament.” In *Creating an American Culture: 1775-1800,* ed. Eve Kornfeld, 124-126. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001.

Webster, Noah. “On the education of youth in America.” In *Essays on education in the early republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph, 41-77. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965.

Wood, Gordon S. *The radicalism of the American Revolution*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.