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WHEN IS SCHOOL AN ANSWER TO WHAT SOCIAL PROBLEMS?

Lessons from the Early American Republic

In modern societies, we ask schools to fix an enormous variety of social problems, both large and small. We ask them to reduce social inequality and increase social mobility. We ask them to provide the economy with job skills that will increase productivity, enhance economic growth, and strengthen the nation. We ask them to promote democracy, improve health, save the environment, and empty our prisons. And at the same time we also assign schools smaller missions, such as improving driver safety, reducing tooth decay, fighting obesity, and deterring teenage pregnancy.

We ask schools to solve all of these problems even though they have demonstrated time and time again that they are unable to do so. Increasing educational attainment has proven to have no effect on the rates of social equality and social mobility, and its impact on economic growth has proven at best to be indirect and limited and at worst counterproductive. So why do we keep turning to schools for answers they cannot provide? One reason is that they are available. Schools are publicly controlled, located in every community, and willing if not able to take on new public missions. Another is that asking schools to fix problems is a lot easier than trying to address the problem directly through the political system.

If schools are a weak mechanism for solving social problems, however, then the topic of my chapter – the movement that established the American common school system – was the exception that proved the rule. Its aim was nothing less than to create a new social order in response to the political, moral, and social crisis of the United States in the early nineteenth century, and it succeeded in accomplishing this extraordinarily ambitious mission. Faced with a burgeoning market economy and a fragile young republic, schools worked out a way to reconcile the two and to establish a liberal democratic compromise with remarkable durability. The common school system expressed the whig vision of the need to construct simultaneously a new citizen for the republic, a new soul for the church, and a new conscience for society. As realized in the new social order, this vision ensured that individuals would internalize political, religious, and moral controls, which would allow them to participate as self interested entrepreneurs and workers in the market economy while still preserving the United States as a Protestant, republican, and moral nation. The core institutions of the new order – penitentiary, hospital, asylum, and poorhouse – were built upon the model of the common school.

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The success of the American common school is an example of one kind of social problem solving in which public schools systems have excelled. In one country after another, they have proven effective at turning subjects into citizens and traditional societies into modern nation states. With that in mind, let us look at how in the early nineteenth century the common school system helped form an American nation.

A SOCIAL CRISIS FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

The United States went through some tough times in its early years, and the second decade of the nineteenth century was particularly trying. First came the War of 1812 with Great Britain. The fighting lasted for three years and ended in a draw, but not before the country had gone through substantial destruction and citizens had watched in humiliation as the president fled the capital to escape from invading troops, who then sat down to eat his dinner before burning down the White House. Coming on the heels of war was the Panic of 1819, which wiped out all of the growth in personal income from the previous 20 years. What followed, however, was one of the strongest periods of economic growth in American history, lasting all the way to the Civil War. There are a number of compelling explanations for the rapid economic growth in the latter part of this period, including the rise of factory production, railroads, and widespread immigration from Germany and Ireland. But none of these factors was in place in the 1820s, when the boom began.

What was going on in the late teens and twenties, however, was an extraordinary growth in the country's economic infrastructure – in particular a huge government investment in building turnpikes and canals. These internal improvements in the US transportation system sharply reduced the cost of transporting goods; this meant that for the first time farmers and craftsmen in rural areas could sell their produce in major cities on the east coast. By connecting previously isolated segments of the economy, the new trade routes helped create regional markets for goods and even the beginnings of a national market. The result was a boom in trade and also a sharp increase in competition among all of the producers along these routes. Instead of operating within a geographically constricted setting, with a small group of producers catering to a small group of local consumers, producers such as wheat farmers and shoemakers found themselves having to adapt to an economic situation where the numbers of buyers and sellers were effectively unlimited. This in turn led to a dramatic transformation in the mode of production for goods, the relations between owners and workers, and in the structure of communities.

This transformation was a kind of revolution, a market revolution.¹ America had a market economy from the earliest colonial days, but large scale trade had been confined to a few port towns. For everyone else markets were local, narrowly restricted by poor transportation and communication. But when goods and information were suddenly able to cross great distances at low cost, this brought a severe challenge to America's economic, social, political, and religious life. The result was the destruction of one social order without a clear indication of what

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new social order would arise to take its place, leaving a vacuum of authority that threatened the foundations of the new republic. And the significance of these events for the history of American school reform is that reformers came to the conclusion that the primary institutional way to resolve this crisis was to develop a broadly inclusive system of public schools.

A useful way to understand both the nature of for this social turbulence in the 1820s and the rationale for seeing education as the solution to the problem is to examine a particular case of social change and social reform up close. Rochester, New York presents an ideal case to consider in the regard, since it served as the site for a natural experiment in radical social change. Starting out as a tiny agricultural village, which had only 15 inhabitants in 1812, it became the fastest growing city in the United States in the 1820s. The reason for this rapid growth is easy to identify: the Erie Canal. And we can even establish the exact starting date for the change process. Construction on the canal began in 1817, and on October 1, 1823 the waterway reached Rochester, connecting the city to Albany 225 miles east and, by way of the Hudson River, all the way to New York City. On that day, the national market came to Rochester, riding on the first canal boat. With this arrival, everything in Rochester changed.

THE NATIONAL MARKET COMES TO TOWN: THE CASE OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

What allows us to interpret the Rochester case is Paul Johnson's stunning study of the city in the throes of social transformation, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (Johnson, 1978). In this book, he details the social transformation that took place in the city after the arrival of the canal and shows how citizens experienced this transformation as a crisis of the spirit. His analysis allows us to understand both the threats and the opportunities inherent in this transformation, which was happening at the same time across the United States. This upheaval prompted reformers to invent a series of social institutions that came to shape American society for the next 200 years, and the model for these institutions was the common school.

In 1818, when construction work on the canal began in earnest, Rochester had about 1,000 residents, and from this point on its population grew at a rate of about 25% a year into the early 1830s. In the first few years of this expansion, the social structure of the town retained a distinctly traditional character, following longstanding patterns of pre-capitalist economic and social relations. Surrounding farmers sold their produce in town, and craftsmen made goods to order for customers in the area, with local custom setting the prices for their wares. Farm work was organized by family, with little need for outside labour. Craft work was organized around the family of the master craftsman, who took in apprentices to learn the trade and journeymen to carry out production, all of them living in the master's house and eating at his table; the goods were sold in the master's shop. Children on the farm expected either to take over the family farm or to buy their

own land and become independent farmers. Apprentices expected to become journeymen and hoped eventually to set up their own shop as master artisans.

Social authority rested with the head of household, who was also the owner of the farm or the shop. Because of property qualifications for voting, these owners were also the prime political actors. Demand for goods was modest and steady, restricted by a geography that also limited the options and thus the leverage of consumers. As a result, there was little pressure for farmers or shopkeepers to increase productivity. Workers in the craft shop earned room, board, and a small amount of pay, which they received regularly even though orders came in more episodically; the shopkeeper-craftsman had to maintain a stable workforce to meet average demand and could not easily add or drop employees in response to fluctuations in this demand. When there were no orders to fill, the workers would quit early.

All this suddenly changed with the arrival of the national market. Cheap transportation by canal boat opened up enormous economic opportunity for farmers and craftsmen alike. Instead of having sales restricted to customers within walking distance, they could sell their wares to anyone living along the 365 mile length of the canal, plus anyone living along the rivers that connected with the canal. Beyond this was the world, since at the western end the canal connected with the Great Lakes and the entire upper Midwest, at the eastern end it linked up with the Hudson, and at the mouth of the Hudson was New York City, where ships could take their goods up and down the coast and across the ocean. A wide open market meant wide open opportunity for farmers and craftsmen to get rich by expanding production to meet the new demand.

But at the same time that the canal provided great opportunity, it also opened up great economic risk. Every wheat farmer was suddenly competing with every other wheat farmer across New York state and beyond, and every shoemaker was competing with every other shoemaker in Buffalo, Albany, New York City, and all points in between. Because of the huge increase in potential market, producers in Rochester could sell vastly more goods than they had before, but because of the huge increase in competition, they could do so only if they lowered their prices to a competitive level. Otherwise they would easily be driven out of business.

Johnson carefully traces the social consequences of these market pressures in Rochester with the arrival of the Erie Canal, and in doing so he provides insight into the same series of changes that were going on more gradually across the country during the period from about 1815 to 1860. As in Rochester, the growth of cheap transportation and the connection with wider markets in the United States was steadily lowering prices and wages and changing the way people worked and lived. Under these new conditions, master craftsmen could no longer afford the economic inefficiencies that came with the old model of work relations. Since they were now producing goods for consumers far away, they could no longer work to order but had to turn toward volume production of standardized goods. They could only pay workers when there was work to do, and they had to supervise them closely to get the most productivity during working hours. In order to maintain flexibility in matching work hours to product demand, they could no longer support

apprentices and journeymen in their home, since they had to be able to drop and add workers as needed. So workers increasingly lived in their own housing in a separate section of the city, which freed them from the social authority of the master but at the same time left them wholly dependent on their own declining and irregular wages as the sole support for themselves and their families.

In Rochester and across the country during this period, the shift toward a market economy led to a series of major problems – social, political, religious, and economic – which merged into a single overarching crisis in American society.² The social problem was in part a question of authority. In the face of wage labour, the old unquestioned authority of the farm and business owner was disappearing and there was nothing to take its place, a change that liberated workers but also raised fears of anarchy and rebellion. In addition, since the key to survival was now the ability to command wages in the market, this left families poorly equipped to handle the dependents in their midst – the old, the young, and the ill – who were not able to care for themselves much less earn a living wage. The political problem was the potential destruction of republican community in the new economy, with its emphasis on personal autonomy, the pursuit of individual interest, and the growing separation between social classes. Under these conditions, how could the republic instil civic virtue in its citizens without restricting their new won liberties, and how could it reduce social differences sufficiently to allow citizens to continue thinking of themselves as political equals?

The religious and moral problem was how people could take part in a competitive market economy, with its emphasis on individual self reliance instead of social dependence, and still remain good Christians with a high standard of morality. And the economic problem was how to resolve all of these other problems without constricting individual initiative and the market economy, which were so effective at increasing wealth and improving the standard of living. Going back to a more traditional society did not seem possible or even attractive, either for the workers who had submitted to it or the farmers and masters who had dominated it; but the social, political, and spiritual consequences of the new market economy were truly frightening.

REFORM TO THE RESCUE

If necessity is the mother of invention, then crisis is the mother of reform. Crisis conditions in a society create a powerful demand for possible solutions, which in turn encourages social entrepreneurs to develop innovative reform measures and test them out in practice. Local innovations that demonstrate the greatest apparent success spread quickly to other locations, winning the reformer public acclaim, social influence, and political power. In the 1820s and 30s, the rise of a national market economy in the United States created a strong demand for social reform to deal with the market's disruptive side effects, and the result was an amazing flowering of reform ideas, which in turn led to the most productive period of institution creation in American history.³

The reformers who stepped forward to meet this challenge can be loosely labelled as whigs. This group, however, was not limited to members of the Whig party, which was formally established in 1833 in response to Andrew Jackson's new Democratic party. But the urge to establish these new institutions extended well beyond the confines of this party and long preceded its formation, when, during the late teens and 20s, whiggism was lodged in the nationalist wing of the old Democratic-Republican party founded by Jefferson. In states like New York, where the Jacksonian Democrats became the dominant force, the whig impulse played out through Democratic politicians.

Whiggism broadly conceived was a particular stance toward progress that cut across party lines if not across class lines. At its heart was a desire to reconcile the market economy with the republic, to develop an approach that would accommodate the one without destroying the other. Whigs tended to be masters, merchants, and farmers who prospered or hoped to prosper in the new setting (and people who aspired to join their ranks). They wanted to enjoy the benefits of the market while also preserving the republic, and their efforts at institution building were closely aimed at accomplishing this kind of delicate balance. The whigs were the group that arose to re-establish this balance when the market economy posed the most severe threat to a liberal republic that Americans have ever faced.⁴

Most of the institutions created during the years before the Civil War are still with us in some form or other. These include the penitentiary, the hospital, the insane asylum, the poorhouse (now superseded by welfare and social security), and the common school. At one level, all these institutions were designed to provide a social support system to replace the system that was destroyed by the market. They took care of the various dependent populations that used to be supported through a person's affiliation with a family farm or family shop. These institutions took care of those who were too criminal (the penitentiary), too sick (the hospital), too crazy (the asylum), too old and poor (the poorhouse), and too young (the school) to earn wages and thus care for themselves. With the rise of a market economy, wage earners were not able to deal with these dependents on their own. Whigs argued that the government needed to step in to fill the gap, providing a new kind of safety net for the populace while at the same time freeing up more people in their productive years to enter the workforce and make a contribution to the economy.

But whig reformers in Rochester (and in the United States more generally) saw a bigger mission for reform than the need to provide a social safety net for workers. At a deeper level, they wanted to resolve the core problem at the heart of the liberal republican compromise: how to create a moral and politically stable community that was made up of self-interested individuals; how to accommodate the republic with the market. The grandest of issues was at stake here: Could we maintain social order, the accumulation of wealth, individual liberty, and republican community – all in the same society? Rochester, like the rest of the United States, settled on an answer right around 1830. In Rochester's case, the answer took a singular form. The great evangelical preacher, Charles Grandison Finney, came to town in 1830 and stayed for a year. By the time he was done, he had turned the city upside down and established a stable basis for a new social order.

Prior efforts by civic leaders to establish social stability in Rochester had failed miserably. During the late 1820s, city government, churches, and civic organizations had tried to fill the vacuum left by the decline in the social authority of masters by imposing such authority through law. Leaders sought to close bars, ban drinking, and prohibit activities on the Sabbath, all in the name of restoring social order. But with the disappearance of property qualifications for voting and the introduction of the secret ballot, the city's broader and freer electorate soundly rejected these initiatives. And this was as much a failure of vision as an electoral defeat for the first wave of reformers. The problem was that imposing order from above was not only unfeasible in the new political environment but it was also economically counterproductive, since it threatened to restrain those individual liberties – free labour and free enterprise – that were so critical to the market economy. So reform took a turn away from imposition and toward education.

Finney was the most famous evangelist in the Second Great Awakening, the powerful wave of religious revival that swept across the United States in the period before the Civil War. His preaching in Rochester helped to establish that city as the heart of what came to be known as the Burned-Over District, the central and western part of New York State (along the route of the Erie Canal) that was the site of the most intense series of revivals in the country during this period. He succeeded in establishing a new social and moral order in the region, not through the force of law but through the power of persuasion, employing his superb preaching skills in service of a powerful theological message directed at the troubled citizens along the canal. In Finney, the social crisis had found the social reformer with the skills and message that were best adapted to respond to this time of trouble and opportunity.

Finney's theology was based on the principle of salvation by grace. Individuals could only save their souls if they were willing to make the decision to accept the grace of God and then rededicate themselves to a new life as Christians. And the revival process was enormously effective in encouraging people to make this choice by using social modelling and social pressure. When people arrived at a revival, they found that their social betters – the local masters, merchants, and landowners – had already accepted grace and were welcoming newcomers to join them. And the revival's combination of public exhortation, public prayer, and social outreach made it hard to resist the offer of the good news – combined with entry into the community of true believers who were also social leaders. But at the heart of this choice was a profound decision to replace external control with internal control. Coming forward at the revival to accept the gift of grace meant agreeing to accept the precepts of social authority, internalizing these rules for behaviour, and then imposing them on yourself. It meant giving up drink, developing sober work habits, observing the Sabbath, and being a productive member of your religious and social community.

Here was a formula for restoring social, political, and religious authority in a market economy; a formula that showed how individuals could be self-interested economic actors and still be civic-minded citizens and upstanding Christians, all the while avoiding the kinds of traditional social controls that would undermine the

freedoms needed for free enterprise. For masters, Finney offered a new social order based on sharing self regulation with their workers rather than imposing control on them. For workers, he offered an answer that reinforced their freedom from the master by allowing them to impose regulation on themselves. And since this new pattern of behaviour was the same for workers and entrepreneurs, it offered the possibility that one could become the other.

Grounding their efforts in this revivalist Protestant frame for reconstructing the antebellum social order, the whigs invented a powerful and enduring series of social institutions that were designed to carry it into social practice. These institutions saw their primary function as education. Reformers established the penitentiary, hospital, asylum, poorhouse, and school all as educational institutions. Like Finney's revivals, these institutions sought to persuade, inculcate, and educate individuals to regulate themselves; and like the revivals, they used mechanisms of social pressure and routines of habit building to accomplish their educational goals.

Although many, maybe most, of these institutions have tended over the years to hover closer to warehousing than educating their clients, that was not the primary intent of their whig founders. As I have noted, taking care of those whom the family could no longer handle was a secondary goal of the institutions, but the primary goal was not custody but conversion. The penitentiary was supposed to be a place for the inmate to become penitent, develop new work habits, and then return to society as a self regulating and productive participant. The hospital and asylum were supposed to rehabilitate patients and prepare them to take on responsibilities as citizens, family members, and workers. The poorhouse took care of the elderly who were unable to take care of themselves, but it also sought to retrain the younger and more able inmates in order to reintroduce them into the labour force. Every correctional officer, nurse, and attendant in these institutions was a kind of teacher.

Of all these institutions, the common school was the most comprehensive and the most fundamental. Whereas the others focused on discrete subgroups of the population, the school focused on the entire cohort of the young, and as a result its goals were broader and its potential social impact greater. The idea was to provide one place in the community where every child would receive instruction, and the primary focus would be on moral and political education. The notion of education for economic growth was not in the vocabulary of the common school movement. Instead, the explicit aim of the movement was to provide students with an educational experience that would encourage them to become self regulating moral and political actors in society. Without resort to external supervision, they would be obedient to moral standards and committed to civic virtue. In the verbal shorthand of the movement, the school was focused on making citizens. And in line with the republican vision of education, this meant that a critical quality of the common school was its commonness. Citizens could not come together into a republican community unless the social differences among them were kept sufficiently modest that they would be able to find common ground. Under these circumstances, the mix of private, parochial, and pauper schools that was in place in the 1820s was no longer suitable for the task.

THE COMMON SCHOOL MOVEMENT

The social problems in United States in the 1820s and 30s were potentially catastrophic, and the key social response that reformers devised to solve these problems was to create the common school. The stakes don't get any higher than this. Of course school reformers have always claimed that the stakes are high. But what distinguished the common school movement from all of its successors in the history of American school reform was that this reform movement accomplished its goal. More recent educational reformers have aimed for a lot and accomplished a little, but the common schoolmen established a system of education that not only reflected their goals but for the most part realized them. And the system they established, with only modest addition and alteration, is still with us today.

The common school movement spanned the years from 1830 to 1860. Its most prominent national leader was Horace Mann, a Whig politician who in 1837 became the first Secretary of the State Board of Education of Massachusetts and then used this position to promote the cause of the common schools. His speeches and widely republished annual reports reached a broad audience across the country. Massachusetts was a natural base for the movement, since it had the earliest start in developing public education back in 1647. But, provoked by a common set of social problems, school reform efforts emerged spontaneously in a number of locations around the country, carried by dozens of local leaders who freely borrowed from each other until their efforts converged into a national movement. And the leaders of the common school movement were also frequently involved in efforts to establish other parallel whig institutions at the same time. For example, Roberts Vaux led the Philadelphia campaign for a common school system in the 1820s, but he was best known as the founder of Eastern State Penitentiary, the widely copied model for the new prison as reformatory. Along the way he also played a leading role in establishing Philadelphia asylums for the deaf, the blind, and the insane. For whig reformers like Vaux (a Quaker and a Jacksonian Democrat), all of these institutions were closely related answers to the same problem.

To understand the nature of the common school movement, we need to establish first what it was not trying to do. It was not an effort to increase school enrolment, since such enrolments were already quite high. It was also not an effort to raise the literacy rate, which was already nearly universal in New England and elevated in the rest of the country. Instead, its central aim was to channel the existing school enrolments in every community into a single publicly-governed community school.

The problem for the movement was how to bring about this end. Different religious and ethnic groups were accustomed to having their own schools, and the middle and upper classes were comfortable paying tuition for their children. Add to this the problem that public schools bore the stigma of charity. If only the poor and the unaffiliated continued to attend the public schools, they would fail to accomplish their grand republican aims. But removing the pauper test and opening the doors of the public school to everyone would succeed only if the whole community would be willing to accept the invitation.

One approach reformers took to selling the common schools was political, to emphasize the need for universal education in order to shore up the republic. As one leader of the movement in Philadelphia put it grandly, “The only pedestal on which Liberty can stand erect, forever firmly poised, is UNIVERSAL EDUCATION” (Dunlop, 1851, emphasis in original). Another approach to selling the reform was religious, to build on the evangelical Protestant vision of sharing the faith. So reformers portrayed the common school as an ideal institution for instilling the new morality of self regulation.

A third marketing approach was social, to stir up fears of the social disorder that would run rampant without an effective institution for socializing the public. And if all these rhetorical approaches didn’t work, there was also the option of luring the well-to-do with special inducements. For example, the 1836 law that established the common school system in Philadelphia also established a high school. The leaders of the new school system deliberately made the high school more attractive than the best private academies in the city – and then announced that students could only be admitted to the high school if they had first attended the common elementary schools.

The arguments worked, and in one community after another emerged a structure of schooling in the new mould. By the outbreak of the Civil War, all of the elements of the new educational system were firmly in place.

THE COMMON SCHOOL SYSTEM

The school system put in place by the common school movement had the following emergent characteristics: community-wide enrolment, public control, local control, age grading, and big government. Let me say a little about each of these elements.

Community-Wide Enrolment: The most important principle defining the common school was that it drew its students from the entire surrounding community. The whig-republican mission made this central. By including students from all walks of life and putting them through the same educational experience, schools could help alleviate the growing class divisions in the new market society. In addition, the school experience would focus on instilling in all students a degree of self regulation, which would allow them to function as self-interested actors while still maintaining a commitment to civic virtue, work ethics, and public morality.

Public Funding: The common schools could not enrol everybody in the community without drawing on public funds to overcome differences in ability to pay. This shift toward public subsidy of education from a mixed model meant that education quickly became a dominant issue in state and local politics, since schools devoured such a large portion of the public purse.

Local Control: From the very beginning, control of the common schools was radically localized. Decisions about funding, hiring, and curriculum rested in the hands of the elected board of a local school district, and the districts for a long time were quite small. No one knows the actual numbers of districts in the nineteenth

century; but when the federal government starting counting districts in 1938, after 40 years of aggressive efforts at consolidation, there were still 120,000.

Age Grading: In rural areas and small towns, one room schools remained the norm long after the establishment of the common school system. But in most towns and cities, educators started dividing students into grades by age. In part this was for efficiency, but in part it was also for ideology. The common school mission called for a form of education that was powerful enough to instil within students a deep sense of citizenship, self regulation, and moral conscience. With age grading, educators could teach a whole class the same subject at the same level and then use forces of peer pressure and emulation to reinforce learning. This approach drew on insights from the revival movement and its techniques for promoting conversion.

Big Government: In an interesting parallel with New Deal reformers a century later, whig reformers felt that they could save capitalism from its own dangerous side effects only by sharply enhancing the role of government. In the antebellum period, this meant expanding government to provide canals, turnpikes, and railroads; penitentiaries, hospitals, asylums, and poorhouses; common schools and normal schools. This amounted to a huge increase in the state, which was not being asked both to care for dependent members of society and to educate the populace for the new social order. The common school system was the largest institution for pursuing the first goal, and it was the model for all other institutions in carrying out the second.

A SCHOOL REFORM THAT WORKED

In the history of American school reform, the common school movement is the one big success story. It was a school reform that worked, and none of the later reform movements came close to realizing their goals the way it did. The reformers had some distinct advantages in creating a system that realized their vision, all deriving from newness. The United States was a brand new country, which in revolution had shrugged off much of its British inheritance and thus was free to invent new traditions. It had educational practices that preceded the development of the common school, but it had no pre-existing school system, which might have acted as a drag on radical reform. In the 1820s, the country was undergoing a social transformation that was so threatening to its existence that modest incremental change seemed inadequate to the task and dramatic forms of social innovation seemed prudent and even conservative. In response to this challenge, school reformers found themselves part of a broad movement to invent new social institutions, each part of which reinforced the others.

A new social order did indeed replace the old one in the years before the Civil War, and this new order resolved the crisis of the 1820s by filling the void left by the sudden collapse of the previous organization of social and economic life. This is exactly what the common school reformers were aiming to do. The new social order was organized precisely along the lines sought by the whigs who were behind the common school and the other related efforts to establish new institutions in the antebellum years. It effected a grand compromise between the market and the

republic, saving republican community while preserving the rapidly expanding market economy.

At the core of this balancing of competing interests was the whig vision of the need to construct a new citizen for the republic, a new soul for the church, and a new conscience for society. As realized in the new social order, this vision would allow individuals to participate as self interested entrepreneurs and workers in the market economy by ensuring that they internalized the political, religious, and moral controls that were needed in order to maintain the United States as a Protestant republican nation. The common schools could not take all the credit for this stunning reconstruction of society, since there many other institutional innovations that moved this agenda forward. But all of these new institutions shared a common form and function, and all of them were constructed around the educational model set by the common schools. Under the circumstances, it is hard to see how the common school movement can be denied major credit for bringing about the resolution of the great social crisis of the early republic.

NOTES

- ¹ The term “market revolution” has a controversial history among American historians. Charles Sellers wrote an influential book with this title in 1991 in which he argued that the market revolution was the signal event in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century around which all other issues revolved. In Sellers’ view, the emergence of a market economy had a devastating effect on nearly all but the wealthiest members of society, which was kept in check only by the rise of Jacksonian democracy. A number of historians responded critically to this interpretation, including Daniel Walker Howe, who wrote his own alternative account of this period in his 2007 book, *What Hath God Wrought?* In that work Howe argued that the market had always been a factor in American life, so there was no sudden market revolution in the 1820s, and the economic and social changes that did take place during this period were largely positive and generally welcomed by most members of society. The view of the market revolution that I am pursuing here lies somewhere in between these two polar histories of the period. Like Sellers, I see the changes in the 1820s as transformative rather than incremental; but like Howe, I see them as having positive qualities that led people at all levels of society to welcome the changes even as they simultaneously feared where these changes would lead. If there is a hero in my story, it is not the capitalists or the workers or the Jacksonian democrats; it is the whig reformers who designed institutions that would allow republican community to coexist with the new market economy. As it happens, in pursuing this argument I draw on Howe’s earlier book on *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (1979).
- ² This analysis draws inspiration from an essay by Michael Katz (1987), “The Origins of Public Education”, in *Reconstructing American Education*.
- ³ This analysis draws inspiration from an essay by Michael Katz (1987), “The Origins of Public Education”, in *Reconstructing American Education*.
- ⁴ I am drawing here on a perceptive account of the whig phenomenon by Howe (1979), in which he depicts it broadly as a cultural force in antebellum American life instead of

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limiting it to the members of the Whig party. I distinguish between the two in the text by capitalizing the Whig party and using the lower case for whig culture.

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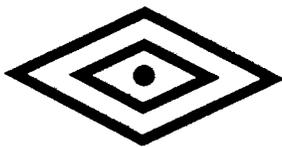
Education Systems in Historical, Cultural, and Sociological Perspectives

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