
Why the Schools Went Public

In the early 1800s, private schools were thriving. Then a small group of wealthy intellectuals decided education must be socialized. And in 40 years they had largely accomplished their goal. Here — for the first time — is the story of their campaign.

WHY DID AMERICANS give up educational freedom for educational statism so early in their history? You will not find the answer in the standard histories, for the simple reason that the question was never asked. It has always been assumed by educational historians that whatever preceded public education had to be less desirable than, and therefore inferior to, what came after. Otherwise, why would Americans have adopted public education?

This is the mind-set that has prevented historians from telling American educational history objectively. They start from the premise that public education is an indisputable good, and they reinforce this basic assumption with a good deal of dogma and legend, often at the expense of accuracy. For example, Horace Mann is usually dubbed the “father of public education” by these historians. But public schools, or common schools as they were



by Samuel L. Blumenfeld

originally called, existed in New England for 200 years before Mann came on the scene, so he was clearly not the father of public education. If he was the “father” of anything, it was of American educational statism.

Therefore, anyone attempting to revise this history, as I did, eventually comes to the realization that he must start from the beginning. Other writers, such as E. G. West, Murray Rothbard, and David Tyack, have done pioneer work in revising the slanted history of public education. But their critiques have tended to deal with developments *after* public education was established. I did not find the answer to that primal question in their writings. As for the standard histories, they give the impression that Americans adopted public education because private education was woefully inadequate, chaotic, or elitist, incapable of satisfying the needs of the new democratic society.

Yet, the historical evidence indicates

that *prior* to the introduction of compulsory public education, Americans were probably the most literate people in the world. Nor did the preponderance of private schools preclude the poor from getting an education. In some towns there were more charity and free schools, supported by private philanthropy and school funds, than there were poor pupils to go around; in Pennsylvania, the state paid the tuition of any child whose parents could not afford to send him to a private school.

BIBLICAL LITERACY

Despite the existence of slavery in the South, the United States, for its first 50 years, was a society as unregulated by government as has ever existed. For education, it meant complete freedom and diversity. There were no accrediting agencies, no regulatory boards, no teacher certification requirements. Parents had the freedom to choose whatever kind of school or education they wanted for their children. There were private schools of every sort and size—church schools, academies that prepared students for the colleges, seminaries, dames' schools for primary education, charity schools for the poor, private tutors — and common schools.

The common schools were the original public schools and were to be found in New England and contiguous areas to which New Englanders had migrated. They were first created in the very early days of the Puritan commonwealth in Massachusetts as a means of insuring the transference of the Calvinist Puritan religion from one generation to the next. The Reformation had replaced papal authority with Biblical authority, and the latter required a high degree of Biblical literacy. In addition, the Puritan leaders had been impressed with the public schools created by Luther and the German princes as a means of inculcating religious doctrine and maintaining social order in the Protestant states. Also, Harvard College had been founded in 1636, with the aid of a government grant, as a seminary for educating the commonwealth's future leaders, and it was found that a system of lower feeder schools was necessary to help find and develop local talent and to prepare such youngsters for higher studies at Harvard and future careers as magistrates and clergymen.

Thus the common schools of New England, supported by the local communities, came into existence. The Massachusetts law required the creation of common schools in the smaller towns plus grammar schools in the larger towns, where

Latin and Greek were to be taught. Latin and Greek were required, as well as Hebrew in the colleges, because these were the original languages of the Bible and of theological literature. All of the schools were strictly local, however—financed locally, and controlled by local committees who set their own standards, chose their own teachers, selected their own textbooks. There was no central authority dictating how the schools were to be run, just as there was no central authority dictating how the local church was to be run. Ministers were elected by their parishioners, and both schoolmasters and clergymen were paid by the towns. But the school laws did not preclude the creation of private schools by private individuals.

Thus, the Biblical commonwealth in the Massachusetts colony was a network of communities linked by a common Calvinist ideology, with a governor and representative legislature overseeing the whole, exercising a civil authority limited by the higher laws of God. The churches ran the towns, and church members ran the legislature. While the ideology was orthodox, the political form was quite democratic. The community conferred authority only on those it elected.

Was this a theocracy? Scholars have never quite been able to decide one way or another, for there was enough of a separation between the civil authority and the clergy to make the colony much less of a theocracy than it has gained a reputation for being. There was no religious hierarchy, and the governor was purely a civil figure. But one thing we do know is that, of all the English colonies, Massachusetts was the least tolerant of publicly expressed heretical teachings. Were it not for religious reasons, it is doubtful that the Massachusetts legislature would have enacted its school laws, for none of the other colonies, with the exception of Connecticut, enacted such laws. This did not mean that the people in the other colonies were less devout or had less religious content in their education. The other colonies, populated by a variety of sects, simply maintained a greater separation between church and civil authority.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS FLOURISH

The Biblical commonwealth did not last long. The growth of the colony, the development of trade, the influx of other religious sects, the increased general prosperity, and the emergence of religious liberalism tended to weaken the hold of the austere Puritan orthodoxy. Enforcement of the school laws grew lax, and private schools sprang up to teach the more practical commercial subjects. By 1720, for

example, Boston had far more private schools than public ones, and by the close of the American Revolution, many towns had no common schools at all.

In drafting its new state constitution in 1780, however, the Massachusetts legislators decided to reinstate the old school laws, primarily to maintain the continuity of its educational institutions. John Adams framed the article that both confirmed the special legal status of Harvard and emphasized the commonwealth's continued interest in public education. The strongest support for the article came from the Harvard-Boston establishment, which wanted to maintain the link between government and school. Harvard had been created with the help of a government grant and had been the recipient of many such grants over the years. In addition, members of the government had been on the Harvard Board of Overseers since 1642. The new constitution maintained the continuity of that relationship.

Connecticut, which had modeled its colonial laws on those of Massachusetts, followed suit and maintained the continuity of its common schools. New Hampshire did similarly. In New York State, the legislature in 1795 appropriated a large sum of money for the purpose of encouraging and maintaining schools in its cities and towns. Many towns took advantage of this school fund and established common schools, but these were only partially financed by the state fund. The counties were required to raise matching funds, and tuition was also paid by parents. In addition, wherever state governments showed an interest in promoting schools, private schools were also eligible for subsidies.

At the start of the new nation, Boston was the only American city to have a public school system. But it was hardly a system in today's sense of the word. Primary education was still left to the private dames' schools, and literacy was a requisite for entering the public grammar school at the age of seven. There was, of course, no compulsory attendance law. The pride of the system was the elitist Latin School, which prepared students for Harvard. Most of the children who attended it came from the upper ranks of Boston society. Thus, the public school was not conceived in the post-Revolutionary period as a means of lifting the lowly masses from illiteracy. It was simply an institutional holdover from earlier days. At the same time, private schools were flourishing, and most parents preferred them to the public ones.

For the next 20 years, public and private schools coexisted in Massachusetts,

with the more efficient private sector expanding slowly at the expense of the public sector. Outside of Boston, the growing middle and professional classes were abandoning the dilapidated public schools for the new private academies. Only in Boston did the public schools hold their own, and it was in Boston, in 1818, that the first move to expand the public sector at the expense of the private was made. This was a complete reversal of the general trend away from the public school. The promoters of the move wanted the city to establish a system of public primary schools and phase out the private dames' schools. There were too many delinquent children roaming the streets, they said, and too many poor parents who could not afford to send their children to the dames' schools, thus depriving them of the literacy necessary for entering the public grammar schools.

To find out if this were indeed the case, the school committee appointed a subcommittee to make a city-wide survey of the schooling situation. The survey, the first of its kind ever to be made in this country, revealed some very interesting facts. About 2,360 pupils attended the 8 public schools, but more than 4,000 attended the 150 or so private schools. The survey also revealed that 283 children between the ages of four and seven, and 243 children over seven, attended no school at all. In short, over 90 percent of the city's children attended school, despite the fact that there were no compulsory attendance laws and the primary schools were private. And it was obvious that even if primary education were made public, some parents would still keep their children at home, since there were already in existence eight charity primary schools for poor children. The committee thus recommended against establishing public primary schools, since the vast majority of parents were willing to pay for private instruction and the charity schools were available for those who could not afford to pay anything.

WHY GO PUBLIC?

But the promoters of the public primary schools waged a vigorous campaign in the press. The fact that over 90 percent of the children were in school was to them no cause for rejoicing. They focused on the several hundred who were not. What are those children doing? they asked. Who has charge of them? Where do they live? Why are they not in school? They warned that unless these children were rescued from neglect, they would surely become the criminals of tomorrow, and their cost to society would be far greater than the cost of public primary schools.

What is curious about this campaign is that the promoters never suggested that

perhaps the city might subsidize the tuition of children whose parents could not afford to send them to the dames' schools, thereby saving the taxpayers the cost of an entire public primary system. What they insisted on was an expansion of the public school system to include the primary grades, and they would not settle for anything less. Their persistence paid off, and primary education was finally made public. Three of the campaign's most active promoters, in fact, were appointed members of the new primary school committee.

Who were the promoters of this campaign? Why did they wage it with such fervor and determination? And why did they not seek a solution to the problem through private philanthropy or public subsidy, solutions far less costly to the taxpayer? At a time when the public, through its market choices, clearly showed that it favored the private approach to education, why did the promoters insist on an expansion of the public system? I found out the answers to all of these questions, but only after an enormous amount of digging. These questions, of course, had never been raised by previous historians,

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because to them the expansion of public education was a natural progressive march to democratic equality, as self-obvious as a parade up Fifth Avenue. Their question is usually, Why did it take Americans so long to adopt public education? not, Why did Americans give up educational freedom so early in their history?

Who were the promoters of the Boston campaign for public primary schools? The names meant nothing to me, and I had to become a historical detective, a tracer of obscure biographical data, before there emerged an interesting pattern that revealed not only a fascinating network of people in action from about 1805 to 1850 but also the ideas that motivated them. It took me a full year to get a handle on all of this, mainly because nothing in my previous reading or education had prepared me for what I was to uncover. Now, after the fact, it doesn't seem quite so earthshaking, but it has so completely changed my view of American and world history that I find it very difficult now to read the standard historical texts without becoming upset. The *distortion* in these texts is so great that it is not really a mat-

ter of simply revising history to correct it, but of actually telling it for the first time.

MAN AND GOD

The first 50 years of American history are generally passed over lightly by scholars on their way from the Revolution to the Civil War. We know some general facts about the period: the framing of the Constitution, the Louisiana Purchase, the War of 1812, the Battle of New Orleans, the Jacksonian era. But we are seldom made aware of the incredible intellectual and philosophical changes that were taking place in that transition period from preindustrial to industrial society. The emphasis in the history books is always on political and military events interlaced with material progress: the invention of the steamboat, the development of the railroads, the invention of the cotton gin.

But what also took place during that period was an intellectual event of great importance—probably the most important in American history: the takeover of Harvard by the Unitarians in 1805 and the expulsion of the Calvinists. That takeover made Harvard not only the citadel of religious and moral liberalism but also the citadel of anti-Calvinism. It took me months to understand the significance of all of this because it required a detailed study of Calvinism and the rise of the Unitarian heresy in the heart of the Puritan commonwealth. But when I did, the intellectual history of America suddenly began to make much more sense, for no event has had a greater long-range influence on American intellectual, cultural, and political life than this one.

The issues at stake were fundamental: the nature of God and the nature of man. The liberals, brought up in the moral, benevolent atmosphere of a free, prosperous, ever-expanding society, could no longer accept the Calvinist worldview, which placed the Bible at the center of spiritual and moral understanding. The liberals found the Calvinist doctrines of innate depravity, predestination, election, and reprobation particularly repugnant. Calvin's was a God-centered worldview in which a man's life is determined by his personal relationship to an all-powerful God who had expressed his will in the Old and New Testaments. The Ten Commandments were the essence of God's law. They provided protection to life and property and codified commitment to God and family. They were the restraints that would save men from becoming the victims of their own innate depravity.

The Unitarians rejected all of this. They could not believe in the existence of an unfair, unjust God who elects a few and rejects others, a God who favors some and condemns the rest. Calvin was the first to admit that these doctrines seem

unjust and repugnant, but he answered that God has placed a limit on what man is permitted to know and that man therefore has no choice but to accept God's will as revealed in the Scripture and by the cold facts of life. Those facts include the existence of evil, the sufferings of the innocent, the triumph of tyrants, the general difficulties of the human condition in a world ruled by an omnipotent God who, despite all of this, is still a benevolent God because he created man to begin with.

The Unitarians accepted the notion that God created man, but they also insisted that man was given the freedom to make of his life whatever he can. It is man himself who can decide, through his life on earth, whether he goes to heaven or hell. He is not innately depraved. He is, in fact, rational and perfectible. As for the existence of evil, they believed that it is caused by ignorance, poverty, social injustice, and other environmental and social factors. Education, the Unitarians decided, is the only way to solve the problem of evil. Education will eliminate ignorance, which will eliminate poverty, which will eliminate social injustice, which will eliminate crime. Moral progress is as attainable as material progress once the principles of improvement are discovered.

SECULAR SALVATION

It was therefore only natural that the Unitarians would shift their practice of religion from the worship of a harmless, benevolent God of limited powers to the creation of institutions on earth to improve the character of man. The one institution that the Unitarians decided could be used to carry out this formidable task was the public school. Their first organized effort was the campaign in 1818 to create primary public schools in Boston.

Why only public schools and not private or charity schools? Because private schools were run and controlled by individuals who might have entirely different views concerning the nature of man. Besides, private owners were forced by economic reality to concentrate on teaching skills rather than forming character. As for the church schools, they were too sectarian, and the charity schools were usually run by Calvinists. Only the public schools, controlled in Boston by the affluent Unitarian establishment, could become that secular instrument of salvation.

But why did the first organized effort take place in 1818? Because, at around that time, a man in Scotland had proudly broadcast to the civilized world that he had discovered the basic principle of moral improvement. His name was Robert Owen, and we know of him today as the father of socialism. Owen was a self-made manufacturer who became a social messiah when he "discovered" what he

considered to be the basic truth about human character: that a man's character is made for him by society through upbringing, education, and environment—not by himself, as the religionists taught. Children in a cannibal society grow up to be adult cannibals. Children in a selfish, competitive society grow up to be selfish and competitive. No one is innately depraved or evil. An infant is a glob of plastic that can be molded to have whatever character society wishes him to have.

Owen started publishing his ideas in 1813 and, to prove that he was right, in 1816 established his famous Institution for the Formation of Character at New Lanark. Through a secular, scientific curriculum coupled with the notion that each pupil must strive to make his fellow pupils happy, Owen hoped to turn out little rational cooperative human beings, devoid of selfishness, superstition, and all of the other traits found in capitalist man.

All of these ideas were music to the ears of the Boston Unitarians, who wanted confirmation that man is indeed perfectible through the process of education. But Owen had stressed that the earlier you start training the child the better chance

In 1818, without compulsory attendance laws, over 90 percent of Boston's children attended school.

you have to mold his character, which is why the Unitarians launched their campaign to create public primary schools. And this was only the first step, for in 1816 Owen had published an essay outlining a plan for a national system of education whereby the character of a whole nation could be molded to the good of all. He wrote in *A New View of Society*:

At present, there are not any individuals in the kingdom who have been trained to instruct the rising generation, as it is for the interest and happiness of all that it should be instructed. The training of those who are to form the future man becomes a consideration of the utmost magnitude; for, on due reflection, it will appear that instruction to the young must be, of necessity, the only foundation upon which the superstructure of society can be raised. Let this instruction continue to be left, as heretofore, to chance, and often to the most inefficient members of the community, and society must still experience the endless miseries which arise from such weak and puerile conduct. On the contrary, let the instruc-

tion of the young be well devised and well executed, and no subsequent proceedings in the state can be materially injurious. For it may truly be said to be a wonder-working power; one that merits the deepest attention of the legislature; with ease it may be used to train man into a daemon of mischief to himself and all around him, or into an agent of unlimited benevolence.

Thus, socialism began as an educational movement to reform the character of man into "future man"—today we call it Soviet man. Leaving education "to chance" meant leaving it private, and that is why in 1818 the Unitarians insisted on creating public primary schools rather than subsidizing pupils to attend private ones. It was also the beginning of the organized movement that was to culminate in the creation of our compulsory public educational system.

SOCIALIZED EDUCATION

From the very beginning, the Unitarians and socialists were the prime movers and leaders of this long-range sustained effort. Between 1823 and 1825, James G. Carter, a Harvard Unitarian, published a series of essays deploring the general trend away from the common schools and advocating the expansion of public education and the creation of state-supported teachers' seminaries. Owen had stressed the need for such seminaries and in his book called them "the most powerful instrument for good that has ever yet been placed in the hands of man." The Harvard-Unitarian elite gave Carter's proposals their strongest endorsement and widest circulation.

In 1825, Robert Owen came to America to establish his communist colony at New Harmony, Indiana. The experiment received a great deal of newspaper publicity and attracted a large number of followers. It was called "an experiment in social reform through cooperation and rational education." But in less than two years it failed. The problem, Owen decided, was that people raised and educated under the old system were incapable of adapting themselves to the communist way of life no matter how much they professed to believe in it. Therefore, the Owenites decided that rational education would have to precede the creation of a socialist society, and they subsequently launched a strong campaign to promote a national system of education.

Owen's son, Robert Dale Owen, and Frances Wright set up headquarters in New York, helped organize the Workingmen's Party as a front for Owenite ideas, published a radical weekly paper called the *Free Enquirer*, and lectured widely on socialism and national education. Their antireligious views turned so many people

away from Owenism, however, that they were forced to adopt covert techniques to further their ends. One of the men attracted to their cause was Orestes Brownson, a writer and editor, whose remarkable religious odyssey took him from Calvinism to Universalism to socialism to Unitarianism and finally to Catholicism.

Years later, describing his short experience with the Owenites, Brownson wrote:

But the more immediate work was to get our system of schools adopted. To this end it was proposed to organize the whole Union secretly, very much on the plan of the Carbonari of Europe, of whom at that time I knew nothing. The members of this secret society were to avail themselves of all the means in their power, each in his own locality, to form public opinion in favor of education by the state at the public expense, and to get such men elected to the legislatures as would be likely to favor our purposes. How far the secret organization extended, I do not know; but I do know that a considerable portion of the State of New York was organized, for I was myself one of the agents for organizing it.

So now we know that as early as 1829, the socialists had adopted covert techniques to further their ends in the United States, techniques that they continued to use for decades.

It was also in 1829 that Josiah Holbrook launched the Lyceum movement to organize the educators of America into a powerful lobby for public education. While I have not as yet found absolute evidence that Holbrook was a covert Owenite, circumstantial evidence convinces me

that he was. And if the socialists decided to further their cause by working through the instrument of public education, we can then understand why the system has had such a pro-socialist bias for as long as any of us can remember. Indeed, public education was to become the socialists' primary instrument for promoting socialism.

UNLIMITED GOOD

In promoting socialism one also promoted the State, for the secular State was to be the primary political instrument for exercising man's rational power. When Frances Wright, the Owenite feminist, lectured in the United States for a national system of education, she left no doubt that the State was to be the ultimate beneficiary of such a system. She wrote in 1829 in the *Free Enquirer*:

That one measure, by which alone childhood may find sure protection; by which alone youth may be made wise, industrious, moral, and happy; by which alone the citizens of this land may be made, in very deed, *free and equal*. That measure—you know it. It is national, rational, republican education; free for all at the expense of all; conducted under the guardianship of the state, at the expense of the state, for the honor, the happiness, the virtue, the salvation of the state.

But while Josiah Holbrook, with active help from the Unitarians, was organizing the educators through the Lyceum movement, and the Owenites were agitating for a national system of education, the American people were going in the opposite direction. The free market favored private

education, and new private academies were springing up all over the country, particularly in Massachusetts, where the town-supported common schools were being abandoned by the middle class (see box).

Thus, had free-market forces been permitted to operate in the educational field without ideological opposition, the common schools would have either disappeared or been reduced to their most rudimentary function as dispensers of free elementary education to a dwindling constituency. In the long run, it would have been more economical for the towns to pay for the tuition of poor children to attend private schools than for the towns to maintain free schools. So the problem was never one of economics; it was, from the very beginning, philosophical.

If both the socialists and the Unitarians embraced educational statism as the future way to human moral progress, it was for two reasons: first, they rejected the Biblical, Calvinist view of man; and second, they rejected the Biblical view of history. Man as sinful and depraved was replaced by man as rational, benevolent, innately good, and perfectible. But the American form of limited government with its elaborate checks and balances had been created on the basis of the Calvinist distrust of human nature. The Calvinists didn't believe that power corrupts man, but that man corrupts power. Man is a sinner by nature and therefore cannot be trusted with power. Only a true fear of God, they believed, can hold sinful man in check.

As the orthodox faith waned in the 19th century and faith in rational man grew, Western culture began to accept a reverse philosophy of human nature. To explain why man does the evil things he does, they turned from theology to psychology. The first scientific attempt to explain the origin of criminal behavior was phrenology, and its teachings had considerable impact on the thinking of many 19th-century educators, including Horace Mann.

As for the Biblical view of history, the Romantic movement projected a new heroic image of man as conqueror and innovator, and mankind was viewed in a universal sense as one big progressive family. Thus was born the myth of moral progress: the idea that man is always getting morally better and better.

The prime modern promoter of this idea was the German philosopher Georg Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), who formulated the dialectical process of human moral progress, a process liberated from the strictures of the Old and New Testaments. He replaced the objectively real God of the Bible with a subjective pantheism in which man is revealed as the high-

For Further Information . . .

Data on the growth of private education during the early 1800s can be found in James G. Carter's *Letters to the Hon. William Prescott, LL.D., on the Free Schools of New England* (1824). Carter was one of the earliest critics of this movement away from public education. He provides interesting insights into the way market choices by parents in the 1820s were leading to the phasing out of public schools in many towns. In his second book, *Essays upon Popular Education* (1826), Carter complained at length about the negative effects the new private schools were having on the common schools. This book is one of the few sources that sheds light on this interesting period of growing educational freedom, when it was clearly demonstrated that in a free market, private enterprise in education could easily compete with free government schools and win.

Additional data about the private schools can be found in a series of articles published in Horace Mann's *Common School Journal* in 1839. The purpose of the articles, "Addressed to the Professional Men of Massachusetts," was to get middle-class parents to withdraw their children from the private schools and enroll them in public ones. Mann's *First Annual Report* (1838) also discussed why parents were abandoning the public schools in favor of private ones. Clearly, the "father" of public education did not give birth to public education but merely revived it from its declining state.

Stanley K. Schultz provides an account of the 1818 campaign in Boston for public primary schools in *The Culture Factory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

est manifestation of God in the universe. Rational, heroic, perfectible man was thus elevated to godlike status, and his secular state was expected to dispense a justice and equality not to be found in the Scriptures. Liberated, unrestrained rational man would create, not unlimited evil as the Calvinists believed, but unlimited good.

FROM HEGEL TO MANN

It was only natural, therefore, that the Harvard-Unitarian elite would look toward Prussia for their statist models. And they found exactly what they were looking for in the Prussian state system of compulsory education, with its truant officers, graded classes, and uniform curriculum. That system had been set up in 1819, and Robert Owen claims in his autobiography that the Prussian system was built on his ideas. Of course, Luther had advocated public schools at the time of the Reformation. But the Prussian system was a model of centralized control, and it had the one feature that Owen considered indispensable for a successful state system: state training schools for teachers. It was acknowledged by the Prussians that you really cannot control education until you control the teachers and their indoctrination. In other words, teachers were to be the front-line troops for statism.

Members of the Harvard-Unitarian elite had acquired a taste for German education while studying in Germany, but Americans had no interest in adopting such a system for themselves. In 1833, however, a French professor of philosophy, Victor Cousin, published a lengthy report on the Prussian system for his own government, which was subsequently translated into English and published in the United States. It was exactly what the public school movement needed, and it was distributed among American educators, who began to arrive at a consensus that the Prussian system was the way to go.

The fact that Cousin had written the report added to its prestige, for Cousin was the main transmission belt of Hegelianism to the Harvard elite. His series of lectures on Hegel's history of philosophy was widely read among the Harvard Unitarians, many of whom became Transcendentalists.

Thus, by the time Horace Mann entered the scene in 1837 as the first secretary of the newly created Massachusetts Board of Education, the groundwork had been thoroughly done by the Owenites, Unitarians, and Hegelians. Mann, a talented lawyer-legislator, was chosen by the Harvard-Unitarian elite to bring educational statism to Massachusetts because he had demonstrated that when it came to legislation, he could give the liberals

whatever they wanted. They had enormous confidence in him, and he never disappointed them.

If any single person can claim credit for changing America's social, academic, and ultimately political direction from a libertarian to a statist one, the credit must go to Horace Mann, for it was Mann who was able to overcome the considerable opposition to statism, while others could not. The key to his success was in his peculiar sense of mission, combined with his practical political experience as a legislator and the strong financial, cultural, and social backing of the Harvard-Unitarian elite.

He hated Calvinism with a passion and fought Calvinist opposition with a ferocity that disturbed some, but delighted most, of his Unitarian backers. But he succeeded mainly because he knew how to divide the opposition. By the mid-1830s, even some Trinitarian Protestants were being swayed by German religious liberalism. Also, Protestant leaders like Calvin Stowe and Lyman Beecher, who were based in Ohio, saw in the Prussian educational system a model they could use in their own efforts to maintain the Protestant charac-

The Harvard-Unitarian elite found exactly what they were looking for in the Prussian state system of compulsory education.

ter of American culture in the face of massive Catholic immigration.

In any case, the backbone of the opposition to educational statism was made up primarily of orthodox Calvinists who feared the long-range antireligious effects of secular public education and favored the decentralized common-school system as it existed before the Board of Education came into being. One of them, Edward Newton, summed it up in these words in the *Christian Witness* in 1844: "We do not need this central, all-absorbing power; it is anti-republican in all its bearings, well-adapted perhaps, to Prussia, and other European despotisms, but not wanted here."

STATISM ENTRENCHED

Despite considerable and continued opposition, all attempts to stop the growth of educational statism failed. Thus, from its very inception educational statism was the prime promoter of statism itself in America. To Mann, the symbol of the triumph of statism was the creation of the first state normal school. The normal school was the state-financed and -con-

trolled teachers' college. No sooner had Mann been appointed secretary of the Board of Education by Gov. Edward Everett than he got to work setting up the first normal school in Lexington. It was done through the financial help of a prominent Unitarian industrialist, whose funds were matched by the state legislature. It was established in 1838 as an experiment. Opposition to the idea of state-controlled teacher training remained strong, until 1845 when the opposition was finally overcome.

In March 1845, the Massachusetts legislature voted to appropriate \$5,000 in matching funds to the \$5,000 raised by Mann's Harvard-Unitarian friends to build two additional normal schools. In describing the dedication ceremony at one of the schools, Mann wrote this in the *Common School Journal* (Oct. 1, 1846):

What constituted the crowning circumstance of the whole was, that the Legislature, in making the grant, changed the title or designation of the schools. In all previous reports, laws, and resolves, they had been called "Normal Schools." But by the resolves for the erection of the new houses, it was provided that these schools should thereafter be known and designated as *State Normal Schools*,—the State thus giving to them a paternal name, as the sign of adoption, and the pledge of its affection.

To Mann, who believed the normal school to be "a new instrumentality in the advancement of the race," the linking of State power to teacher education was indeed a crowning circumstance, creating what James G. Carter had described in 1825 as a powerful "engine to sway the public sentiment, the public morals, and the public religion, more powerful than any other in the possession of government." Carter was perfectly right, for once the philosophy of statism is firmly entrenched in a nation's teachers' colleges, that philosophy will very soon permeate every other aspect of society.

The simple truth that experience has taught us is that the most potent and significant expression of statism is a State educational system. Without it, statism is impossible. With it, the State can, and has, become everything. ▮

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Illustration by Don Wood