

The Educational System of the United States --It's Nature, History and Aims

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Every government tends to train the future generations as to its own repurposes. We saw this clearly in Nazi Germany, Communist Russia, China, and Fascist Italy. We see it more clearly now in the MidEast. Propaganda becomes the grist mill of the modern 'isms'. Young people respond to the convictions and values or lack of them that they are taught.

The Nature of our Educational System

That is why our Founding Fathers set up an educational system that would pass on the highest convictions and principles of our form of government.

A Remarkable Education

What a remarkable education our Founding Fathers must have received, for it successfully equipped them to establish our government which has now lasted securely for over two centuries. But what kind of educational system was it that produced these remarkable men? What were they taught that equipped them to produce such a unique philosophy of government? To help answer these questions, let's begin by examining what was being taught at the schools which produced our great leaders--schools like Harvard, Yale and Princeton.¹

Interestingly, colleges and universities then--just like now--not only had general educational objectives, they also had specific student requirements. For example, at Harvard (the school selected by John Adams, John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and other Founding Fathers), its declared educational purpose was clear:

Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus which is eternal life, (*Jn* 17:3), and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning.

To help students attain this general goal, Harvard instituted specific practices. For example:

Everyone shall so exercise himself in reading the Scriptures twice a day that he

¹ Numerous Founding Fathers attended these prestigious institutions, including these signers of the Declaration of Independence: John Adams, William Ellery, Elbridge Gerry, John Hancock, William Hooper, Robert Treat Paine, William Williams, Lyman Hall, Phillip Livingston, Lewis Morris, Benjamin Rush, and Richard Stockton; and these signers of the Constitution: Rufus King, Abraham Baldwin, Jared Ingersoll, William Samuel Johnson, William Livingston, Gunning Bedford, Johnathan Dayton, James Madison, and William Paterson.

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At Harvard, all academic endeavors were built upon the foundation of Biblical principles: the primary educational objective was to know God and Jesus Christ and each student therefore was to know and study the Scriptures.

Yale was another popular school of the day, attended by William Samuel Johnson, William Livingston, Noah Webster, and other prominent Founders. Yale, which declared itself a college “for the religious and liberal education of suitable youth,” had specific requirements for its students:

Seeing God is the giver of all wisdom, every scholar, besides private or secret prayer ... shall be present morning and evening at public prayer ... shall be present morning and evening at public prayer.

Yale’s philosophy of education was openly religious, placing a strong emphasis on student prayer--private as well as public!

Princeton produced more of the two hundred-plus Founding Fathers than any other single school; its alumni included men like President James Madison and signers of the Declaration Benjamin Rush, Richard Stockton, and John Witherspoon. The educational philosophy of Princeton University (founded in 1746) was made clear by its first president, Jonathan Dickinson, who declared:

Cursed be all that learning that is contrary to the cross of Christ!

Similar emphasis can also be seen in the other schools of the day, including William & Mary, Rutgers, King’s College, etc.

Christianity unquestionably was at the core of the education received by our Founding Fathers. Yet, this is not surprising, for Christianity had been the basis of American education for nearly a century and a half before the Founding Fathers. In fact, the very first public education laws passed in America in the early 1600s had been constructed upon Christian principles./

Those first laws proceeded from the experiences of the early American settlers still concerned about the civil atrocities of Europe. Those atrocities too often had occurred under the alleged banner of Christianity (e.g., the Inquisition, the Crusades, etc.) and our

early religious immigrants were convinced that widespread illiteracy and lack of individual knowledge of the Bible (as opposed to what the civil and religious leaders claimed the Bible said), had contributed much to the public sanction of those atrocities. The American settlers were convinced that if the common people of that day could have read the Word of God for themselves that they never would have tolerated their civil governments engaging in the atrocities they did.

In an attempt to preclude such repetitions America, in 1642, those settlers passed “The Old Deluder Satan Act” -- the first public school law in America. That law declared:

It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former time...

This law acknowledged the fact that a primary intent of Satan was to keep people ignorant of the Scriptures; to prevent this, American students would have a sound education based on God’s Word.