

**SCHOOLING THE NEW SOUTH:
PEDAGOGY, SELF, AND SOCIETY
IN NORTH CAROLINA, 1880-1920**

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“Educational work in [the South] is...something more than the teaching of youth; it is the building of a new social order.”

Walter Hines Page, 1902

Walter Hines Page spoke for a generation of young reformers who laboured to create a New South through the agency of public education. Between 1880 and 1920, his home state of North Carolina led in that crusade by building more than 5,000 new schoolhouses, professionalizing teacher training, and establishing an elaborate bureaucracy to administer the instruction of youth. Civic leaders touted those projects as the means of inducting future generations into the habits of wage labour and market production. They viewed the classroom as North Carolina's bridge from a plantation to a commercial economy. It was to be the progenitor of a new culture and a new way of life.¹

The southern campaign for educational reform turned on the critical but largely unexplored transition from common-school to graded-school pedagogy. The practices of graded education have become so much a part of our everyday lives that it is difficult to imagine that children ever learned in any other way. As a result, pedagogical questions that were hotly contested at the turn of the century

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1. The epigraph is from Walter Hines Page, “Rebuilding of Old Commonwealths,” in *The Rebuilding of Old Commonwealths, Being Essays Toward the Training of the Forgotten Man in the Southern States* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1902), 150-51. Page left North Carolina in 1885, dismayed by the persistent conservatism of the state's political leadership. In later years, he used his position as an expatriate to draw national attention to efforts at New South educational and economic reform. See John Milton Cooper, *Walter Hines Page: The Southerner as American, 1855-1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977).

have faded from public discourse and their connection to issues of social and economic organization have been largely forgotten. But those educational debates are not entirely lost to time. The archives are ripe with sources—teachers' and parents' letters, student reminiscences, and both fictional and prescriptive literature—for constructing an historical ethnography of the classroom. By peering into the schoolhouses of the past, we can begin to rediscover how seemingly ordinary childhood experiences were linked to sweeping processes of social, economic, and cultural transformation. Such a venture promises to remind us of what nineteenth-century reformers knew so well: that ways of learning are intimately connected to ways of perceiving, thinking, and acting.²

ON THE EVE of the Civil War, North Carolina was an economic backwater, known even among its own inhabitants as the "Rip Van Winkle State," the "Ireland of America." Lacking a major seaport and a system of easily navigable rivers, it never sustained great plantations like those boasted by its neighbours, South Carolina and Virginia. But the state's fortunes were shaped nonetheless by the economics of slavery. Political power rested in the hands of eastern slave-owners, who held the great bulk of their wealth in the form of human rather than real property. Unlike land, that investment was movable, and its value bore little relation to local development. As a result, North Carolina's governing elite gave scant attention to improving the countryside through the construction of railroads, canals, villages, and factories. They sought instead to maximize the return on their investment in slaves. When the soil wore out, planters—particu-

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2. This essay is partly an attempt to refocus the discussion of Progressive school reform. Beginning with Michael Katz's pioneering work in the late 1960s, revisionist scholars challenged the view of public education as the capstone of democracy. Their accounts of schools deeply mired in class and racial conflicts helped make sense of the concerns of teachers who complained of blackboard jungles and dull, repressive classrooms. But over the last decade the revisionists themselves have come under fire from critics who point to an abandonment of basic education rather than social inequities as the real cause of the schools' failure to deliver on their democratic promise. The ensuing debate has generated more heat than light, primarily because both camps have treated the school as a black box, arguing over what went in and what came out rather than what happened inside. My effort to probe that darkness draws on the work of anthropologists and sociologists who have sought to decipher the inner workings of contemporary schools. See esp. Gary Anderson, "Critical Ethnography in Education: Origins, Current Status, and New Directions," *Review of Educational Research* 59 (Fall 1989): 249-70; Michael W. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); Norris Brock Johnson, *West Haven: Classroom Culture and Society in a Rural Elementary School* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); and Peter Woods, *Inside Schools: Ethnography in Educational Research* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

larly those of more modest means—picked up and moved to unexploited land elsewhere in the state or to the fertile fields of Alabama, Mississippi, and western Tennessee. Between 1790 and 1860 that footloose behaviour helped to drop North Carolina in population from fourth to twelfth place in the nation. Those planters who remained produced cotton, tobacco, and rice—crops that oriented them toward the coastal export trade rather than inland commerce. For that reason, they offered only limited support for efforts to pierce the state's interior with plank roads and rail lines. Local investors and the state legislature financed a fledgling rail system on the coastal plain during the 1830s and 1840s, primarily to service the cotton and tobacco economy, but until 1856 no track extended further west than Raleigh, the state capital, just one hundred and fifty miles from the shore.³

Underdevelopment left most North Carolinians in the upcountry Piedmont and mountain regions living in rural isolation. Poor transportation hobbled commercial agriculture and reinforced a system of general farming and direct exchange among local producers. White yeomen and a smaller group of tenants raised corn, wheat, and other grains to feed their families; in the woods and meadows that surrounded their fields they herded cattle and hogs, hunted wild game for the table, and harvested timber for fuel and shelter. People found dignity in working with their hands, treasured control over their labour, and considered ownership of land—or at least access to the means of subsistence—a common right. Although not unaware of events in the outside world, they grounded their identities in a familiar circle of family, neighbours, and friends. Calvin Henderson Wiley, who took office as the first State Superintendent of Common Schools in 1852, thought of North Carolina as less a state than “a confederation of independent communities.” “Whoever travels over North Carolina,” he observed, “will meet with great apparent diversity of character, manners, and interest; and if he be much attached to the ways...of his own community, will hardly ever feel himself at home from the time that he crosses the boundaries of his county.” Nearly thirty years later, another traveler found most North Carolinians to be “independent and happy, but very far from the rest of the world.”⁴

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3. Hugh Talmage Lefler and Alfred Ray Newsome, *North Carolina: The History of a Southern State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 314-26, 362-66; Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 20-73; and Cecil Kenneth Brown, *State Movement in Railroad Development: The Story of North Carolina's First Effort to Establish an East and West Trunk Line Railroad* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1928), 1-147. This discussion of slavery's effects on economic development draws on insights from Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 17-33.
 4. Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina,*

The state's common schools bore the stamp of that rural society. Before the mid-1880s, education was primarily a local enterprise that served to integrate children into webs of personal relations defined by kinship, church, and race. North Carolina first provided for a system of public education in 1839, when lawmakers empowered individual counties to collect school taxes supplemented by payments from a state Literary Fund. The Fund, established fourteen years earlier, drew its revenues from bank and navigation company stocks, taxes on auctioneers and distillers, and profits from the sale of state-owned swamp lands and other public holdings. By the time of the Civil War, those resources supported the instruction of more than 100,000 children, roughly half the white school-aged population, enrolled in 3,488 districts scattered across the countryside.⁵ Under the Reconstruction Constitution of 1868, the benefits of schooling were extended to black children and a tax-supported, four-month term was made a legal requirement rather than a local option. Black Republicans fought for those provisions on behalf of constituents who viewed education as the key to realizing their dream of independence on the land. For the freedmen, illiteracy was both a badge of servitude and a serious liability in their dealings with white landlords and merchants. They embraced the common school as a means of putting "as great a distance between themselves and bondage as possible."⁶

1850-1900 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 3-31; Robert C. Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood in a Southern Community: Orange County, North Carolina, 1849-1881* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987); *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1896/97-1897/98* (Raleigh, 1898), 449-50; *Special Report of the General Superintendent of Common Schools, 1854* (Raleigh, 1855), 30; and "Among the Pines," *State Chronicle*, Sept. 22, 1883.

5. On the early history of public education in North Carolina, see Stephen B. Weeks, "Beginnings of the Common School System in the South; or, Calvin Henderson Wiley and the Organization of the Common Schools of North Carolina," in *Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior, Report of the Commissioner of Education, for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1897*, House Documents, vol. 22, no. 5, 55th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C., 1898), 2: 1379-1474, and Marcus Stephens Cicero Noble, *A History of the Public Schools of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930), 43-63. The statistics on school districts and enrolment are from *Report of the Superintendent of Common Schools of North Carolina, for the Year 1860* (N.p.: John Spelman, n.d.), part I, 18.
6. Noble, *History of the Public Schools of North Carolina*, 285-98, and Ronald Eugene Butchart, "Educating for Freedom: Northern Whites and the Origins of Black Education in the South, 1862-1875" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1976), 430-31. Many communities found it difficult to achieve a four-month term because the same constitution that mandated the longer session also limited poll taxes to \$2 and property taxes to 66 2/3 cents per \$100 valuation, ceilings that were often too low to provide the necessary revenues. A four-month term did not become commonplace until after the turn of the century, when most counties

But in other fundamental ways, the antebellum system of public instruction survived relatively unaltered. In the years immediately after the Civil War, schooling—in African-American and white communities alike—continued to stand on what one observer described as a foundation of “home rule and self-government.” State- and county-level administration of schooling existed in name only. Meaningful authority resided with neighbourhood committees which built and held title to school buildings, examined teachers’ qualifications, and arranged the school calendar so that it did not conflict with family demands on children’s labour at harvest and planting times. Teaching was a casual pursuit rather than a profession, and most instructors were men who entered the classroom to earn tuition money for college or the cash that farm families needed for store-bought goods.⁷

Instruction in the common schools followed no set curriculum or pattern of advancement. Between the ages of six and twenty-one, children moved in and out of school according to family needs, often attending when they were very little, then remaining at home for several years, and finally returning when younger brothers and sisters were old enough to relieve them of field work and household duties.⁸ Students used whatever books their parents could obtain or afford, and instruction usually took the form of memory work. That meant, for example, that children learned to read by learning to spell. “Over and over again” was the rule as pupils laboured to conquer lists of words without definitions. Observers frequently described the common schools as “loud” or “howling schools” because teachers required students to chant their lessons while memorizing them. When all of the children were hard at work, the classroom rang with “a constant hum & hubbub” and the “babel jargon of voices.”⁹

adopted special local-option school taxes. See Noble, *History of the Public Schools of North Carolina*, 391.

7. *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1898/99-1899/1900* (Raleigh, 1900), 234, and James L. Leloudis, “‘A More Certain Means of Grace’: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1989), 17-30.
8. Leloudis, “A More Certain Means of Grace,” 30-31. Such a casual attitude toward attendance can make nineteenth-century school census figures misleading. In 1887, the state superintendent reported that among blacks and whites alike only 58 percent of school-aged children were enrolled, but he warned against concluding that others never knew the benefits of the classroom. They were likely to attend for at least a term or two sometime before their twenty-first birthday. See *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1887-1888* (Raleigh, 1889), xxxi.
9. Zillah Raymond, *Then and Now, or Hope’s First School* (Wilmington, N.C., 1883), 45, 87-89; Edgar W. Knight, ed., *A Documentary History of Education in the South Before 1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1950), V: 234; “Howling Schools,” *North Carolina Teacher* 4 (Mar. 1887): 356-58; and



A rural common school of log construction, ca. 1890. Note the wide range of ages among the students. The original does not identify the teacher.

Courtesy of the North Carolina Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The fact that common schools privileged sound over sight reflected the pattern of human relationships that conditioned literacy in nineteenth-century rural society. Modern observers might easily dismiss the clamour of the common school as a detriment to learning, but that judgement suggests how alien common-school pedagogy has become to our way of experiencing the world. Parents and educators valued reading less as an avenue of empowerment for the individual than as a means of reaffirming the moral bonds of everyday life. Teachers assumed that students would communicate more often through speech than through writing and that patterns of local usage would supply meaning. They also wanted children to read so that they could understand “the Bible and the laws

“Schooldays,” box 9, Charles Duncan McIver Papers, Special Collections, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Compare William A. Link, *A Hard Country and a Lonely Place: Schooling, Society, and Reform in Rural Virginia, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 65.

of the state"; they valued memory work because it tied the present to the past, making "what has already been done a pattern of good counsel to the future."¹⁰

All in all, the common schools were well adapted to the lives of middling farmers, men and women who placed scant faith in acquisitiveness and social mobility but laboured instead for a competence and a respectable start in life for their children. Education was one of many paths to adulthood. It was meant to provide only the basic knowledge of reading, writing, and ciphering necessary for survival in a face-to-face world governed more by custom than by the written word. Parents and teachers recognized and rewarded students' individual achievements in the classroom, but at every turn those accomplishments were tied to the rhythms of collective life. Youngsters went to school to learn their way around a densely personal world, not to make preparations for striking out on their own. The common school embodied what one historian has described as a "peasant pedagogy"—one more attuned to getting along than to getting ahead.¹¹

By the early 1880s, however, economic forces unleashed by the Civil War and emancipation had begun to produce dramatic changes in the neighbourhood-oriented world of the common school. With the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, slave-holders who had once been labourlords became landlords. Contemporary observers pointed out the profound implications of that shift in property rights. They argued that slavery had bound whites as well as blacks by choking off entrepreneurial energies, and rejoiced that the Civil War liberated "not only the black slaves but a large class of white slaves" as well. "Our labor has become free, our doors have been thrown open to ideas of money,"

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10. I am drawing here on insights from Madeleine R. Grumet, *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 140-41, and Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 2-14. The quotations are from the *Raleigh News and Observer*, Sept. 22, 1886, and "Plutarch on the Training of Children," *Schoolteacher* 2 (Jan. 1888): 8. Teachers who attempted to standardize textbooks even within neighbourhood schools often confronted the intransigence of parents who clung to family heirlooms out of poverty or a belief in the power of books to "interlock one generation with the other." See Francis Lieber to "a committee of the Euphradian Society," Nov. 22, 1848, Francis Lieber Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, quoted in Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 130, and Raymond, *Then and Now*, 40. For comparative purposes, see David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 19-20; Link, *Hard Country*, 68-70; and Edward Eggleston, *The Hoosier School-Master, A Novel* (New York, 1871), 34.
11. Compare Ben Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools: Officialdom, Village Culture, and Popular Pedagogy, 1861-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

exclaimed Edwin Anderson Alderman, one of the architects of the graded-school movement. "In short, we have passed from the patriarchal to the economic stage of society, where...the orators and dreamers of old must, at least, share the stage with the manufacturer, the producer, the industrial man."¹²

Emancipation forced white North Carolinians to rethink "fundamental points of view, social, political, and economic." As long as slavery survived, the state's elite had taken little interest in local development. But black freedom introduced new economic incentives. Masters without slaves had no choice but to redirect their investments and their politics toward raising land yields and land values. Across the South, coalitions of furnishing merchants and large landholders campaigned for fence laws and the enclosure of the common range, railroad and town building, new taxes to pay for public improvements, and factories that would turn the resources of the land into profitable goods. Denied property of their own or recognition of the common rights that had made a semi-subsistence way of life possible, burdened by higher taxes and the pressure to grow more cash crops instead of food, large numbers of freedmen and white yeomen began to work other men's land as sharecroppers or abandoned the plow to sell their labour for wages.¹³

School reformers insisted that this "new order" of life "called for radical readjustment" in the way that children were educated. Wickliffe Rose, an outspoken proponent of graded education, explained that in a society of free labour and cash exchange each individual had "to win for himself his place, and must show himself worthy of [that] place by winning it anew every day. In the new South not birth but worth determines place, and the criterion of worth is social efficiency." Here was a transformative ideology, what one schoolman termed a new "culture of the self" that defined exertion, striving, and enterprise as the keys to happiness and a rewarding life.¹⁴

Beginning in North Carolina's market towns, educators and civic leaders searched for an institutional form capable of translating that ideology into new

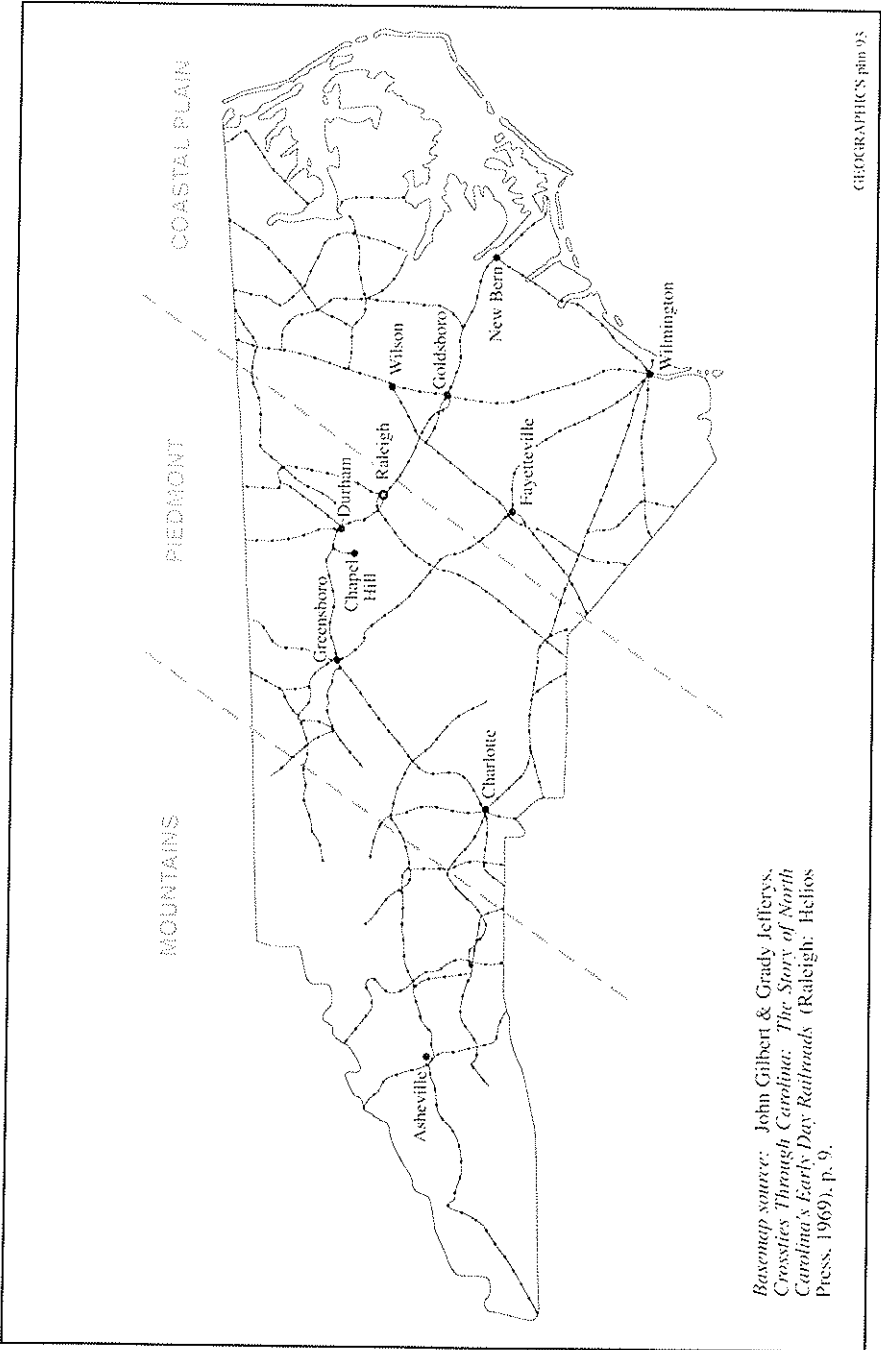
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12. Wickliffe Rose, "Educational Movement in the South," in *Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior, Report of the Commissioner of Education, for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1903*, House Documents, vol. 25, no. 5, 58th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), vol. 1: 361, and *Inauguration of Edwin Anderson Alderman* (N.p., n.d.), 23-24. I am indebted to Wright, *Old South, New South*, for the incisive distinction between labourlords and landlords.
 13. Rose, "Educational Movement in the South," 361, and Wright, *Old South, New South*, 17-50. For an overview of the process of economic change, see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, James Leloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones, and Christopher B. Daly, *Like A Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 3-43.
 14. Rose, "Educational Movement in the South," 361-62, and *Proceedings of the North Carolina Teachers Assembly, 1884* (Raleigh, 1884), 46.

structures of experience. They found the answer in graded education. Graded schools and towns sprouted like weeds during the late nineteenth century. In 1870, only the port city of Wilmington could claim a population in excess of 10,000, but by 1900 it enjoyed the company of six other towns. Even more striking was the rise of crossroads settlements with 1,000 to 5,000 inhabitants: their number mushroomed from fourteen to fifty-two. The founding of graded schools followed a similar trajectory. Wilmington and Charlotte opened the state's first graded schools in 1868 and 1871, respectively; Raleigh and Greensboro followed four years later; and Fayetteville joined the movement in 1878. But it was the establishment of schools in Wilson and nearby Goldsboro in 1881 that effectively spread enthusiasm across the state. Goldsboro was a major railroad centre and Wilson stood strategically placed twenty miles away on a through north-south line. Easy access by rail brought the towns thousands of visitors who returned home with "a militant desire for public graded schools for their own children." By the late 1890s, more than two dozen communities had adopted special taxes to finance both white and black graded-school facilities.¹⁵

The men and women who organized those new schools viewed themselves as actors on a world historical stage. More than merely a local enterprise, their work was part of a broad pedagogical revolution that had already reshaped society throughout much of Western Europe and North America. The first graded schools in the United States were organized in Boston in 1848, and from there the idea spread rapidly to other urban centres. Its popularity signalled a critical shift of emphasis in the rhetoric and purpose of public education. Antebellum promoters of the common school had most often explained their labour through a language of politics and morals. In a society confronted with a growing tide of immigrants, deepening divisions between rich and poor, and perennial concerns

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15. The quotation is from Noble, *History of the Public Schools of North Carolina*, 405-6. On town growth, see Lefler and Newsome, *North Carolina*, 517-18. It is virtually impossible to tally the exact number of graded schools in operation at the end of the century because the city systems were required to make no special reports to the state superintendent. For the general outlines of the graded-school movement, see "Capt. John Dugger," *North Carolina Teacher* 2 (July 1884): 6-7; Eugene Brooks, "Some Forgotten Educational History," *North Carolina Education* 9 (May 1915): 3-4; Charles Lee Coon, "The Beginnings of the North Carolina City Schools, 1867-1887," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 12 (July 1913): 235-47; Noble, *History of the Public Schools of North Carolina*, 398-409; and Charles Lee Coon, *A Statistical Record of the Progress of Public Education in North Carolina, 1870-1906* (Raleigh: Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1907), 18. On the extraordinary numbers of visitors who passed through the Wilson and Goldsboro graded schools, see "Graded School Report," *Wilson Advance*, Dec. 15, 1882. In its first year of operation, the Wilson school alone hosted nearly nine thousand curious sightseers. For a sense of proportion, consider the fact that the town itself claimed only two thousand residents.

North Carolina railroads, 1894, and key towns in the state's graded-school movement.



Basemap source: John Gilbert & Grady Jefferys, *Cross-ties Through Carolina: The Story of North Carolina's Early Day Railroads* (Raleigh: Helios Press, 1969), p. 9.

over liberty's temptations to vice and personal excess, they turned to the classroom as a source of common citizenship. "The chief end" of education, declared the Illinois state superintendent in 1862, "is to make GOOD CITIZENS. Not to make precocious scholars...not to impart the secret of acquiring wealth...not to qualify directly for professional success...but simply to make good citizens."¹⁶

In North Carolina, superintendent Wiley shared that view, albeit for reasons that most of his northern colleagues would have abhorred. The mission of the common school, he explained in 1855, was to produce a united citizenry "governed by common laws...advancing with a common step towards a common end." In a slave society, that purpose seemed especially important, for the most fundamental relations of property and authority depended upon vigilant enforcement of the distinctions of race. More worrisome than the prospect of black insurrection, Wiley argued, was the danger posed by "vicious" whites who sank "into the bosom of the African community." Their "degeneracy" challenged the moral legitimacy of slave-holding itself by blurring the line between master and slave, the line that separated a ruling race elevated by "centuries of [Christian] progress" from a subject people "just emerging from a long and debasing thralldom to the lowest form of idolatry." Such intermingling also threatened to redefine the fundamental divisions of southern society in terms of class rather than colour, thereby encouraging "fierce and bloody hostility...between the rich and poor." Thus, Wiley concluded, state lawmakers and county officials served their own interests by "strain[ing] every nerve to push forward the religious and mental development of the [white] masses." Only in that way could they hope to preserve a social order governed by a spirit of "respect, harmony, and subordination," and in which "all who are entitled to command [would be] cheerfully submitted to in their proper place."¹⁷

Education for citizenship remained a driving concern for school reformers well into the twentieth century, but among graded-school enthusiasts it found expression more often through a language of markets and competitive individualism than one of civic virtue and self-sacrifice. For graded-school promoters, the classroom was not so much a crucible of community as a staging ground for the great race of life. That difference in outlook could sometimes

16. The Illinois superintendent is quoted in Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 98. Kaestle's book offers the best survey of the antebellum common-school movement throughout the United States. See esp. chap. 5, "Ideology."

17. *Special Report of the Superintendent of Common Schools of North Carolina, 1854*, 30; *Report of the Superintendent of Common Schools of North Carolina for the Year 1859* (Raleigh, 1860), 36-37; *Report of the Superintendent of Common Schools of North Carolina, for the Year 1860*, part II, 12-15; and Calvin Wiley, undated, untitled manuscript, cited in Paul Henry Michael Ford, "Calvin H. Wiley and the Common Schools of North Carolina, 1850-1869" (Ed.D. diss., Harvard University, 1960), 285.

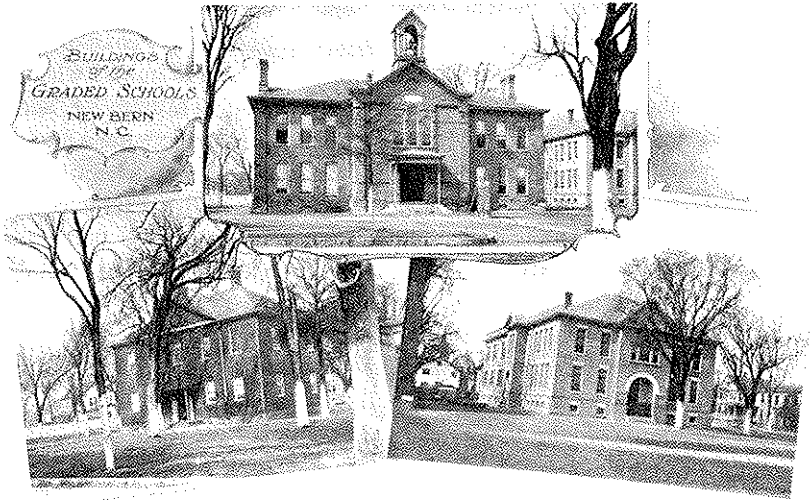
strain relations between first- and second-generation educators. Graded-school leaders deified Calvin Wiley as the father of public education in North Carolina, and often invoked his name to lend their work historical credibility. Nevertheless, they seldom invited the old man to assume an active role in promoting their cause. One reason, perhaps, lay buried in the annual reports that Wiley had once submitted to the state legislature. In 1860 he described in uncompromising language the kind of society he hoped the common schools would hold at bay: it was, he wrote, a world of "Ishmaelites, everywhere lying in wait for each other, and fighting over the natural fountains and fruits of the earth." As the former superintendent looked upon the economic and pedagogical changes wrought by war and emancipation, those words must have returned to his mind ringing with the sound of prophecy.¹⁸

North Carolina's new graded schools stood in stark contrast to the common schools they replaced. Administrative control rested in the hands of professional superintendents rather than neighbourhood committees, teachers were hired according to their ability to meet certification requirements, and punctuality and regular attendance were rigorously enforced. Within the graded schools' walls, children left behind the personalistic and ascriptive anchors of an older way of life. Cut loose from the relations of family, neighbourhood, and church, they entered classrooms where each would be furnished "an opportunity to work out his own salvation."¹⁹

Graded-school students sat aligned in neat rows of individual desks, all oriented toward a teacher who stood on a rostrum at the front of the room and used a blackboard to parse lessons from standardized texts. Children learned at the pace of the group, not at a pace determined by their own or their parents' needs and desires, and their success or failure was measured by written examinations. In the common schools, spelling bees, recitations, and elocution drills had sorted out "good," "bad," and "tolerable" scholars. As elements of an ordinal system of evaluation, those exercises furnished only relative measures of indi-

18. The quotation is from *Report of the Superintendent of Common Schools of North Carolina for the Year 1859*, 35-37. For comparative purposes, see David F. Labaree, *The Making of an American High School: The Credentials Market and the Central High School of Philadelphia, 1838-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). The language of morals and politics seems to have persisted more strongly in the Northeast, in part because of reformers' confrontation with a growing population of non-Protestant Eastern and Southern European immigrants. See Mustafa Kemal, "Moral Education in America, 1830-1990: A Contribution to the Sociology of Moral Culture" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1989).

19. Leloudis, "A More Certain Means of Grace," 45-51, and undated manuscript, box 9, Charles Duncan McIver Papers, Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.



A turn-of-the-century postcard advertising the city of New Bern's graded schools. Town boosters often touted graded schools as a powerful attraction for new businesses and residents. Courtesy of the North Carolina Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

vidual performance. By contrast, the graded schools' regimen of written examinations and numerical marks imposed normalizing judgements. Those instruments applied a "single standard of honor" to the entire school population and attached a specific value to each student. Grades became a figurative—and sometimes even literal—form of capital by which individual profit and loss could be calculated. One schoolteacher, for example, reported that she had established "a sort of currency called *merits*," with each daily exercise having a fixed value. At the end of the term, her pupils could tally their accounts and learn precisely where they stood in relation to their peers. The system, she advised fellow teachers, "was sufficient to induce every pupil to take good care of his exercises, and led to a more careful attention to the school record."²⁰

20. I am indebted here to insights drawn from Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 177-94; Keith W. Hoskin and Richard H. Maeve, "Accounting and the Examination: A Genealogy of Disciplinary Power," *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 11 (1986): 105-36; and Christopher Lasch, "Origins of the Asylum," in Lasch, ed., *The World of Nations: Reflections on American History, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Basic Books,

The graded schools also abandoned a pedagogy based on memory work in favour of new "object methods" of instruction. Rather than "forcing upon [students] rules and statements of authority," they encouraged children to learn by interacting with their physical environment. Proponents of object teaching argued that in the common schools children had acquired only "passive knowledge," or "simply the capacity to receive information, and to imitate what they see done by others." By contrast, the graded schools sought to cultivate "active" intelligence and the "ability to produce effects." Object methods put a premium on children's ability "to get [information] for themselves," to generalize from their discoveries, and to use their new knowledge in further exploration and reshaping of the world around them. "Our aim is very definite," one graded-school administrator explained. "It is to develop in children the power of thought, the capacity for learning, and the impulse and the desire for knowledge. We want to make men, not fill them. We want to educate rather than inform."²¹

That enthusiasm for object teaching grew primarily from the work of Francis Wayland Parker, who was described by his admirers as "the most brilliant, out-and-out apostle of...the New Education." Born in New Hampshire in 1837, Parker might have become little more than a respected New England schoolmaster had an aunt not left him a modest inheritance. In 1872 he set off for Europe to study at the University of Berlin and to travel extensively through Holland, Switzerland, Italy, France, and Germany. During that tour he visited a number of schools founded on the educational philosophies of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel, and Johann Friedrich Herbart. Earlier in the century, these reformers had drawn on the Enlightenment writings of Locke and Rousseau to outline a distinctively modern pedagogy based on the assumption that children were by nature active and creative rather than merely receptive. Instruction, they insisted, should be a participatory exercise in which students were encouraged to learn through observation and to build new ideas one upon another at a pace attuned to the gradual unfolding of their innate capacities. Taken by those precepts, Parker returned home in 1873 determined to transplant European ideas in American soil. His two major treatises, *Talks on Teaching*, published in 1883, and *Talks on Pedagogics*, which appeared eleven years later,

1973), 3-17. The quotation is from the *North Carolina Teacher* 5 (Jan. 1888): 208.

21. *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1891-1892* (Raleigh, 1893), lxiv; J.W. Dickinson, "Results of Methods Teaching," *Addresses and Journal of Proceedings of the National Educational Association, Session of the Year 1880* (Salem, Ohio, 1880), 95-102; *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1889-1890* (Raleigh, 1890), lii; and *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1887-1888*, 89-90.

became handbooks for a new generation of “progressive” reformers and laid the foundation for efforts to define a science of teacher training.²²

Parker visited North Carolina in 1885 to deliver a series of lectures before the annual meeting of the state Teachers Assembly, a conclave for white educators and lay enthusiasts founded a year earlier. Public reaction to the event was overwhelming; newspapers reported daily on his lessons, while an educational publishing house in Raleigh blanketed the state with a special commemorative issue of the complete Assembly proceedings. Much of that excitement flowed from the connection between Parker’s pedagogics and the public schools of Prussia, which New South reformers took as a model for their own region. Prussia had suffered a crushing defeat during Europe’s Napoleonic wars, but in the decades that followed the German state remade itself into a formidable economic and military power, in part by liberalizing its system of public education. Graded-school enthusiasts saw in Parker’s teachings a reflection of that triumph. He seemed to offer them the means of freeing students from the stale formalism of the common school and, at the same time, of yoking the experiences of childhood to the disciplinary logic of the marketplace. Such reforms, declared one graded-school proponent, had launched Prussia towards “leadership of all the nations of Europe.” Now, he advised fellow reformers, North Carolina should seize the same advantage “in the race with [her] sister states for material prosperity.”²³

Practitioners of Parker’s object methods revolutionized reading instruction by promoting what they described as a shift from “ear-mindedness to eye-mindedness.” A nineteenth-century visitor to the graded schools would have been struck immediately by the silence of the classrooms. Graded-school students learned to read through the “word method,” which relied on vocabulary recognition rather than rote spelling drills. Students first mastered words as wholes, associating them with objects in their environment. They then broke those words into “elementary” sounds that served as ground rules for reading and pronunciation. By combining sounds, children could “learn new words without assistance” and acquire for themselves “the power to *use* words freely.” The word method promised to liberate children from “oracular authority, blind obedience, [and] dead results [by] enkindling in their minds the power of seeing truth for them-

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22. The quotation is from Amory Dwight Mayo, “New Education and Col. Parker,” *Journal of Education* 18 (Aug. 9, 1883): 84-85. On Parker’s life and career, see Jack K. Campbell, *Colonel Francis W. Parker: The Children’s Crusader* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1967). The label “new education,” used to describe reformed methods of reading and arithmetic instruction, seems to have entered the popular vocabulary with the publication of J.R. Buchanan’s *The New Education* (Boston, 1882). Buchanan was a Boston physician, lecturer, and educator.
23. *North Carolina Teacher* 2 (Dec. 1884): 256, and 3 (Sept. 1885): 28; *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1887-1888*, xl-xli.

selves." When educated properly, each child would become a "discoverer" who not only learned to read but also learned from reading.²⁴

There is little evidence that children acquired basic literacy skills any faster under one method or the other, but for the graded-school reformers the choice of technique was packed with social significance. The rejection of "ear-mindedness" signalled a desire to weaken the link between reading and the oral culture of local life, heightening literacy's capacity to cultivate individuality and independence of mind. In the graded schools, reading lost much of its association with family Bible lessons, story-telling, and the public rituals of the church and the courthouse. Conditioned less by the social world of speech and hearing, it became a private pursuit that took place within the silence of an individual mind. Like the market itself, the new pedagogy pushed aside old barriers and opened new avenues of experience and understanding. It put a premium on students' ability to manipulate the world and not simply abide it.²⁵

Those innovations obviously mimicked dramatic changes in public life, but the graded school did more than merely record the cultural consequences of an emerging commercial economy. As reformers themselves were quick to point out, a market economy could exist only in a market society. Graded schools, explained a contributor to the *North Carolina Teacher*, operated both as a "reflex of things existing" and as a "motor imparting its force" to a new social machinery; they were at once a product of the New South and a condition of its possibility. That dual positioning accounted for graded education's capacity to inspire awe and civic pride. Its purpose was nothing less than the reformulation of individual

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24. U.S. Commissioner of Education, "Francis Wayland Parker and His Work for Education," in *Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior, for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1902, Report of the Commissioner of Education*, House Document No. 5, 57th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903), vol. 1: 245-46; *Proceedings of the North Carolina Teachers Assembly, 1884, 1887-1888*, 103; and *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1889-1890*, lii.
25. A number of historians have begun to suggest that the context in which literacy is acquired is at least as important as literacy itself in restructuring personality. See, for example, Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools*; Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); and Graff, *Legacies of Literacy*. For more on the development of reading instruction in the nineteenth century, see Harold Boyne Lampont, "History of the Teaching of Beginning Reading" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1935), 208-516; Mitford M. Mathews, *Teaching to Read, Historically Considered* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 53-74, 97-108, 122-39; Eva D. Kellogg, *Teaching Reading in Ten Cities* (Boston, 1900); and William J. Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780-1835* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989).

identity. Within the graded-school classroom, the habits of the marketplace were "moulded into pupils" so that they came to be lived as a sense of self.²⁶

ANOTHER WAY to grasp the generative nature of the new education is to look closely at the reformers themselves. The graded-school movement drew its leadership from a group of young men who had been born in the early 1860s and had come of age in a bleak and demoralized society. Unlike their fathers, they felt no responsibility for the Civil War and no need to justify the Lost Cause. Instead, they became bitter critics of the Old South and assumed the task of rehabilitating their world through a wholesale reformation of state and society.²⁷

Most of the reformers developed their social ideas while studying at the University of North Carolina. Edwin Alderman believed that "there was no better place for the making of leaders than Chapel Hill in the late 1870s." For him, it was an heroic time when "life seemed grand and...opportunity precious." That sense of historical urgency and uniqueness grew partly from the structure of college life. The university had closed in 1871 as a result of the political battles of Reconstruction. When it reopened in 1875, its trustees cast off the classical curriculum, which had emphasized the study of Greek and Latin rhetoric, for a course of study more attuned to a world of commerce. New departments offered electives in agriculture, business, and engineering, while in the established branches of learning, professors introduced a new commitment to empiricism and experimentalism. The trustees embraced those reforms so that the university might "keep step" with the late nineteenth century's "march of knowledge,

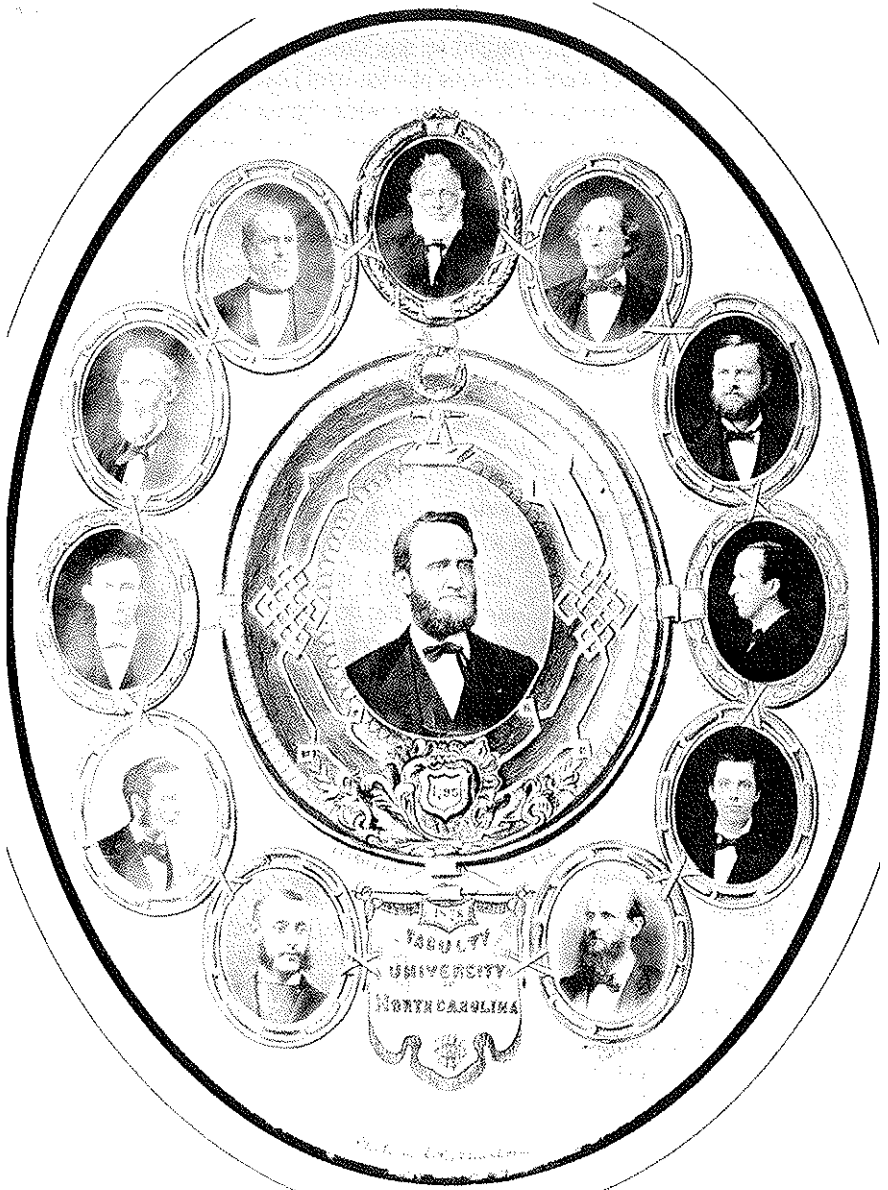
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26. George W. Dale, "About Normal Colleges," *North Carolina Teacher* 5 (Feb. 1888): 242, and "School Government," *North Carolina Teacher* 3 (Nov. 1885): 107. The editor of the *Wilson Advance* described the town's graded school as the source of "formative influences which are to mould and shape society." See "Our Public Schools," Dec. 1, 1883. For further discussion of the creative and formative aspects of such institutional remodelling, see Michael B. Katz, *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987); Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*; and Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Pavla Miller, *Long Division: State Schooling in South Australian Society* (Netley, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 1986), and Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (London, Ontario: The Alt-house Press/Falmer Press, 1988) provide revealing comparisons from an international perspective.
27. Edwin Alderman recalled that for men of his generation, the Civil War did not "unfold...any of its marching splendours and waving banners." Instead, they witnessed "only the filthy backwash of war, its ruin and bitterness." See Alderman, *Woodrow Wilson, Memorial Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Two Houses of Congress, December 15, 1924, in Honor of Woodrow Wilson, Late President of the United States* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1925), 16.

invention and discovery." Their metaphors testified to a radically new vision of education and society. The university, they insisted, would serve no longer as a mere repository of knowledge; it would operate instead as "a great metropolis of thought whose ships bravely sail the ocean of life and even explore unknown seas." Just as the world's bustling seaports sustained the flow of commerce, the university's mission was to create a marketplace of ideas. By "gathering, creating and distributing knowledge," it would become "a potent force in the world's progress, a wide-felt influence throughout the State to make all men love and seek after learning." In the reconstructed university, the goal of undergraduate education became investigation and discovery rather than the mastery of fixed and final truths.²⁸

The elective system also undercut established patterns of collegiate socialization. Before the Civil War, each class of students—freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors—had received instruction together in daily recitations. But under the new regime, college men maintained separate schedules and enjoyed the freedom to tailor their studies according to individual "tastes, talents [and] necessities." Lecturing replaced memory drills and exercises in declamation as the preferred method of instruction, and the classroom—once a place where young men recited together and shared their answers—became an arena in which "side by side they compet[e]d for academic honors." Nothing, perhaps, better illustrated the university's reincarnation as "both product and factor in the larger life about it."²⁹

The faculty could not have effected those changes in college life without student co-operation. In 1875, the university opened its doors to a student body that told "the whole story of the passing of an old order and the birth of a new." Statistics gathered in the 1890s revealed a fundamental shift in campus demo-

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28. Edwin Anderson Alderman, "The Life and Work of Dr. Charles D. McIver," *North Carolina Journal of Education* 1 (Dec. 15, 1906): 4; George T. Winston, "The First Faculty: Its Work and Its Opportunity," *University Record* 1 (N. S., No. 2): 18-21; George T. Winston, "The University of To-Day," *University Magazine* 13 (Mar.-Apr. 1894): 327; and "The Curricula of the University, 1857-58 and 1897-98," *University Record* 2 (Jan. 1898): 18-20. On the transformation of the University, see Robin Brabham, "Defining the American University: The University of North Carolina, 1865-1875," *North Carolina Historical Review* 57 (Oct. 1980): 427-55, and Leloudis, "A More Certain Means of Grace," 64-114. For comparisons at the national level, see Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 23-81; and Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976), 203-331.
29. Winston, "The University of To-Day," 325-26, and "University and the State," *University Record* 6 (Nov. 1900): 14.



Faculty of the University of North Carolina, 1878. This picture was produced and widely sold among friends and alumni of the university in celebration of its reopening at the end of Reconstruction. At the center is Kemp Plummer Battle, whom the trustees named president of the university in reward for his work as chief architect of the new curriculum. Courtesy of the North Carolina Collection, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

graphics. The university no longer served a regional elite; North Carolina alone now provided more than 90 percent of the institution's matriculants, the largest proportion of native students claimed by any state college in the country. Half of those undergraduates were the "sons of men who never knew the advantages of college training," and more than a quarter worked their way through school or financed their education with borrowed money. These young men came to Chapel Hill to find their place in a changing society rather than acquire the mantle of gentility. An institution that had once educated the sons of slave-holders now ministered to the children of a budding middle class.³⁰

The new collegians embraced the university's reformed curriculum for the chance it offered to play out the drama of their individual lives. They thought of their years in Chapel Hill as a "period of preparation." Whatever pleasures the campus offered came second to the pursuit of academic achievement and worldly advancement. "Earthly success is the grand center around which the hopes and desires of most men collect," one student wrote in the *University Monthly*, "it is the goal that all would obtain." For many young men, that quest became a source of constant challenge and uneasiness. They applied themselves tirelessly to self-improvement, chastened by the knowledge that at any moment they might confront a rival who had been more resolute in his preparation. "Some may depend upon splendid talents," another of the new collegians warned his classmates, "but as a rule this will be a poor dependence....there will [be] other heroes in the field, who have talents and who have been trained to direct their minds in close and concentrated thought, before whom the talented but uneducated man will vanish as a 'morning mist before a noonday sun.'" ³¹

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30. *Inauguration of Edwin Anderson Alderman*, 27; *University Record* 1 (Feb. 1897): 18-19; *University Record* 2 (Jan. 1898): 20-21, and (Apr. 1898): 34-35; and Kemp Plummer Battle, *History of the University of North Carolina* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1912), II: 587. The university enrolled 542 students in 1897. See Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 56-81, for related changes at other American colleges. For a comparative perspective on a similar generation of reform-minded university students in Russia, see Abbott Gleason, *Young Russia: The Genesis of Russian Radicalism in the 1860s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), and W. Bruce Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825-1861* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982).
31. "A Student's Life as Controlling Professional Life," *University Magazine* 1 (Apr. 1878): 43; "A Definite Plan of Action Necessary," *University Monthly* 1 (Sept. 1882): 24; and Inaugural Address of W.P. Cline, Mar. 15, 1878, folder 3, Student Organizations and Activities, Dialectic Society Records, Series 2, Subseries 1, Addresses/Debates, University of North Carolina Archives, Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. See also Senior Oration of E.M. Foust [1885], folder 7, and Inaugural Address of John Cicero Angier, n.d. (c. 1879), folder 1, Dialectic Society Records.

Of course, not all students shared those sensibilities. In fact, a significant minority defied the reorganization of campus life. They refused to acknowledge the faculty's standards of success and clung to an older view of college as a training ground for gentlemanly deportment and manly bearing. For those students, distinction was to be gained in the world of the extracurriculum, not the classroom. But the young reformers were different. They stood apart because they modelled themselves after the faculty and actively sought professorial approval. In return, they won assurances that they held the keys to a new age, that they—in the words of one commencement speaker—were “destined to write [their] creed on other men’s souls.”³²

Such affirmations encouraged the acting out of what Jean Piaget has called the adolescent’s peculiar blend of self-sacrifice and acute egocentrism. In the privacy of his diary, Charles Duncan McIver, another of the graded-school enthusiasts, compared himself to Julius Caesar, Napoleon Bonaparte, George Washington, Patrick Henry, and even Jesus Christ—all of whom, he said, “were young men when they first became great.” McIver and his friends thought of the postwar years as a “Lilliputian age” and rejected established paths to public life: careers in law, politics, or the ministry. Instead, they chose education, an immature and expansive field in which a young man could quickly make his mark. For Edwin Alderman, public education became a “personal religion—a cause to serve, a social faith to hold, a philosophy of life to live and die by.” He and his peers attributed to themselves an essential role in the salvation of their society and organized their lives accordingly. The creation of a new pedagogy became for these reformers an act of self-creation as well.³³

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32. Adolphus Hill Eller, *The New University, An Oration Delivered by Adolphus Hill Eller, at the One Hundredth Annual Commencement of the University of North Carolina, June 5th, 1895* (N.p., n.d.), 10, and Leloudis, “A More Certain Means of Grace,” 94-114.
33. Jean Piaget, *Six Psychological Studies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 67-68; undated manuscript, box 8, Charles Duncan McIver Papers, Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro; Alfred Moore Waddell, *The Ante-Bellum University, Oration Delivered at the Celebration of the Centennial of the University of North Carolina, June 5th, 1895* (Wilmington, 1895), 21; and “Carolinians Honor President Alderman,” *Alumni Bulletin of the University of Virginia* 8 (Third series, Apr. 1915): 174. The turn away from “the old groves of politics” in favour of careers in education and school reform was truly a generational phenomenon. In 1854, 38 percent of the university’s graduates made law their profession, while only 11 percent took up teaching as a regular occupation. By 1896, those figures had reversed; 19 percent of the graduates went on to read law as compared to 37 percent who became full-time teachers. See J.T. Strayhorn, “Southern Development,” *University Monthly* 2 (Jan. 1883): 21, and *University Record* 3 (Jan. 1899): 26. Alderman and his two most influential classmates, Charles Duncan McIver and James Yadkin Joyner, began their educational careers as graded-school superintendents. In 1891,

Much the same can also be said of the graded-school men's most enthusiastic allies: white, middle-class women, who at the turn of the century eagerly embraced new opportunities of schoolteaching. When North Carolina opened its first normal college for white women in 1891, only four out of every ten teachers in the state were female; by 1920, the balance had shifted, with women claiming 86 percent of the state's classroom jobs. In 1902, the normal college also became the centre of operations for the newly established Woman's Association for the Betterment of Public Schoolhouses, which organized white women across the state into local school-improvement leagues. As teachers and schoolhouse activists, women served as foot soldiers in the campaign for educational reform.³⁴

The feminization of teaching sprang from a number of causes. By virtue of their roles as mothers, women seemed well prepared to implement the more nurturant pedagogy of the graded school. Their subordination to men also appeared to fit them for work as "servants of the state," employees rather than independent pedagogues. Through the recruitment of vast numbers of women "helpers," men secured their own positions as superintendents, principals, and normal school professors. And because women earned roughly half as much as men, graded-school advocates could increase enrolments and lengthen the instructional year at minimal cost.³⁵

McIver was named president of the newly established North Carolina Normal and Industrial College for white women. He held that office until his death in 1906. Alderman and Joyner served briefly on McIver's faculty. Alderman left in 1893 to accept a position as Professor of Pedagogy at Chapel Hill, and four years later was named president of the university. He resigned that position in 1900 to take the helm first of Tulane University and then of the University of Virginia. Joyner stayed at the Normal until 1902, when he was named North Carolina's State Superintendent of Public Instruction. He held that office until his retirement in 1918. All three men were active members of the Rockefeller-funded Southern and General Education Boards. Alderman and Joyner also served on the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm. See Dumas Malone, *Edwin A. Alderman: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Company, 1940); Rose Howell Holder, *McIver of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957); and Elmer D. Johnson, "James Yaddin Joyner, Educational Statesman," *North Carolina Historical Review* 33 (July 1956): 359-83.

34. *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1891-1892*, 16, and *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1918/19-1919/20* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1921), 109. On the founding of the Normal and women's experiences there, see Leloudis, "A More Certain Means of Grace," 115-78. The work of the Woman's Association is examined in James L. Leloudis, "School Reform in the New South: The Woman's Association for the Betterment of Public School Houses in North Carolina, 1902-1919," *Journal of American History* 69 (Mar. 1983): 886-909.
35. Walter Hines Page, "School that Built a Town," in *The Rebuilding of Old Common-*

Equally important was the fact that male reformers viewed women as vital allies in undermining persistent loyalty to the common school. Most men who entered the classroom treated teaching as a stepping stone to more lucrative employment. They relied on their superiors to get them into college or to open doors to the worlds of business and law. Male teachers took care not to offend local school committees by embracing unpopular innovations. Women, on the other hand, remained on the periphery of the political relationships that structured men's lives. They had less to lose by casting off tradition, and because of their marginal status, received lighter punishments for their transgressions. As a result, argued advocates of the new education, female teachers were more "ready-witted and quick to catch ideas." Their increased presence in the classroom helped to distance schooling from the politics of neighbourhood life. In the end, the new education owed its triumph to a convergence of male and female reform cultures, both born of a rejection of nineteenth-century partisanship. The graded school promised its advocates access to power through the creation of a bureaucratic, interventionist state removed "as far as possible" from popular accountability.³⁶

wealths, 77, and Leloudis, "A More Certain Means of Grace," 122-26. A newspaperman explained the "naturalness" of the division of labour that emerged in the graded schools between teachers and administrators. "As in an advanced state of civilization men come to a division of labor system in mechanics and manufacturing," he observed, "so the same rule applies to educational matters." See the *Wilson Advance*, July 29, 1881. For similar developments in the world of business, see Lisa Fine, *The Souls of the Skyscraper: Female Clerical Workers in Chicago, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990). The creation of a bureaucratized school system paralleled the growth of large corporations. In both cases, physical expansion was accompanied by a division of labour in which a small body of male administrators supervised a predominantly female work-force. For comparative perspectives on the feminization of teaching in Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and the northeastern United States, see Michael W. Apple, *Teachers and Texts: A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 54-78; Barry H. Bergen, "Only a Schoolmaster: Gender, Class, and the Effort to Professionalize Elementary Teaching in England, 1870-1910," *History of Education Quarterly* 22 (Spring 1984): 45-58; Alison Prentice and Marjorie R. Theobald, eds., *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); and "Women and Teaching in the Nineteenth Century," in *Education and the State: Politics, Patriarchy, and Practice*, ed. R. Dale et al. (Sussex: Falmer Press, 1981): 359-75.

36. *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1891-1892*, liv; Walter Hines Page, "Study of an Old Southern Borough," *Atlantic Monthly* 47 (May 1881): 653-54; Charles McIver, untitled address, n.d., box 9, Charles Duncan McIver Papers, Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro; and *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1896/97-1897/98*, 48-49. For comparative perspectives on women's greater openness to innovation, see Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern*

White women teachers also pursued a distinct agenda of their own. The story of their movement into the classroom reveals a turn-of-the-century female world that was more dynamic than stereotypes of southern ladies and rigid sex roles might suggest. Women joined the graded-school crusade for reasons not unlike those of their brothers. Educational work offered them a public voice, the chance to live independently outside of marriage, and their own institutions of higher education. At the state normal college in Greensboro, students revelled in the conviction that they were more than “mere onlookers in life,” and that they, like men, had “a great rôle to play” in civic affairs. The young women studied with an extraordinary female faculty, all of whom held advanced degrees, and obtained not only the skills to run a classroom but also broad instruction in the liberal arts. When a “Normal Girl” left the college, she entered the world with a new bearing, which one writer attempted to capture in verse:

You can tell her by her manner
 When you meet her on the street,
 For she walks as if she meant it,
 Treading squarely on both feet.

If some friend should introduce you,
 You would know her by her talk,
 Which is fully as decided
 As the manner of her walk.

She is versed in many matters,
 And she always has a view
 Which she clings to in a manner
 That would shame the strongest glue.

France, 124-51; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 191-97; and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “Disorderly Women: Gender and Labor Militancy in the Appalachian South,” *Journal of American History* 73 (Sept. 1986): 372-77. School reformers commented endlessly on the conservative nature of male teachers. See esp. Institute Notebooks, Edwin Anderson Alderman Papers, Manuscripts Collection, Edwin Anderson Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, and *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1889-1890*, 6. For a national perspective on this alliance of male and female reformers, see Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,” *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984): 620-47.



Edwin Anderson Alderman (left) and Charles Duncan Melver (right) with the first class of graduates from the North Carolina Normal and Industrial College. Courtesy of Special Collections, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Even as the feminization of teaching reaffirmed old sexual hierarchies, it also transformed them into something new.³⁷

Recognition of that fact should warn against viewing women teachers and schoolhouse activists as mere surrogates for the men who employed and advised them. An ideology of civic domesticity often guided women's educational work, emphasizing a special responsibility for child welfare that could at times challenge prior loyalties of race and class. In 1905, for instance, white women in Granville County violated the Woman's Association's charter by attempting to organize a racially integrated local chapter. Charles McIver and other school officials reacted with outrage, partly because the move bared the inner contradictions of a segregated school system. The very logic of segregation—the main-

37. *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1889-90*, 11; Leloudis, "A More Certain Means of Grace," 153-78; "The Lady Teacher," *North Carolina Teacher* 7 (Jan. 1890): 263; and Mary Dail to Charles D. McIver, June 12, 1895, box 2, Charles Duncan McIver Papers, Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

tenance of two parallel but separate societies—required that black children receive at least basic schooling and that some provision be made for the training of black teachers and professionals. But any community-based effort to improve black education provided a platform from which black leaders could challenge the injustice of a society in which expenditures for white children were more than double those for blacks. State officials sharply reprimanded the Granville County women and warned that “certainly there must not be even the appearance of breaking over the barriers of the color line.” Nevertheless, many Association women continued working informally—and sometimes covertly—with black teachers and mothers. Their efforts, although frequently plagued by condescension and mutual mistrust, remained a significant arena for interracial co-operation in a society otherwise rigidly divided by the colour bar.³⁸

Such independent action in other schoolhouse matters, however, became increasingly difficult by the 1920s. In the classroom, women teachers began to lose much of their autonomy to formal, state-mandated curricula. Through a revision of the school law in 1923, the legislature insisted that all teachers, even those employed in one-room rural schools, adhere to strict standards of age-grading, and that they arrange their instruction and adopt their textbooks according to guidelines established by the state superintendent. At the same time, the Woman’s Association became less an autonomous citizens’ league than an arm of the State Department of Education. In 1919, the group changed its name to the North Carolina Parent-Teacher Association, a move that signalled the growing importance of school officials in directing educational decision-making. A school movement that once relied for its success on grass-roots organizing had, by the 1920s, grown content with professional administration from the top down. The triumph of the graded-school idea ultimately made the pioneering generation expendable.³⁹

THAT IRONY offered perhaps the most compelling evidence of how thoroughly the organization, scope, and purpose of public education in North Carolina had

38. Charles D. Melver to Mrs. Hollowell, July 23, 1905, box 5, Charles Duncan Melver Papers, Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Leloudis, “A More Certain Means of Grace,” 258-70, 311. Glenda Gilmore has suggested that interracial co-operation in school improvement work helped to cultivate a new code of civility in black-white relations after the turn of the century. The change was subtle; nevertheless, it served to curb white violence and to open new avenues for challenging the principles of Jim Crow. See Gilmore, “Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1992).

39. *The Public School Law of North Carolina, Codification of 1923* (Raleigh: State Superintendent, n.d.), 6-7, 13, 86-93, and Leloudis, “A More Certain Means of Grace,” 304-14.

been transformed. Within a single generation, graded-school advocates had succeeded in placing a new institution and a new social grammar at the centre of everyday life. By 1925, the one-room common school had lost its hold over all but the most isolated communities. Such facilities—once a defining feature of the rural landscape—accounted for less than a third of all the schoolhouses in the state, and enrolled an even smaller fraction of the school-aged population. In their place stood imposing city schools built of brick and stone, or, in the countryside, three- and four-room consolidated schools staffed by teams of teachers.⁴⁰ That architectural revolution bore material witness to schooling's defining role in New South society. The graded-school campaign had helped to rearrange the boundaries of self and society, elevating the individual above the claims of family and community. It had shaped new notions of manhood and womanhood, still anchored in hierarchical sex-typing yet more attuned to a world governed by the primacy of the individual. And above all, the graded-school crusade had made public education into a focal point for debates over issues of class, race, and gender.

In the nineteenth century, few North Carolinians—indeed, few Americans—would have considered turning to schools to resolve such matters. Today, we do so almost instinctively because the school has become so central to how we define ourselves and distribute life's economic rewards. Some critics would argue that public education is incapable of effecting constructive social change because its own past is so deeply mired in inequality. Others would insist that such an agenda is inappropriate for the schools, and that in any case they should be left alone to pursue the self-evident business of teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic.⁴¹ But both positions risk forgetting that the three R's have a history, and that in the late nineteenth century schools emerged as institutions responsible not only for social reproduction but also for the creation of new social and economic relations. That history speaks of possibilities as well as limitations. It cannot provide answers for the future, but it can help us understand how ordinary classroom experiences reflect priorities and shape outcomes. Armed with that knowledge, we can begin to see more clearly and to act more effectively as parents, teachers, and citizens concerned with the place of education in our own lives, and especially in the lives of our children.

40. *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, 1924/25-1925/26* (Raleigh: State Superintendent, n.d.), part II, 149, 163, and part III, 153, 172.

41. For a provocative account of the contemporary debate over education, see Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux, *Education Under Siege: The Conservative, Liberal, and Radical Debate Over Schooling* (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey, 1985).

