



FROM WILLIAMSBURG TO CHARLOTTESVILLE: HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE
NEW AMERICAN REPUBLIC

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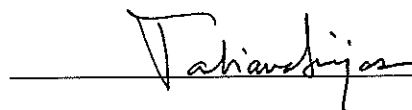
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Abstract

This thesis examines the change in higher education curriculum in the state of Virginia in the half-century following the American Revolution. It analyzes how the College of William and Mary and the University of Virginia shifted from a traditional, language-based classical education to a more profession-oriented curriculum that would be helpful to men hoping to become lawyers, doctors, etc. The analysis considers the ways in which the creation of the University of Virginia, as overseen by Thomas Jefferson, represents a major turning point in the conceptualization of the role of universities and had a significant impact (whether it was Jefferson's intention or not) on the changes that took place in the curriculum of universities over the rest of the century. The study examines a variety of primary sources, including the private and public writings of Thomas Jefferson (who had significant links to both institutions), letters from students of the schools, and official university documents including charters and curriculums. Overall, the thesis argues that in nineteenth century America, the market revolution, specialization of the labor force and the rise of the middle class played a significant role in prompting new methods of education at the university level, moving away from a traditional classical curriculum and toward an elective-based, professionally oriented system which better prepared students to succeed in the modernizing economy.

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Introduction

In the year 1800, Thomas Jefferson wrote to his dear friend Joseph Priestly that “to read Latin and Greek authors in their original is a sublime luxury...I thank on my knees him who directed my early education for having in my possession this rich source of delight.”¹ Jefferson was a lifelong enthusiast of classical Latin and Greek education and reading, always happy to spend hours perusing the vast collection of texts he had acquired over a lifetime of learning. Jefferson, however, also played a major role in creating his beloved University of Virginia, participating in the early beginnings of the long process of creating the modern American university system of education that grew to be based on specialization and utility. How can this seeming contradiction in Jefferson’s educational philosophy be explained?

The answer lies in the fact that Jefferson lived in a transitional period of American history. Jefferson was a product of both a privileged colonial upbringing and the radical changes that took place during and in the wake of the American Revolution. Jefferson was foremost a colonial elite gentleman, a member of the landed gentry class with leisure time to pursue education and politics. On the other hand, Jefferson was forward thinking about the burgeoning republic that emerged during the late eighteenth century. He imagined that the new nation needed to create a unique identity, heavily influenced by the type of education its citizens received. Jefferson’s life therefore is representative of the transitional nature that dominated the early part of the nineteenth century in America, and serves as a way to study the changes that were taking place at the time. The economic, political, and social changes that occurred during the late eighteenth

¹ Thomas Jefferson and Merrill Peterson, *Writings* (New York, N.Y.: Literary Classics of the U.S., 1984), 1072.

and early nineteenth century were reflected in the changes instituted within the higher educational system at the time. This project explores these educational changes—with a focus on Jefferson's innovations—to reveal the way larger cultural changes that took place in the late eighteenth century played a significant role in the development of American higher education.

These changes, of course, were by no means anticipated, predetermined, or immediate. This was a slow shift, over the course of nearly a century and a half, from the traditional classically based system of higher learning to one that incorporated more areas of learning to appeal to an increasingly important middle class, who now had the disposable income to send their sons to universities. There was widespread resistance to the change, especially among elites and older educational institutions such as Yale. And classical learning continued to play a role in defining status. It did so, however, in an increasingly ornamental way and began to be seen as superfluous and extravagant rather than a source of social respect. The shift itself was much more nuanced than it appears on the surface, and this study seeks to draw out those nuances that existed, even within Jefferson himself, to trace more precisely the shift in higher education in the new American Republic.

With a focus on institutions of higher education specifically, this paper will explore the shift from a very broad and often religiously focused classical education to a more specialized curriculum based on students' particular interests and career paths. The first chapter explores the history of the College of William and Mary, which was founded by a royal charter in 1693. Since William and Mary is the second oldest university in America, it provides useful information about the type of education that was

characteristic of the colonial period. The history of the college begins on a religious note, founded as a seminary for Anglican ministers, as was common for institutions of higher education within the British Empire. The chapter traces the tumultuous early history of the college, which was plagued by internal and external troubles including faculty disagreements and a major setback when fire destroyed the college's main building. Overall, the chapter serves to establish the College of William and Mary as an example of what higher education in colonial America generally looked like, but also to establish the context of the tensions that existed in colonial America as they were reflected within the educational institution. The main tension that existed at William and Mary was between the locally elected Board of Visitors (an executive board similar to Trustees today) and the predominately Anglican faculty that answered directly to the Church of England and therefore the crown. The chapter traces the numerous disagreements about power that occurred between these groups and establishes the connection between the problems at William and Mary and the growing discontent with the British government among the American colonists. The chapter also examines Thomas Jefferson's own experience while he was a student at William and Mary from 1760-62 and how his time there influenced his thoughts about education in America. The first chapter serves to set the stage for the changes that took place during and in the wake of the American Revolution, by establishing the colonial status quo as well as revealing the underlying tensions that predated the outbreak of widespread rebellion.

The second chapter moves onto the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary periods in American history, with a focus on the social and cultural impact of the political and economic changes that took place as a result of the break with the British Empire.

Specifically, the chapter examines the effect that the changes in the market system and the growth of the middle class had on the development of higher education in America. Also, it draws attention to the impact that the new political system—in which the authority of the government was derived from the people—had on ideas about the type of education that would be most useful for American citizens. American society was changed distinctly not only by the war with Britain but also by the ideological sentiments that had developed out of Enlightenment thinking and distaste for the way that the British system operated. These changes had profound effects on the higher education system, because the administrations of new and preexisting universities needed to adapt and conceptualize a type of education that students would consider useful. Jefferson believed that the education system had to be something that was uniquely American and serve the purpose of creating a national identity, clearly influenced by the development of a unique form of Republican government. This “bridge chapter,” then, explains the period of transition that took place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth and how it played a major role in shaping the modern university system based on electives and specialization.

The third chapter focuses on the creation of the University of Virginia (UVA) in 1824 as the culmination of the cultural and political changes that had taken place during the last half-century. The innovations at UVA, mostly as a result of Jefferson’s unfailing dedication to creating a system of public education for all Americans, were both a product of the changes that had taken place during the revolutionary era and an important first step toward the more radical overhaul of standard university level curriculum that would take place over the course of the nineteenth century. UVA was subject to the Virginia state legislature, as opposed to a particular church. It also offered students the

opportunity to choose a particular course of study based on their interests or career paths, as opposed to the uniform model of classical higher education during the colonial period. The United States was politically and culturally diverse and allowed for a relatively wide range of participation in government, according to eighteenth and nineteenth century standards. This chapter explores the ways that this diversity—which had led to the significant political and social differences between the colonies and the British Empire—was embraced at UVA. Jefferson's university is a manifestation of the changes that had taken place in American society and a foreshadowing of the further changes that would develop in the late nineteenth century as a result of the industrial revolution. This final chapter, therefore, serves to bring the entire argument together and understand how the changes within higher education were reflective of larger social change.

Of course, Jefferson was not the only key player in the story of the shift from classically based higher education to a more practical and specialized method. He is the central character for the purposes of this study, which does not overlook contributions from men such as William Small, George Wythe, who had great influence on Jefferson in Williamsburg. Also, Joseph Cabell played a major role in helping Jefferson persuade the Virginia legislature to fund a public university. Jefferson and his ideas also had a great deal of influence on other educators at the time, such as William Ticknor, who was a professor at Harvard and was instrumental in enacting changes to the curriculum there which were quite similar to the UVA model. There was also Noah Webster, who is widely known for his contributions to the American education system. Though Webster was a bit younger than Jefferson and focused mainly on education at the lower level, his ideas about making education available and relevant to the masses were no less radical

that Jefferson's and were important to the transformation of educational ideology at the time.

Historiography

The transition from classical to professionally oriented education was not one smooth movement, but rather a series of small changes and reactions to the developing nation that eventually lead to an overhaul of the system. It is important to remember that nothing about the change was predestined, and most of the results in the later part of the nineteenth century (i.e. the virtual disappearance of the traditional classical education) were entirely unanticipated, especially by Jefferson himself. The history of education can provide significant insight into the social structures that existed in a population at a given time. Throughout the history of education in America, there have been a number of important shifts with regards to the students being educated, how teachers taught, and the overall goals of educational institutions. Perhaps one of the most informative shifts—in terms of helping scholars understand larger societal movements at work—was the shift from the traditional, elitist method of classical education that was so dominant during the colonial period to the more democratic system of education available to more of the public and geared toward preparing students for professional careers.² Scholars have debated the origins of the shift, when it really took hold at the university level, and who the important players were in bringing about this substantial change.

Most scholars agree that the true disappearance of traditional classical education at the university level took place in the later part of the nineteenth century, following the eras of Jacksonian ideals of democracy and the industrial revolution. Among these

² Lawrence Arthur Cremin, *American Education; The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

scholars is Caroline Winterer, who argues that the antebellum period in America represented a major transitional period from “broadly diffused and unspecialized classicism” to more “specialized, professionalized scholarship” which became dominant in the later half of the nineteenth century.³ However, the initial stirrings in the movement, which emphasized a more specialized method of education than the traditional broad base of classical learning, began following the institutionalization of democracy following the American Revolution. This democratization, which gained a powerful kick-start from the empowering years of the Revolution, was certainly a slow process lasting through the first half of the nineteenth century. It has been argued that this slow movement led to shifting thoughts about the “ideal white male citizen” and empowered the rising middle class, which in turn contributed to the increasingly competitive and expanding consumer market.⁴

The ideal citizen in the colonial period was a refined British gentleman who did not labor with his hands and had the leisure time to indulge in things like mastering classical languages and cultivating refined behavior, this ideal could not last in the post-revolutionary period. Through the Revolution, American colonists realized that they were, in fact, quite different from British citizens and acted on those differences to bring about a new nation. So it follows naturally that the new ideal American citizen would differ from the ideal British gentleman. Once America had created its own cultural identity based on the idea of being a “self-made man,” it was clear that the British ideal of a stately, learned gentleman was becoming irrelevant in the social, political, and

³ Caroline Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780-1910* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

⁴ Margaret Sumner, *Creating a College World: Men, Women, and Families in Academic America, 1782-1860* (Manuscript awaiting publishing).

economic structures of the new nation. Scholars, among them Edwin Miles, have argued that the rising businessmen began to replace the landed gentry in terms of political and social importance, and monetary wealth replaced the importance of family name or connections in terms of status. Thus, a rigid classical education that had been so definitive of status in the past had increasingly less “market value” and more students began to push for more useful educational plans that were tailored to individual life-plans, i.e, the modern major or elective system.⁵ Furthermore, Miles argues, the new American nation was (at least in theory) devoted to a spirit of egalitarianism and breaking down class barriers, and since “the ability to quote Latin and Greek formerly served as a means of distinguishing a gentleman from the common man,” traditional classical education was seen as outdated and inconsistent with the new social norms of the United States.⁶ Yet arguments that insist knowledge of Latin and Greek began to be seen as negative rather than positive in terms of class barriers does not mean that classes disappeared entirely. On the contrary, according to Siobhan Moroney, the education system that developed in the nineteenth century actually continued to reinforce class structure in American society, as professions created a divisive economy and the level of education attained remained a defining factor in determining social and economic status.⁷

Along with this shift in attitude about the role of elite in society, there was also pressure on university curriculum from the rapidly expanding population. With the population, the number of universities and university students naturally expanded. During

⁵ Edwin Miles, “The Young American Nation and the Classical World,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 35, no. 2 (June 1974): 259-274.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Siobhan Moroney. “Latin, Greek and the American Schoolboy: Ancient Languages and Class Determinism in the Early Republic.” *The Classical Journal* 96, no. 3 (February 1, 2001): 307.

the entire colonial period, only ten universities had been opened and many sons of wealthy landowners were sent abroad, usually to England, to receive university education. However, by the time of the second American census in 1800, there were twenty-two colleges in the United States and that number jumped again by 1830 to fifty-six. As Americans began to develop their own system of higher education on a broader scale, they were forced to address the issue of creating a curriculum that would be suitable for a larger group of students, with which comes a broader spectrum of interests and pursuits. This wider spectrum put pressure on universities to reconsider the typical model of higher education that focused on one particular course of study for all students.

Having identified the major social movements behind the changed that took place in higher education, scholars also explore the major historical actors who had an impact on that change. This particular study will focus on the influence of Thomas Jefferson on the higher education system through his work of establishing the University of Virginia, which, many scholars would agree, represented a significant turning point in the beginnings of the shift away from a broad classically-founded education. Though Jefferson is widely known for his love of the classics and his life-long passion for learning, he also recognized the necessity of a certain level of utility in education, especially at the university level. Jefferson did not abandon his belief in the importance of training in the classical languages. He simply came to believe that they should be taught at the lower levels of education and that the universities should not need to dedicate time to addressing them.⁸

⁸ Roy John Honeywell, *The Educational Work of Thomas Jefferson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931).

Jefferson understood that the world itself was changing, and that educational systems existing within the new democracy had to adapt or perish. Jefferson was a promoter of education for political ends, and the democratization of education (i.e. bringing education to the masses) that went against the implicit elitist spirit of traditional classical education. Some historians may suggest that Jefferson, being so brilliant and captivating in his extensive writing on the subject of education, intended to bring about such a major shift in the way students at universities were educated. I tend to agree, however, with historians such as Herbert Adams and James Conant who argue that the radical changes that took place in universities in the later part of the nineteenth century, while linked to his initial proposals, were entirely outside of the realm of possibilities for Jefferson. He did not realize the implications of his plans for Virginia.⁹ He could never have imagined the evolution of the modern university system simply because he so feared industrialization and urbanization, seeing the perfect democratic society as an agrarian one centered on small, self-sustaining communities. His plans to make education, at least at the lowest level, available to all Americans, was limited by that agriculture-based economy that Jefferson held so dear. Jefferson imagined America as an idyllic agricultural nation where each (white) man was guaranteed land and urbanization was kept to a minimum. In this sort of system a widespread public education system would have been difficult since families would not live close together and therefore most children would live too far from their schools. Thus the implementation of widespread education in America is ironic with regards to Jefferson's ideas, because it took a certain

⁹ Herbert Baxter Adams, Office of Education, *Thomas Jefferson and the University of Virginia* (Washington: Govt. Print. Off, 1888).

level of urbanization and industrialization to make his goals possible.¹⁰ And it was that success in delivering state-funded education to all Americans that led to the decreasing popularity of classical study at the university level, since it was not useful to the majority of American students who were interested in professional education that would make them more marketable.

The goal of this study is to add to the work of previous historians by exploring the major trends in these early educational changes and examine the extent to which these changes were manifestations of larger social developments, such as the rise of the middle class and change from an agricultural economy to a market-based, consumer driven one. I argue that these changes in society did, in fact, have a significant impact on the goals of higher education institutions. Furthermore, I argue that Jefferson himself provides an excellent case-study in examining these shift with his ideas for education being both revolutionary in laying the groundwork for the development of the modern university system but also a tragic victim of their time, held back by the state of the economy and society in the earliest part of the nineteenth century. Jefferson's ideas, in fact, Jefferson himself, were caught up in the transition to a modern system of education, with one foot in the past (Jefferson's idealization of the classics as leisure study, his unwillingness to accept urbanization as progress) and one in the future (specialization, modernization of the system). Overall, Jefferson and his ideas serve as a way to explore the tensions that surfaced as a result of the dramatic changes that were taking place in education in the nineteenth century as a result of a complete social, political and economic restructuring that was also taking place.

¹⁰ James B. Conant, *Thomas Jefferson and the Development of American Public Education* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962).

**Chapter 1: Higher Education in Colonial America: The College of William
and Mary 1693-1776**

“A Place of Universal Study”: Establishing a Gentleman’s College in Virginia

The College of William and Mary, the second oldest university in the United States, has no doubt played an important role in the development of the American system of higher education. To understand the ways in which the history of William and Mary ties into the development of higher education in America, it is necessary to trace the college all the way back to its foundation. King William III and Queen Mary II of England issued the charter for the college from London in 1693 in response to requests from members of the Virginia colony’s General Assembly. While broad in nature with regards to curriculum, the charter does reveal a certain amount of detail to help historians understand the motivations of the college’s creators and how they intended the college to function. The charter established the college as a “seminary of ministers of the gospel” to enhance the Anglican Church in Virginia.¹¹

The charter says that the college should be a place of “universal study” and mentions the study of “divinity, philosophy, languages, and other good arts and sciences.”¹² The primary focus of the college, as originally intended, was the education of seminarians of the Anglican Church. It also explains to the reader that the curriculum established at William and Mary was to be broad and unspecified, typical of the idealized well-rounded classical scholarship that was the norm for higher education at the time.

¹¹ William and Mary College, *The Charter of the College of William and Mary* (Richmond, VA: Nicholson, 1800): 4.

¹² *Ibid*, 4.

The college would develop scholars in the traditional sense, educating them broadly in classical languages and philosophy which would prepare them for their lives as clergymen or elite gentlemen, a system that functioned well in the hierarchical and class-oriented society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

After establishing these rather broad terms for the general goals of the institution, the charter moves onto more detailed resolutions related to creating the Board of Visitors, which would function as the governing body of the college. The men appointed to the original Board of Visitors were powerful and well connected, such as William Byrd, Benjamin Harrison II, and William Randolph. These men were trusted with the actual logistics of creating this place of “universal study,” choosing a location, raising funds, and selecting faculty. The charter also confirmed the General Assembly’s election of Reverend James Blair of Scotland as the first President of the college and said that he should serve for life. Future presidents were to be selected by the Board of Visitors.

So this charter, granted by the royal power of the King and Queen of England, created a relatively autonomous ruling body of the college and gave them broad authority with respect to creating the curriculum and selecting the faculty. The charter established the Board of Visitors as the key players in the establishment of the college and therefore identified the Board and their actions as essential to understand the post-charter development of The College of William and Mary. In official language, the charter grants the Visitors “full and absolute liberty, power and authority, of making, enacting, framing and establishing, such and so many rules, laws, statutes, orders and injunctions for the good of the said college.”¹³ So it would seem that the authority granted to these Visitors

¹³ Ibid, 14.

was quite vast and perhaps even unchecked. The charter provided a broad framework for what the British monarchy and the Virginia Assembly would have expected the Visitors to build on. This, as we will see in the latter part of the eighteenth century, led to tension between the Visitors and the professors over questions of authority. The visitors were locally appointed, powerful men of the Virginia colony, while the professors were mainly ministers of the Anglican Church and answered to the Bishop of London. The tension between colonial interests and imperial ones became increasingly separate and conflicting as the eighteenth century began, reflective of the tensions that were beginning to exist throughout the colonies. These tensions were especially apparent at William and Mary compared to other colleges created around the same time because it “remained an institution that expressed a more traditional Anglican and imperial vision of the social and religious order” than other schools.¹⁴

After the chartering of the school, William and Mary experienced difficulties on its road to becoming a functioning institution of higher education. The thirty years following the charter were marked by periods of success mixed with periods of decline and confusion. The main school building, designed by the famous London architect Sir Christopher Wren, burned down in 1705 and was not reconstructed until 1716. Though there were small developments in the two decades following the fire—such as an increase in the student population from twenty-one in 1712 to sixty by 1737—there were also major issues in terms of the facilities and logistics of the college.¹⁵ Reverend Hugh Jones,

¹⁴ Susan Godson, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, vol. 1 (Williamsburg, VA: King and Queen Press, 1993): 17.

¹⁵ “Journals of the Meetings of the Presidents and Masters of William and Mary College,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 1, No. 3 (Jan 1893): 130, Accessed 13 October 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1939690>.

who had served as the professor of mathematics and natural philosophy from 1717-1721, described William and Mary as:

A college without a chapel, without scholarship, and without a statue...there is a library without books...and a president without a fixed salary till of late: A burgess without certainty of electors; and in fine, there have been disputes and differences about these and the like affairs of he college hitherto without end.¹⁶

These issues would have certainly been detrimental to the quality of education that could be produced at William and Mary during the eighteenth century. The problems, such as those described by Jones, that plagued William and Mary in its formative years were often the result of political games, among and between faculty, locals, and the Board of Visitors. Reverend James Blair, President of the college from its creation until his death in 1743, was notorious for being involved in the removal of governors of Virginia with whom he did not see eye to eye, relying on the British system of patronage and influence to hold powerful sway in Virginia as well as back in London. Political affairs were a serious distraction for the President and faculty of William and Mary, creating even more tension between faculty members and political leaders in Williamsburg and taking away much needed attention from the college and its students. Blair played a major role in the removal of Governor Spotswood in 1722, a man who had a clear interest in the success of William and Mary based on his appropriation of funds for “the maintaining and education such and so many of the ingenious scholars.”¹⁷ Blair put his own political interests ahead of the interests of the college as a whole—which was in desperate need of funds and scholars—another example of the ways in which internal struggles added to the tumultuous beginnings of William and Mary. The questions of authority that existed from

¹⁶ Quotation from Godson, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, 58.

¹⁷ Quotation from “Faculty Report to Board, July 1831, Matriculation Book, William and Mary Archives, in Godson, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, 62.

the beginning of William and Mary would continue to play themselves out for the remainder of the eighteenth century, leading to more conflict among faculty and administration members over the direction the college should take in the changing social and political system that was developing in colonial America in the later half of the century.

Tradition Versus Progress—Period of Internal Rebellion, 1729-1776

After the 1693 charter, the next major development in terms of definition of curriculum, governance, and structure of the college came in 1729 with the transfer of the college to from the Board of Trustees (the original 18 visitors named in the charter) to the President and masters of the college. The only two surviving trustees at the time of the transfer were Blair and his long time friend and ally Stephen Fouace, which made it easy for them to complete the transfer and its accompanying statutes without much controversy.¹⁸ The statutes expand upon the general mandates of the charter and provide clues as to how the college operated on a daily basis, as well as some of the problems face by the faculty and students at the time. An example of this is a resolution in the statutes that gives the rector of the college, appointed by the visitors, power to discipline professors who failed to attend examinations or scheduled lectures.¹⁹ A rule such as this one would not be necessary to mention if the non-attendance of professors was not a prominent issue at the time. So it can be inferred that it was normal for professors to simply just not show up to lecture the students or give examinations, which would clearly seriously impede on the quality of education provided at William and Mary.

¹⁸ Godson, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, 65.

¹⁹ William and Mary College, *The Charter of the College of William and Mary*, 65.

In addition to providing insight into the internal problems that the college was experiencing in the late 1720s, the statutes also have information about progress that was taking place in terms of defining the curriculum of the school. While the charter provided a broad framework for the subjects of study at the college, the statutes provide more detailed information about what exactly was being taught in the eighteenth century. We know that there were six professors at the time of the transfer: the Professor of Moral and Natural Philosophy, Professor of Law and Police, Professor of Mathematics, Professor of Modern Languages, Professor of Humanity, and an Assistant Professor of Humanity.²⁰ This certainly provides a more detailed picture of the subjects scholars were studying at William and Mary than what was originally described in the charter, but it is also a sign of major progress in terms of educational development in the eighteenth century. Up to this point, it had been the norm for a professor to be assigned to a particular class of students and to lecture them on various subjects throughout their entire time at a university. The specialization of professorships listed in the statutes, therefore was a major step forward in terms of specialization of education and the development of the modern major system.

As is typical with the history of William and Mary, signs of progress in the statutes were counterbalanced other signs of rigid tradition. The transfer of the college was made official, as documented in the "Journal of the Meetings of the President and Masters of the College", when the president and masters "subscrib[ed] their assent to the thirty nine articles of the Church of England and by taking the Oath de Fideli Administratione," in

²⁰ Ibid, 67.

Latin.²¹ So by 1729, the college was still operating under the influence of the Church of England and emphasizing the importance of Latin as the language of educated gentleman. Even though there were stirrings of change at work within the William and Mary community, it was clear that the British tradition of classical education and its function of defining gentlemanly status in the social hierarchy was still very much alive in first half of the eighteenth century.

To find any substantial progress toward conceptualizing a more utilitarian approach to higher education at William and Mary, it is necessary to look into the second half of the eighteenth century, not coincidentally when tensions between England and the American colonies were growing increasingly more heated. At a meeting of the President and Masters of the college in May of 1770, they argue against a proposal of the Board of Visitors to allow students who had a “competent knowledge of common of vulgar arithmetic and whose parents or guardians may desire it be received into the Mathematical school.”²² The visitors envisioned a system where students could bypass the traditional coursework in Greek and Latin languages if their parents did not see it fit for their future pursuits and participate solely in the school of Mathematics. Perhaps without even realizing the potential implications, the visitors suggested a certain level of specialization in higher education, presumably not trying to undermine the classics but instead to appeal to wider base of students. The President and Masters argued that the proposal went against the intended design of the college, to train youth “intended to be

²¹ “Journals of the Meetings of the Presidents and Masters of William and Mary College,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 1, No. 3 (Jan 1893): 131, Accessed 13 October 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1939690>.

²² *Ibid*, 152.

qualified for any of the three learned professions, or to become a Gentleman.”²³ They argued that if the college allowed students to “quit their classical reading and exercises very early for the sake of making a premature and superficial progress in the Mathematics” it would produce a “contagious humor...of neglecting the foundations of improvement in knowledge under the pretence of separating the useful from the ornamental and studying only the former.”²⁴ Here we see evidence not only of stirring changes within the early American system of education, but we also see the administration of the College of William and Mary openly resisting those changes.

The President and faculty of William and Mary—consisting of mostly ministers of the Anglican church—clearly believed in the importance of the traditionally broad classical education therefore fed into the hierarchical social system of the eighteenth century, helping to educate sons of the wealthy elite in a way that would continue to define them as inherently different from ordinary men. The Board of Visitors, who were locally appointed colonists, decidedly opposed this position. This contextualization helps us to understand the tensions that existed between the British faculty and the colonial Visitors. The American colonists at the time were rethinking their position within the British Atlantic world and identifying the ways in which they had become quite different from the British subjects back in England. Thus, the American Board of Visitors would be rethinking their educational system and what kind of education would be useful for the American culture moving forward. By this time, the American colonies had developed a much more substantial “middle class” (i.e. people of mean who could afford a certain amount of leisure time activities such as education) than anything that existed in England.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, 153.

This development disrupted the long-standing tradition of hierarchy in the British system, with a few powerful elites and a large mass of common, uneducated people. Along with these changes, it makes sense that the way in which the new middle class functioned and their education they needed to participate in the changing economy and society would be different than the previous traditions in education. And although this excerpt from the Journal of the Meetings is representative of the ways in which the faculty of William and Mary was resistant to change, as most tradition-based institutions are, it certainly reveals that changes in educational ideology were beginning to take place, as perhaps most importantly the tensions that were produced as a result of those changes, tensions which continued to play themselves out well into the nineteenth century.

Students at William and Mary

The day-to-day events in a student's life at William and Mary are just as important to this study as the history of the college at the institutional level. A question to begin exploring this level of William and Mary's history would be, what were the students planning on doing with their education after leaving Williamsburg? Some would become ministers or educators at local schools, but according to J.M. Opal, "The great majority of Americans carried on their parents vocations as well. Indeed work for one's parents (or master) and at their trade (usually farming) was the fundamental circumstance of preindustrial" America. It is reasonable to understand why many students, especially since they were young men of elite status who could afford to attend college, would return to the family farm or plantation to live out their days as a wealthy landowner gentleman prior to the American revolution, when the hierarchical structure of the British Empire was still firmly in place. Another popular path for students who matriculated

from William and Mary in the eighteenth century was politics. Traditionally, politics in the colonial period had been dominated by wealthy landowning men with prominent family names and good personal connections, just the kind of men who would have attended the college of William and Mary in the eighteenth century.

Walter Jones, born December of 1745, was a young man from Williamsburg who entered the College of William and Mary in 1758 and studied there until 1760 when he completed his general studies and left to pursue his degree in medicine from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. Upon completing his degree, he returned to Virginia and served as a physician in the Continental army beginning in 1777. Later in life, Jones served as a representative in the Virginia House of Delegates and the United States House of Representatives. Jones, though he attended William and Mary nearly 70 years after the college's charter was signed, still very much represents the colonial university student. That is, a student who came from the elite, landed class of gentlemen, studied a very broad curriculum steeped in the British tradition of classical learning, and who often ended up with a career of influence in politics. Though Jones had studied medicine and had put his skills to use during the Revolutionary War, colonial expectations for the sons of prominent gentlemen lingered and he eventually began to pursue politics, an area that had not yet become "professional" in nature. Politics, through the end of the eighteenth century at least, remained the playground of elite gentlemen.²⁵ Therefore, the education that he received during his time at William and Mary was precisely what Jones needed to succeed in the world in which he operated. He required the education of a gentleman, to

²⁵ Many people can and will argue that politics has remained dominated by an elite class of Americans, but the specialization of political careers began to require a level of specialized political knowledge that first, did not exist in the colonial and early republican periods and, second, would have been a fairly insignificant requirement in comparison to family name and personal connections during the eighteenth century.

set him apart from the uneducated masses with knowledge of the classical languages and an alma mater that denoted prestige. Thus, despite all of the shortcomings at the college that were apparent to many at the time, the educational traditions that existed there continued to serve a purpose in the late colonial and early republican eras, when the British Atlantic social and economic traditions were still playing a significant role.

Another student, among many, who falls into the category of gentleman-scholar whose education served as more of an ornament than a professional degree was Mann Page III, brother of Thomas Jefferson's good friend and schoolmate John Page. Page attended William and Mary in the early 1760s and went on to pass the bar in Virginia and then return home to execute his family estate, called Mannsfield. Mann continued to manage the estate for the rest of his life, with brief absences when he first served as a delegate to the Continental Congress and again when he served as a lieutenant colonel in his local militia during the Revolutionary War. Page's education, like Jones's, served him well in that it provided a broad base of knowledge, especially in the Latin and Greek languages which clearly defined him as a man of elite status in the eighteenth century context. This status was just as important for enjoying a successful life as a specialized degree became in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The gentleman planter did not require a specialized knowledge of a particular field, he simply needed an education to associate himself with the upper echelon of society and be accepted into the elite circles of social and political dominance. The planter, politician, and soldier seem to be the most popular pursuits for graduates of William and Mary in the mid to late eighteenth

century.²⁶ Though the groundwork for change had begun to be laid by the mid-eighteenth century, with a growth in population and increased direct interaction with the British, but the change was a slow process that took decades to take hold and even longer for American society to fully accept it and react accordingly. The brief examples of Jones and Page speak to the slow pace of this change, since they both clearly were still participating in the traditionally structured British system of social and economic hierarchy and the corresponding system of higher education.

A Young Scholar from Shadwell—Thomas Jefferson at William and Mary

When Thomas Jefferson arrived in Williamsburg in 1760, he could never have imagined the prestigious status he would eventually achieve in American history. Jefferson entered William and Mary in the midst of the turmoil between the faculty and the visitors. Just two years before his arrival there had been a major upheaval among faculty members who were protesting against the Two Penny Act because of its negative impact on the salaries of ministers. In response, the local Board of Visitors fired three members of faculty and brought in new professors, including William Small.²⁷ Small became one of Jefferson's most revered mentors and a close friend. In fact, during Jefferson's time at William and Mary, Small came to teach most if not all of the subjects after two more members of the faculty were fired after leading the school boys in fight with the boys of Williamsburg.²⁸ This certainly had a significant effect on Jefferson's experience at the college, first when he experienced the turmoil brewing between faculty and locals and also because it gave Small an exceptionally large amount of influence over

²⁶ A departure from the tradition of entering a life in the Anglican ministry, as most students of William and Mary did in the earliest years of the college.

²⁷ Dumas Malone, *Jefferson the Virginian*, Jefferson and His Time vol. I (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948): 51.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 52.

the young Jefferson. Later in life, Jefferson said that Small was “even and dignified” during those times of turmoil and discontent.²⁹

Small certainly did not have much competition in earning Jefferson’s utmost respect, as other members of the faculty were certainly not setting examples of high morality and manners. In addition to the Professor of Moral Philosophy, Reverend Jacob Rowe, and the Master of the grammar school for younger boys who were the leaders in the fight between the students and the boys of the town, the President of the college, Reverend Thomas Dawson, had become a notorious drunk.³⁰ The Lieutenant Governor of Virginia at the time, Fauquier defended the reverend, claiming that he had been driven to drinking due to the constant disagreement among faculty and visitors.³¹ It is clear that the troubles at William and Mary had serious effects and were widely known within the town of Williamsburg. The politicized question of who would have authority, the Anglican faculty or the colonial Visitors, had an effect on Jefferson, perhaps sparking conversations with Small and others about education and politics. The negative view of the Anglican Church that Jefferson saw at William and Mary no doubt had an impact on the young scholar. It is not unreasonable to think that the corruption and discord among the ministers of the faculty, along with the resentment from the townspeople and the Board of Visitors, played a role in shaping Jefferson’s thoughts on religion and his life-long battle for secularism in government and education.

Another vital part of Jefferson’s experience at William and Mary was the amount of structured and ceremonial daily activities that were required of students during his

²⁹ Letter to Thomas Jefferson Randolph, Nov 24, 1808 (Ford, IX, 231), quotation from Dumas Malone, *Jefferson, the Virginian*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948): 54.

³⁰ Malone, *Jefferson, the Virginian*, 52.

³¹ *Ibid.*

time there. The students' day began early in the morning, with reading from the Book of Common Prayer in the chapel.³² This reminded the students of the religious nature of the college and instilled in them the tenants of the Anglican Church. Three times a day, the students and faculty were required to gather and have their meals together in the Commons, where they sat in descending order according to socioeconomic status. The professors all taught from a platform seat, which resembled a minister's pulpit.³³ All of this was done to create a sense of order and hierarchy, a physical manifestation of the status-based system under which the British imperial world operated during the eighteenth century.

Although it is one thing to observe what the administration mandated in terms of student performance, it is quite another to acknowledge the reality of student life in Williamsburg while Jefferson was in attendance. Despite all of the instillation of structure, order, and morality, the students at William and Mary were clearly quite rowdy and rebellious. In the second edition of the Statutes of the College, published in 1758, there is a rule that "none of the scholars presume to tell a lie, or curse or swear, or do anything obscene, or quarrel or fight, or play cards or dice, or set into drinking."³⁴ This specific rule would not have been necessary if each of these offenses had not become an issue within the William and Mary community. In light of the rules and the harsh discipline that waited offenders, the college boys continued to enter scuffles with the locals. Jefferson wrote to his dear friend John Page in October of 1763 and included a list of students who had recently been expelled for instigating trouble in town. Jefferson tells

³² Mark R. Wenger, "Thomas Jefferson, the College of William and Mary, and the University of Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 103, no. 3 (July 1, 1995): 346.

³³ *Ibid.*, 349-350.

³⁴ "The Statutes of the College of William and Mary in Virginia" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Apr., 1908): 247, accessed 30 October 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1922662>.

Page that the “affairs at William and Mary are in the greatest confusion.”³⁵ It is clear that the turmoil that had been brewing at William and Mary since the presidency of James Blair was growing increasingly more troublesome, and that the students had begun to grow rebellious in light of the internal turmoil and confusion that plagued the college during the eighteenth century.

All of his memories of the problems at William and Mary weighed heavily on Jefferson’s mind when he reflected on his experience later in life while considering the best approach to creating an educational system in the state of Virginia. In a letter to his friend Joseph Priestley in 1800, he called William and Mary “a college just well enough endowed to draw out the miserable existence to which a miserable constitution has doomed it.”³⁶ Clearly, the intended goals of William and Mary as described by its charter and later statutes were not being accomplished because of the internal struggles that the faculty, Visitors, and students could not seem to overcome during the second half of the eighteenth century. The College of William and Mary, as originally designed, represented the traditional interests of the British Empire, but existed within the American colonial context, in which colonists were rapidly developing a new, separate identity and set of interests. Interestingly for this study, the struggle over questions of power and authority that were going on within the William and Mary community were reflective of the sorts of questions being raised by the American colonists in general with regards to British imperial authority. As time moved forward toward the American revolution, the colonial Board of Visitors began to rethink higher education and assert their authority against the

³⁵ Thomas Jefferson, “Letter to John Page October 7, 1763,” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian Boyd, Vol 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950): 11.

³⁶ Thomas Jefferson et al., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, D. C.: Thomas Jefferson memorial association of the United States, 1903): Vol. 10, 140-41.

British Anglican ministers, just as the American colonists were rethinking their status within the British Empire. All of the revolutionary fervor and change that took place during the 1770's brought the already existing tensions of the past century to a head. This explosion of tensions within the colonies resulting in the American Revolution, which in turn had a significant impact on American educational ideology. This shift is the next essential piece of the study of the creation of a new type of specialized, modern university education and that is where our focus will now turn.

Chapter 2: Jefferson and the University of Virginia

The Long Road to UVA: Jefferson's Battle

Thomas Jefferson remains today one of the most complex figures in American history. So it is no surprise that this history of his contribution to the American educational system is complex and full of contradictions. On the one hand, there is evidence of Jefferson as an educational visionary, a man who spent countless hours imagining an ideal educational society where every child would receive a free education and enjoy the pleasures of knowledge throughout their lives, as Jefferson had. On the other hand, there is Jefferson the pragmatic statesman, who wanted to educate citizens in preparation for civic duty and to create a strong sense of nationalism in the young and developing United States. Jefferson the visionary wanted a small, relatively weak central government while Jefferson the pragmatist wanted widespread government-funded education. These seemingly opposing made his long-lived battle for public education in the state of Virginia and eventual creation of the University of Virginia so intriguing and worthy of historical study.

The creation of the University of Virginia, similar to that of the College of William and Mary, was a drawn out and complicated process. Jefferson's original plans for educational reform in the state of Virginia did not even include the creation of a university in Charlottesville. In fact, he originally sought simply to reform the constitution and statutes of William and Mary to fit a more modern model of higher education. This seemed reasonable in Jefferson's mind, since he had seen some serious problems at the college while he was in attendance during the early 1760s. Before the American Revolution had come to a close, Jefferson drafted a series of bills in the

Virginia state legislature concerning public education. The first bill in the series called for funds to create a public library, while the other two concerned the public education system, or lack thereof in Virginia. His “Bill for Amending the Constitution of William and Mary, and Substituting More Certain Revenues for Its Support” was written in 1779 and called for public monetary support for the college as well as major changes to the school’s curriculum model. The bill first traces a brief history of the college, including its roots in the British Empire and the small changes that had taken place during the eighteenth century. The bill certainly reflects the influence of the Revolution when it says that the visitors of the college should not be “restrained in their legislation, by the royal prerogative, or the laws of the kingdom of England; or the canons or constitution of the English Church.”³⁷ This language of independence, even before the war with Britain was over, is reflective of the ways that changes taking place within the American colonies had an influence on all aspects of society and culture, including education.

Jefferson’s vision for the education that should take place at William and Mary was a more modern system, something geared specifically toward the creation of proper citizens for the new nation. With that in mind, his bill suggested changes in the curriculum and increasing the faculty to eight professors and a president. Although the original curriculum at William and Mary was limited to a school of sacred theology and a school of philosophy along with a grammar school for younger boys to learn Latin and Greek, the newly suggested curriculum would be much more expansive. It would include subjects such as Law of Nations, Politics, Commerce, Geometry, Anatomy, Medicine,

³⁷ Thomas Jefferson, “Bill for Amending the Constitution of the College of William and Mary, and Substituting More Certain Revenues for Its Support,” 1779.

Agriculture, Zoology, Botany, and Modern Languages among others.³⁸ The subjects would be useful for the new American scholars just as the college's original curriculum had been useful for scholars within the British Empire. Disciplines such as Commerce, Agriculture, and Botany would be useful in the American economy because it would allow scholars to be knowledgeable about specific areas of trade and therefore more valuable within the new capitalistic economy. The curriculum of higher education in America, in the mind of Jefferson, should serve the purpose of creating a solid natural political identity as well as shaping statesmen and legislators, and an expansion of the subjects of study at William and Mary would facilitate this. In addition to expanding the curriculum, the students at UVA, not having the time or energy to complete every course of study available to them, would pick and choose which subject would be most useful to them and pursue individual learning tracks rather than a single, identical course of study during their time there.

With regard to suggestions about public funding of the college, the bill says "the revenue arising from the duties on skins and furs[sic] and those on liquors with which the said college was endowed, by several acts of General assembly is subject to great fluctuations, from circumstances unforeseen." Since the money raised from taxes varies greatly from year to year, Jefferson suggested the Assembly should give regular funds to the College to keep it running while the funds collected for the duties should just be paid directly to the Assembly.³⁹ This change would have been to help minimize problems created by lack of stable funds that had a negative impact on the scholars at William and Mary throughout the eighteenth century. Though the bill had the potential to be a major

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

step forward in terms of improving the quality of education at William and Mary, it was defeated in the Virginia legislature. The bill was a victim of its time, proposed while the Revolution was still draining state legislature of money. Virginia simply had no extra funds to promise for public education when the Continental Army was fighting a war against the most powerful and wealthiest empire in the world.

Though the bill was defeated in the legislature, Jefferson did not give up on his pursuit of modernizing Virginia's educational system. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, published first in 1780, Jefferson again discussed his discontent with the state of the college. He said that the existence of the grammar school within the college for the "learners of Latin and Greek filled the college with children" and this was disruptive and discouraging for the older scholars.⁴⁰ This, Jefferson argued, deterred students who were proficient in the ancient languages from attending the school of philosophy, and "thus the schools for mathematics and moral philosophy, which might have been of some service, became of very little."⁴¹ Jefferson saw the Grammar school as a major hindrance to the higher educational community at William and Mary. That is not to say that Jefferson would have supported getting rid of classical language studies altogether; he was an avid supporter of indulging in classical reading and writing. Instead, he suggested that the learning of Greek and Latin should be a requirement for entering institutions of higher education, but that the Grammar schools should be local and separated from secondary and higher education so that higher learning could be more focused on advanced modern sciences. While the entrance requirements of a mastery of Latin and Greek made it

⁴⁰ Thomas Jefferson and Merrill D. Peterson. *Writings*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984. 276.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

possible for students to focus more on their specialized courses of study, it also is a clear reminder of the way in which the classics continued to play an important role in American society during the nineteenth century. The transition away from the study of classical languages in higher education was both slow and unanticipated. When devising his plan for the structure of UVA, Jefferson certainly would have imagined that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, universities began to do away with classical requirements as they began to draw on an increasingly middle class population of students. The democratization of education, like that of the United States in general, was a slow process that was in no way predetermined or anticipated by people in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Jefferson also took the opportunity in his *Notes* to comment on the negative effect the rejection of his 1789 bill had on William and Mary, saying “after the present revolution, the visitors, having no power to change those circumstances in the constitution of the college which were fixed by the charter, and being therefore confined in the number of professorships” were forced make minor adaptations to the subjects of study with just six professors.⁴² Though the changes were certainly a step forward in William and Mary’s curriculum, to Jefferson they were simply not enough. He went on to say that the constitution of the college should again be reconsidered for amendments “so soon as the legislature shall have the leisure to take up the subject” to include more professorships and more branches of modern sciences.⁴³

Jefferson continued to be disappointed in his mission to modernize and secularize the College of William and Mary into the nineteenth century, and thus began to shift his

⁴² Ibid, 277.

⁴³ Ibid.

attention to the creation of an entirely new college in Virginia, to be called Central College, located just outside of Charlottesville—the site that would become the home to the University of Virginia just a few years later. The Virginia legislature passed a bill in February of 1816 creating the college, despite more disagreement about state funding. It is important to note the possible motivations for the approval of Central College and eventually UVA. Why, after all of the negative reactions to the proposals about William and Mary, would the Virginia legislature be willing to approve the creation of an entirely new university? It has been argued that it was because of South-North tensions that were already beginning to brew. For years, the sons of Southern elite planters had been shipped to the north to receive their education at Universities such as Harvard, Princeton and Yale. However, “Between the 1790s and the 1820s, southerners hopes that prestigious northern universities would turn their boys into respectable men were eclipsed by their fears about elite sons abandoning the region’s slaveholding tradition.”⁴⁴ This argument for a strong university system in the South would have provided serious motivation for taxpayers and legislators to finance the creation of an institution such as UVA. And on a personal level, though it was not an officially documented reason for Jefferson’s work at UVA, the cause of saving the traditions of the southern slave-based economy must have weighed on Jefferson’s mind throughout the process of creating the university.

Jefferson was appointed as a visitor of the college along with James Madison, James Monroe, and Joseph Cabell. These visitors would have extensive control over the creation of the college and the appointment of professorships, of which there would be

⁴⁴ Glover, Lorri. *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007)

six.⁴⁵ Central College, however was never able to become a legitimate institution of higher education since just two years after the college had been established, the legislature decided that the site of Central College was “a convenient and proper part of the state for the University of Virginia.”⁴⁶ A commission was created by the Virginia legislature to submit a plan for the new state university, a report that became known as the Rockfish Gap Report, named for the location of the tavern where the meeting took place in August of 1818. The commissioners, including Thomas Jefferson, were charged not only with selecting the site of the future university, but also with creating a plan for the buildings and the curriculum that would be taught. The suggested curriculum included the subject listed in Figure 1, which is an excerpt from the Rockfish Gap Report⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ Jefferson, Thomas, Joseph C. Cabell, and Nathaniel Francis Cabell. *Early History of the University of Virginia As Contained in the Letters of Thomas Jefferson and Joseph C. Cabell, Hitherto Unpublished : with an Appendix, Consisting of Mr. Jefferson's Bill for a Complete System of Education, and Other Illustrative Documents, and an Introduction, Comprising a Brief Historical Sketch of the University, and a Biographical Notice of Joseph C. Cabell*. Richmond, Va: J.W. Randolph, 1856, 391-393.

⁴⁶ Jefferson, *Writings*, 458.

⁴⁷ Jefferson and Cabell, *Early History of the University*, 437-38.

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|---|---|
| <p>I. Languages, ancient :
Latin,
Greek,
Hebrew.</p> | <p>IV. Physico-Mathematics :
Mechanics,
Statics,
Dynamics,
Pneumatics,
Acoustics,
Optics,
Astronomy,
Geography.</p> |
| <p>II. Languages, modern :
French,
Spanish,
Italian,
German,
Anglo-Saxon.</p> | <p>V. Physics, or Natural Philos-
ophy :
Chemistry,
Mineralogy.</p> |
| <p>III. Mathematics, pure :
Algebra,
Fluxions,
Geometry, Elementary,
Transcendental.
Architecture, Military,
Naval.</p> | <p>VI. Botany,
Zoology.</p> |
| <p>VIII. Government,
Political Economy,
Law of Nature and Nations,
History, being interwoven
with Politics and Law.</p> | <p>VII. Anatomy,
Medicine.</p> |
| <p>IX. Law, municipal.</p> | <p>X. Ideology,
General Grammar,
Ethics,
Rhetoric,
Belles Lettres, and the fine
arts.</p> |

Figure 1

It is easy to see the progression from Jefferson's proposals for the changes to the curriculum at William and Mary to what he recorded at the meeting At Rockfish Gap, with many of the same subjects suggested and a definite link with regards to the specialization and variety of coursework. There was certainly more detail presented here,

but the subjects of study remained generally the same throughout Jefferson's battle for the creation of a state university. It is important to note that while it may seem that the commissioners put significant emphasis on the learning of the ancient languages by naming it first, this was not necessarily the case.

A bit further in the report, Jefferson wrote that even though a professorship is suggested for the study of ancient languages, "it is difficult to foresee the extent of this school" because the languages were a foundation to the modern sciences, and should thus be learned prior to entry into the university.⁴⁸ In fact, the students at the university would devote only "a portion of their time to a finished knowledge of the Latin and Greek, the rest might be appropriated to the modern languages, or to the commencement of the course of science for which they should be destined."⁴⁹ Although Jefferson clearly did believe in the important role of the classics in American education at the lower level, this was a deviation from the goals of higher education during the eighteenth century, when a student's focus would have been on mastering the classical languages and histories. Instead, in the Report of the Commissioners there was a focus on modern languages and sciences, and a hint of the modern major system when Jefferson suggested that the scholars' time should be devoted to the branch of science they were destined for, rather than a general immersion in all sciences. Thus the commission's report served as a milestone not only in the development of the University of Virginia, but also in the development of higher education in the United States.

The Rockfish Gap Report was reviewed in late 1818 in the Virginia state legislature and the creation of a university at Central College was approved on January

⁴⁸ Jefferson, *Writings*, 464.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 465.

25, 1819 in "An Act Establishing A University." The curriculum proposed in the act was practically identical to that presented in the Rockfish Gap Report, a major victory for Jefferson in his battle for creating a successful system of public education. The act, like the Charter of William and Mary, established a Board of Visitors, but required that the governor of Virginia appoint those visitors, rather than naming them specifically in the Act. It also required that the Board elect a leader, known as the Rector (the first Rector was, not surprisingly, Thomas Jefferson). These Visitors, similarly to those at William and Mary, would be in charge of the "erection, preservation and repair of the buildings" of the university as well as a number of other duties such as appointing and removing professors, setting tuition rates, and establishing disciplinary laws.⁵⁰ The University of Virginia would be subject ultimately to the Virginia legislature, since it would be receiving aid from the Literary Fund, a fund established by the Constitution of the Virginia for the general promotion of learning and education. The Literary Fund was financed by revenue collected from "the proceeds of all public lands donated by Congress for free public school purposes...of all property accruing to the Commonwealth by forfeiture except as hereinafter provided, of all fines collected for offenses committed against the Commonwealth, and of the annual interest on the Literary Fund."⁵¹ The Visitors were required to make reports to the Literary Fund directors annually and therefore were held responsible for their actions. All of these provisions were no doubt influenced at least in part by the rather disastrous early history of William and Mary. The act sought to clearly establish a powerful Board of Visitors and avoid major conflict

⁵⁰ Virginia State Legislature, *An Act Establishing the University*, (Richmond, VA, 1819) found in Thomas Jefferson and Joseph C. Cabell, *Early History of the University of Virginia as Contained in the Letters of Thomas Jefferson and Joseph C. Cabell*, 427.

⁵¹ Virginia State Legislature, *Constitution of Virginia*, (Richmond, VA, 1776): Art. 8 Sect. 8.

between faculty and visitors over questions of authority, as there had been to the detriment of educational quality at William and Mary. Jefferson had never forgotten his experience at the college in Williamsburg and adapted his plan for the university accordingly, with the hope that those adaptations would serve American students well in their pursuit of modern knowledge.

Jefferson also remembered the standardized curriculum that was available to students at William and Mary while he was developing his plan for UVA. In his opinion, William and Mary's "miserable existence to which a miserable constitution has doomed it" in part stemmed from the limitations on the curriculum available to students.⁵² Jefferson wanted to create "a university on a plan so broad and liberal and modern, as to be worth patronizing with public support, and be temptation to the youth of other states to come and drink of the cup of knowledge and fraternize with us."⁵³ To achieve these goals, Jefferson not only expanded the curriculum (as seen in the Rockfish Gap Report of 1818) but also the faculty. Rather than having a few professors who knew a little bit of everything, he created eight distinct schools within the university with a professor assigned to head each one. These professors would focus on their particular areas, thus creating a more "expert" or specialized role that has become the norm for modern professors. Jefferson also provided each student with the option to study in one particular school or a number of them, depending on individual interest and need. This, according

⁵² Conant, *Jefferson and the Development of American Public Education* (1962), 24.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

to historian James Conant, is evidence of the origins of the elective system that exists presently because of its emphasis on specialization and individual education plans.⁵⁴

The degree of “usefulness” of Jefferson’s plan for the university can be best analyzed by examining the lives of early UVA students, looking for the ways in which their education helped (or perhaps hindered) their success in the modernizing American society. Frederick Coleman, who entered UVA at age nineteen in 1832, had “settled upon teaching as his profession” from an early age.⁵⁵ Note the use of the word “profession” when referring to Coleman’s educational goals, hinting that the role of the educator had become more specialized with specific training and education required, rather than being just an option for an educated gentleman to pursue in retirement or leisure time. Coleman graduated from UVA with a Master of Arts and went on to found a very successful secondary school in his home county. Though Coleman did eventually spend time in the military (as had been common among eighteenth century graduates of William and Mary), his first and foremost concern was his school. Perhaps it was his time spent at UVA that influenced his decision to revolutionize secondary education at his school. It was noted that at his school, Concord Academy, there was “the absence of all rules in regard to the preparation of tasks and hours of recitation. The boys studied when and where they chose and the length of time given to a class varied from thirty minutes to three hours, according to the judgment of the professor.”⁵⁶ So while the curriculum at Concord Academy was steeped in classical language and history to prepare students for university-level education, it is clear that the relative flexibility in curriculum Coleman

⁵⁴ Ibid, 25.

⁵⁵ W. Gordon McCabe, *Virginia Schools Before and After the Revolution*, (Chronicle Steam Book and Job Office, 1888) 40.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 45.

enjoyed at UVA made an impression on his educational philosophy, thus furthering the development of a more modern education system in Virginia.

Another student of UVA whose life is particularly interesting with regard to the development of a more “professional” education system was Dr. Levin Smith Joynes. He matriculated from UVA in 1839 with a degree of Doctor of Medicine. After a brief period spent practicing medicine in Virginia, he moved north to Philadelphia to serve as professor of physiology and medical jurisprudence in the Franklin Medical College. He later returned home to Virginia, first as a professor of medicine at the medical College of Richmond and eventually served as secretary of the Virginia State Board of Health.⁵⁷ Recalling the life of Walter Jones, the graduate of William and Mary who earned a degree in Medicine from a European school and eventually became a politician, it is clear that a medical degree had become much more professional in nature. Joynes, unlike Jones, had pursued a career that required his knowledge of medicine and each position that he held was related to his degree. This is a clear sign of progress toward a more specialized and professional society and economy in the developing American republic by the mid nineteenth century.

Jefferson's Dreams for the University: Some Realized, Some Sacrificed

The passage of the “Act for Establishing a University” was a major turning point in Jefferson’s mission to create his vision of an ideal academic village. It was, however, also representative of the ways in which Jefferson the pragmatist began to outweigh Jefferson the idealist during the later years of his life. Early in his life, Jefferson laid out

⁵⁷ Thomas Robinson Joynes and E. Lee Shepard, “Professional Choices in Antebellum Virginia: A Letter of Thomas Robinson Joynes,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (Jul., 1980), 356.

his thoughts on a proper educational system for the burgeoning United States in his *Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge* in 1778. The language of the bill's preamble is similar to that of the Declaration of Independence, stating that the best protection against tyranny is "to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large."⁵⁸ The ultimate goal of Jefferson's plans for creating an educational system in Virginia is linked to the dialogue of the Revolution and the establishment of liberty and virtuous citizens while protecting against corruption and tyranny. These ideas are certainly echoed in Jefferson's later writings about the University of Virginia and the creation of citizens prepared to participate in a republic, but here they are much more idealistic and related to broader concepts such as liberty, freedom, and tyranny.

To accomplish his goals of creating citizens who were fully willing and able to protect their liberty and virtue from tyranny, Jefferson first suggested the creation of publically funded local primary schools, where the children of each district would be taught "reading, writing, and common arithmetick[sic]...and at the same time make them acquainted with Grecian, Roman, English and American history."⁵⁹ The second tier of public education would be the grammar schools, of which there would be one per district and which would teach "the Latin and Greek languages, English grammar, geography, and the higher part of numerical arithmetick[sic]"⁶⁰ Anyone of means could pay to send their children to primary and grammar schools and then on to college at William and Mary, but the brightest boys at each level who could not afford to pay their own way would not be ignored. Each year, visitors would examine the schools for the brightest at

⁵⁸ Jefferson, *Writings*, 365.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 367.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 371.

the primary and grammar school levels and they would receive scholarships to attend the next level of study. In particular at each of the grammar schools, the visitors would “chuse[sic] one among the said seniors, of the best learning and most hopeful genius and disposition, who shall be authorized by them to proceed to William and Mary College.”⁶¹

This bill was defeated in a similar manner as Jefferson’s bill proposing changes at William and Mary. Again, Virginia state legislators were unwilling to sacrifice what precious funds they had available for expanding the educational system when they did not have enough money to fund the army in the war against Great Britain. It also certainly did not help Jefferson’s case that the wealthy and powerful men in Virginia would have seen Jefferson’s ideas about providing scholarships for bright but underprivileged students as a threat and an attempt to undermine the long established system of hierarchy in the colonies, which would have created more competition for the sons of the landed gentry in maintaining elite status.

Though this bill was resoundingly defeated in the Virginia legislature, Jefferson did not give up hope of one day creating his ideal system of education. As late as 1814, Jefferson was still writing about his ideas for creating a government-funded multi-tiered system of public education. In Jefferson’s letter to his dear friend Peter Carr in September of that year, Jefferson laid out another plan, slightly different but similarly idealistic and unrealistic for the means of the state of Virginia at the time. He again presented a tripartite system of education the public, but now called them Elementary schools, General schools, and Professional schools.⁶² While it is true that at the University of

⁶¹ Ibid, 373.

⁶² Ibid, 1348-50.

Virginia Jefferson sought to create a system that abolished class distinction in education, this letter showed that class distinctions weighed heavily on Jefferson's mind when imagining the ideal system of education. He thus divided Americans into two major groups, the laboring and the learned. The laboring class would only need the first level of education, elementary, which would give them enough of education to "qualify them for their pursuits and duties."⁶³ The learned class would continue on to the General schools where Jefferson further divided them into "those who are destined for learned professions, as means of livelihood; and the wealthy, who...may aspire to share in conducting the affairs of the nations, or to live with usefulness and respect in the private ranks of life."⁶⁴

After the General school the wealthy would retire from education to pursue their life of public service or leisure, but the professionals would continue on to those particular professional schools which would train them for their chosen field. These professional schools were to include those of law, theology, medicine, military, rural economy, architecture and fine arts, and technical philosophy.⁶⁵ These professional schools were reminiscent of the modern graduate schools, another innovation of Jefferson's that went virtually unrecognized in his own lifetime. Once again, however, Jefferson's plan was simply to grand for the reality that existed in Virginia at the time. This letter was really the idealist Jefferson's last stand with regards to making any substantive push for widespread public education in Virginia. Yes, he still contemplated which system of education would be best for the new republic, but his time and energy

⁶³ Ibid, 1348.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 1348.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 1350.

were increasingly occupied first with the creation of Central College and then with the University of Virginia. He was forced to abandon his seemingly fruitless attempts at creating public support and funding for the creation of primary and secondary schools and instead focus on the one part of his original plan for education that was coming to fruition, the state University.

The University's Lasting Legacy: UVA's Impact on American Higher Education

Although Jefferson was forced to abandon the majority of his original plan for renovating the educational system in his beloved Virginia, his efforts were still innovative. The University that Jefferson and his colleagues created in Charlottesville was both a product of the changes that took place within American society as a result of the Revolution, as well as a foundation for even more dramatic changes that would continue to take place throughout the nineteenth century. The University of Virginia was arguably the first modern major system where students could choose which courses of study they would pursue, based on personal preference and intended profession. UVA was funded by the state, not a particular church and therefore was in line with Jefferson's ideas for separation of Church and State. Up to this point, colleges and universities had strong ties to religion, as most had started out as seminaries, as William and Mary had. The curriculum established at the university was expansive yet specific, covering a wide range of topics in great detail, as opposed to the traditional course of study in theology, moral and natural philosophy, and classical languages. The changes that had taken place in American culture and society before, during and in the wake of the Revolution were deep and resounding, and they were reflected in Jefferson's quest to create a curriculum and educational community that was purely American in nature. And the curriculum and

goals of the University of Virginia had a lasting impact on other American universities who were also struggling with ideas about creating a distinctly American identity versus continuing to adhere to traditional methods of higher education that were instilled in universities under the British Empire.

Perhaps the most immediate result of the innovations that took place in Charlottesville can be seen in the history of our nation's oldest university, Harvard in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1815, a future professor at Harvard, George Ticknor, visited Jefferson at his home in Monticello, a visit that marked the start of a strong friendship. Originally, Jefferson was interested in acquiring Ticknor as a Professor of ethics, but he had already accepted a professorship at Harvard. Jefferson, however, continued to keep Ticknor informed of his plans for the university. He wrote in 1820 that the University of Virginia would not adopt the practice of "holding the students all to one prescribed course of reading" as "nearly every university and academy in the United States" had.⁶⁶ Rather, Jefferson wanted to create a system that would allow students "exclusive application to those branches only which are to qualify them for the particular vocations to which they are destined."⁶⁷ Jefferson suggestion to allow students to specialize in a certain field of study that would be useful in their professional lives must have been well received by Ticknor, since just five years later, he and several colleagues proposed significant changes to Harvard's rigid traditional curriculum, which was similar to that of William and Mary under British rule. Reflecting on the changes in 1884, Harvard President Charles Eliot described that the "laws provide...for the admission to

⁶⁶ "Thomas Jefferson to George Ticknor 1820" in Herbert Baxter Adams and United States Office of Education, *Thomas Jefferson and the University of Virginia*, Washington: Govt. Print. Off, 1888, 124.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

the university of persons not candidates for a degree...for the division of instruction into departments...and to a limited extent, consideration of the desires of the students in the arrangements of their studies."⁶⁸ These new regulations were quite similar to the programs instituted in Charlottesville, especially with regards to the specialization of study according to students' desires.

Though the new code of 1825 was ill-received by many of the Harvard faculty, it is representative of the ways in which the progressive approach to higher education that was implemented in Virginia had widespread influence. Ticknor himself remained positive that the changes would become more popular when he reported, "perhaps, [these changes are] not yet possible with us, though it is actually doing in the University of Virginia, and will soon, it is to be hoped, be considered indispensable in all our more advanced colleges."⁶⁹ The changes that were taking place within the larger educational community certainly did not catch on rapidly; change is normally a slow progression over time. The changes that took place as a result of the creation of a new national identity, society and economic system had a ripple effect, slowly reaching all aspects of American culture, and education certainly was affected. The progressive educational thinking that Jefferson recorded and created at UVA was a first step in the series of radical changes that would revolutionize higher education in America during the later part of the nineteenth century as a result of rapid industrialization and an increasing middle class. The rise of the American city and the process of urbanization, something that Jefferson feared would be a detriment to American society, led to further developments in terms of

⁶⁸ Charles Eliot, 1883-84 Annual Address, quoted in Adams, *Jefferson and the University of Virginia*, 126.

⁶⁹ George Ticknor, "Remarks on Changes Lately Proposed Or Adopted in Harvard University", (Boston: Cummings, Hilliard and Company, 1825): 40.

a public education system. Jefferson, though a self-proclaimed lover of ancient languages and history, created innovations at the university level that paved the way for the modern system that made classical studies less appealing to students seeking professions in science, technology, and business. Jefferson represented the tension that existed in American society at the time, both conscious of America's traditions within context of the eighteenth century British world yet looking forward to the development of a separate American national identity as the nineteenth century progressed. When Jefferson died in 1826, just a year after classes had begun at his beloved university, he only wanted three accomplishments remembered: author of the Declaration of Independence, of the Statute for Religious Freedom, and Father of the University of Virginia. Jefferson, who had served as a Virginia legislator, governor of Virginia, American Ambassador to France, and as the third president of the United States—saw these as his greatest accomplishments. While Jefferson certainly could not have anticipated the modernizing changes that his educational theories would inspire, it is clear that he understood that the developments he instituted were substantial enough to effect and encourage other institutions to adapt to the new American society.

Chapter 3: The Effect of Politics and Economics in the Early Republic on the Development of Higher Education

It would be simple to say that the Revolutionary War, with its focus on liberty and the triumph of individual rights, played a significant role in the development of new ideas about American identity and the ways in which education could best serve the needs of the new nation. This, however, would be to oversimplify the situation to the point of misunderstanding the entire transition. The war itself, while important in the span of American history, is less important for this study than the underlying cultural and economic changes that had allowed the revolutionary spirit to take hold in the American colonies during the 1760s and 1770s. The war was an event that forced the political leaders at the time to deal with the changes that had been taking place in America since the 1720s, namely population growth, cultural and economic diversity, growth of the middle class, and an increasing spirit of individualism and personal ambition. The war represents the point in American history when the colonists realized that there were, in fact, significant differences between the colonies and Great Britain, and that those differences necessitated the creation of a government that was independent from the British Empire.

The changes that took place, both at the institutional level and societal level, in the wake of the American Revolution and the ratification of the American Constitution in 1789 are of particular value to this study. They reveal the underlying causes of the changes that took place in higher education as seen in the differences between The College of William and Mary and the University of Virginia. Though there was a constant struggle between tradition and innovation during the early years of the American

Republic, there is no doubt that the government that was created as a result of the revolution was quite different from that of the British Empire. There was a distinct difference between subject and citizen, and therefore the education of a citizen needed to be different than that of a subject, since the success or failure of a republican government essentially depended on its citizens. Jefferson and a few of his contemporaries were among the first to recognize that within a republic, the citizens would play an essential political, economic, and social role in a variety of particular roles, and that education must be tailored to fit the needs of individual students. This required a rejection, not of the classics altogether, but of the rigidity of the traditional British model of higher education, where every student was restricted to one course of study dominated by the tedious mastery of Latin and Greek languages. Jefferson's push for innovation and specialization in higher education represents not only the first step toward the development of the modern American university, but also a culmination of the changes that had taken place in American society up to that point.

From Subject to Citizen: Democratization in America

In the years that followed the Revolution, American leaders were left with a political and economic mess on their hands. In addition to dealing with the enormous amount of war debt, they were also forced to come to terms with the rhetoric that had been employed during the revolution, i.e. the language of liberty and equality. Even before the revolution, American colonists had begun to move away from traditional aspects of British society, such as rigid social and economic hierarchy, deference to the

gentry class, and the unification of lower classes under the dominant rule of the elite.⁷⁰ After the Revolution, the creation of a democracy in the United States left even more confusion concerning social hierarchy and structure. The former culture of gentility, having no place in a society without titles or rigid social barriers, began to be replaced by what Burton Bledstein has called the “culture of professionalism. According to Bledstein, “the culture of professionalism provided an orderly explanation of basic natural processes that democratic societies, with their historical need to reject traditional authority, required.”⁷¹ The development of this new “culture” gave American society an entirely new structure that allowed for more social mobility and helped to further empower the working or middle class since professional work began to hold more cultural and economic prestige. These formerly marginalized people had gained newfound political authority (i.e, the right to vote) and were beginning to recognize how their role citizens of the United States differed greatly from their traditional role as British subjects. As citizens, they were able to take on a much more active role, especially at the state and local level, where post-revolutionary governments had been set up to be much more responsive to a larger percentage of the population than the British imperial government ever had been. With these new privileges, however, came certain responsibilities.

The idea of social and political responsibility was perhaps summed up best in the rhetoric of “virtue,” which was often employed during this transitional period. Those men who were in power were still very wary of the relatively large amount of power that had

⁷⁰ Robert E. Shalhope, *The Roots of Democracy: American Thought and Culture, 1760-1800* (Boston: Twayne, 1990): xii.

⁷¹ Bledstein, Burton J. *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America*, (New York: Norton, 1976): 90.

been entrusted to the American public as a result of the revolution, thus they emphasized a focus on being virtuous citizens. The idea of virtue, inherently linked to classical antiquity interestingly enough, was focused on self-sacrifice for the benefit of the whole, a call for citizens to think of the good of the nation before personal gain and the rejection of greed and corruption. This idea of self-sacrifice and self-control for the people in power served as an attempt to control the passions of the masses, to make them more controllable and less radical. However, in a period of transition, it is often the case that language can take on multiple meanings and different groups tend to employ it in different ways to serve particular needs. The general public often understood the language of virtue as empowering rather than restraining, recognizing new ways that they could be important in a republic and the ways that they could embrace their citizenship and right to participate. These feelings of virtuous participation and involvement existed prior to the revolution and continued to exist as America entered the nineteenth century.

Jefferson witnessed this empowerment of the masses and recognized that the call for virtue from political elite was not enough to secure the longevity and success of the American republic, thus prompting his ideas regarding the utility of American education and the purposes it should serve. Clearly, Jefferson saw higher education as a useful tool for forming virtuous American citizens who were fully prepared to participate in the republican government. He wrote in the Rockfish Gap Report of 1818 that the first objective of the curriculum instituted at the University of Virginia should be "to form the statesmen, legislators and judges, on whom public prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend...And, generally to form them to habits of reflection and correct

action, rendering them examples of virtue to others.”⁷² Jefferson, here, is representative of the elitist view of American society, attempting to maintain stability in American government, insuring that “public prosperity” was maintained by a few political elite who should be trained for that specific purpose. This was an extension of the language of virtue as it was used to control the masses and protect the American government from falling victim to the whims of the public. This reveals an interesting contradiction in Jefferson’s educational philosophy, since he wanted to democratize the entire system of American education by making it available to all Americans (at least at the elementary level) but at the same time arguing that there is by nature a small elite class—not necessarily based on wealth, but on ability—that is best suited to rulers of the masses, and those are the people who should receive the highest level of education. Jefferson’s ideas about the specialization of curriculum, which he designed to prepare people for specific roles within the American republic, began to be seen as the democratization of the American education system, allowing more people to benefit from higher education and participate in the diversifying political and social system.

Jefferson himself was resistant to significant change, instead wishing for the American economy to remain agrarian and for the government to be controlled by the educated elite. His theories about widespread education tailored to individual needs, however, were co-opted and incorporated by the movement for a more truly democratic society that really took hold during the Jacksonian era, when the “common man” came into political and social importance. Also important in the co-option by more radical educational reformers were Jefferson’s ideas about education’s links to citizenship in a

⁷² Roy John Honeywell, *The Educational Work of Thomas Jefferson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931): 250.

democracy. Another one of the objectives at the University of Virginia was to “instruct the mass of our citizens in these, their rights, interests and duties, as men and citizens.”⁷³ The emphasis on education as a creator of democratic citizens was significant in that it identified the American system as something inherently different from a British one, since the role of subject had been minimal and required no programs of civic training or education. It also lent itself to discussions about the role of the common man in society, especially as the nineteenth century progressed. Since the common man was just as much of an American citizen as an elite man, and education is for the advancement of citizens, it is only logical that higher education should serve a legitimate purpose in the lives of a more common citizen base that did not have the time or desire to dead languages such as Latin and Greek. Over time, the specialization which Jefferson imagined to be built upon a solid foundation of classical learning, began to make the classical languages virtually obsolete in a system based on specialized learning tracks geared toward eventual careers (i.e. the modern major system). This unintended consequence really draws out the tension that existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries between tradition and progress in terms of political development and how that played out in the role of education American society.

Economic Changes and Resulting Effect on Higher Education

In the midst of the radical political changes that were taking place as America asserted its statehood, there were also significant economic changes that led to a complete overhaul of the social system and thus a change in the way Americans needed to be educated. There was a population boom from 2.8 million to 9.6 million in the forty years

⁷³ Jefferson, *Complete Jefferson*, 1098.

from 1780 to 1820, which flooded the market with workers. Also, the population was increasingly young, with half of the white males in country by 1810 under the age of 16.⁷⁴ Along with this population boom, there was also a significant boom in foreign trade following the break with Great Britain, since there were no longer the trade restrictions enforced by the imperial administration. With freer trade, i.e., the development of a capitalistic system and a rejection of the traditional mercantilist one, and a boom in the labor market competition bred quickly, spurring more innovation in domestic manufacturing. Some examples of this innovation would be Eli Whitney's cotton gin in 1794, causing a boom in cotton exports from the south, as well as his promotion of interchangeable parts in manufacturing, specifically with regards to the production of rifles.⁷⁵ None of these changes marked the beginning of one era of economic activity or the end of another; this was a slow process of change over a long period of time.

The innovations that began to take place around the turn of the nineteenth century were by no means on the scale of the widespread industrialization and urbanization that became so familiar in the Gilded Age, but the changes were significant enough to draw the attention of contemporaries as well as modern historians. Historian Paul Gilje has called the period surrounding the turn of the century the "adolescence" of capitalism. Gilje described capitalism at the time as "vibrant, cocky, feeling its own strength, and ready to take on the world."⁷⁶ Thus, the changes that were taking place at the time seem quite significant and had an impact on numerous sectors of the developing American

⁷⁴ Jean V. Matthews, *Toward a New Society: American Thought and Culture, 1800-1830* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990): 3.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁶ Paul A. Gilje, "The Rise of Capitalism in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16, no. 2 (July 1, 1996): 162.

society. America at the time, when compared with European nations, “provided both better living conditions, greater freedom, and a much better chance of social and economic mobility.”⁷⁷ All of these combined to advance the mindset of capitalism in America; positive results helped to “sell” the concept of capitalism to the American people and attracted them to the ideas about individualism, consumerism, and expansion of the market. This was a crucial step in the advancement of capitalism and provided more of an opportunity to readdress the ways in which American higher education should be structured in a new, expanding, and diversifying economy.

There was also the important link between economics and social status that changed significantly during the early and mid-nineteenth century. Under the British system, power and status had been defined by land possession and family names or titles and the entire system was based on a strict adherence to a rigid social hierarchy. Within this system, the learned gentleman who had the leisure time and means to pursue the luxury of classical education played an important role in society, with his elite status legitimated by the power of the Crown. However, in America things had always been a bit different, again with the focus on deference to the elite ruling class rather than authority. When the Revolution was over, there were no more titles of a clearly ordained ruling class. This, combined with increasing market opportunity and competition led to the rise of the American professional in social status. Evidence of this change in economic pursuits can be seen in the resistance of farmers to the changes that were taking place. When Michael Chevalier, a Frenchman traveling in the United States in the early

⁷⁷ Reginald Horsman, *The New Republic: the United States of America, 1789-1815* (Harlow, England: Longman, 2000): 104.

nineteenth century, published his letters concerning American society, he noted a new England farmer who complained about the new class of educated young men. The farmer had said, "After consuming the farm in the expenses of a fashionable, flashy, fanciful education, they leave the honorable profession of their fathers to become doctors, lawyers, merchants, or ministers, or something of the kind."⁷⁸

The role of the hard-working professional began to surpass the archaic role of the educated landowner gentleman, and "wealth rather than family background or education was becoming the principal status determinant."⁷⁹ In an increasingly consumer oriented economic world, the traditional classical education simply began to lose market value and was reminiscent of the time when the classics were used as a status-determinant and therefore did not function well in a system which did not recognize strict status boundaries.⁸⁰ The American economy was changing, and the era of the "common man" was beginning during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, thus prompting Jefferson and others to reconsider how education should be made useful in the new era of American capitalism.

Jefferson clearly recognized that competition in the market had spurred innovation and diversification of the economic sector when he made suggestions for the creation of professional schools within the public school system. He wrote in April 1814 that these professional schools would specialize in training for particular careers:

⁷⁸ Quotation from Michael Chevalier, *Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States* (Boston: 1839) found in Bledstein, *Culture of Professionalism*, 62.

⁷⁹ Edwin Miles, "The Young American Nation and the Classical World," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 2 (June 1974): 267.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 264.

To these professional schools will come the lawyers to the school of law; the ecclesiastic to that of theology and ecclesiastical history; the physician to those of the practice of medicine, materia medica, pharmacy, and surgery; the military man to that of military and naval architecture and projectiles; the agricultor to that of rural economy; the gentleman, the architect, the pleasure gardener, painter, and musician, to the school of fine art⁸¹

It is important to note, first, that these professional schools were suggested to replace the traditional apprenticeships in a given vocation such as medicine, thus making the student more competitive on the job market, being trained at a credible academic institution. Second, it is clear from the passage that Jefferson did still see a role for the gentleman in American society, since he was a gentleman himself. Jefferson never imagined the extent to which the very fiber of American society would change during the nineteenth century, making his dreams for a utopian agrarian society of highly educated citizens obsolete. Paradoxically, however, the success of Jefferson's plan for widespread publically funded education actually began to gain popularity at a time when his greatest fear was coming to fruition—urbanization and industrialization.⁸²

This entire process of economic change during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could be described as the liberalization of the American economy, a description that is worthy of note since the political changes that were taking place were predominately republican in nature (hence the focus on “virtue”) rather than purely democratic or liberal in the classical sense. Again, this is evidence of the serious tensions that existed in America at the beginning of the nineteenth century, tensions between

⁸¹ Jefferson's Letter to Colonel Duane, April 14, 1813 found in Adams, *Thomas Jefferson and the University of Virginia*, 63.

⁸² Conant, *Thomas Jefferson and the Development of American Public Education*, 40.

popular sovereignty and maintaining control; overarching tensions between tradition and progress that are so common in the study of historical processes. It is no surprise that these tensions, created in part by the radical changes that were beginning to play out in the economic sector, were reflected in the tensions that arose from suggestions to modify the traditional model of higher education. Jefferson, as we know, was among the first to suggest that there should be changes made in the way that young men were educated to enter the new economic world. But there were certainly people who did not want to follow Jefferson and break with the tradition of a strictly classical education, we see this clearly in the amount of opposition there was to Jefferson's plans for education in Virginia, and that only a small part of his elaborate plan—the creation of UVA—was actually realized during his lifetime. But the changes in American society that had begun well before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War could not be stopped or even slowed. Though Jefferson attempted to control the change that was taking place through the creation of an educational system that he thought would best help Americans move forward while not losing too much sight of tradition, the deep rooted change and progress was so significant that the classics increasingly began to be viewed as archaic and unmarketable in the modernizing, commercial economy.

Diversification and Expansion of the American Population

In the years following the Revolution and into the first half of the nineteenth century, America witnessed an explosion in population (a result of immigration and

higher birth rates than Europe) that added to the diversity of the nation and encouraged westward expansion into the frontier in search of land, markets, and opportunities. This expansion and diversification, as noted briefly earlier, provided a catalyst for a boom in the founding of American colleges and universities. It seems like a simple reactionary event, more students to educated means that America needed more institutions of higher education. What complicated the matter was the fact that many of the new colleges and universities that were being founded were quite different from those of the colonial era, for certain obvious reasons. First, the larger populations, especially those that migrated westward during the early part of the nineteenth century, were of a different social and economic caliber than those who had traditionally attended universities such as William and Mary during the colonial period. In 1837, the President of the University of Nashville (founded 1826, modern day links to Vanderbilt University), Philip Lindsley, described the situation concerning the type of higher education suitable for the growing republic:

Whoever has studied the history, genius, character, government, modes of instruction, endowments, revenues, and all the concentrated ways and means and facilities of communicating knowledge, which distinguish the most celebrated European universities, will be able to comprehend our meaning when we speak of them as an order or species of institution altogether unknown in the United States...if established, they would be duly patronized and sustained by our busy, restless, speculating, money making people...for the purposes of educating boys generally between the ages of fifteen and twenty one, we have no hesitation in giving preference to such colleges as we already possess...such institutions, scattered over the land, at convenient distances from each other, are better adapted to the habits, wants, and circumstances of our widely dispersed and comparatively poor population.⁸³

This admittedly rather lengthy excerpt helps draw out the tension between traditional and modernizing higher education. Lindsley and others—like Jefferson—envisioned a

⁸³ Le Roy Halsey, ed. *The Works of Philip Lindsley*, (1864) I, 404-405.

system of higher education that was both accessible and relevant to young men in the new nation. Lindsley, unlike Jefferson however, seemed to lack the connection to the colonial gentry class and therefore the traditional elitist perspective associated with higher education. Lindsley recognized that the new colleges would be serving a very different group of students. He describes them as “comparatively poor,” which should not be understood as people living in poverty but rather people of the new, industrious and pragmatic middle class. Here, Lindsley presents a viewpoint that supported entirely rejecting the models of European higher education (i.e. rigorous study of classical languages with emphasis on repetition and recitation). Examining the language and opinions of men like Lindsley reveals the way in which Jefferson’s ideas about specialization and “utility” in higher education could have been co-opted by educational thinkers who sought to dismantle the classical education system that Jefferson prized so dearly. Despite all of his forward thinking about American society, Jefferson certainly would not have gone so far as to suggest a complete elimination of classical studies or even of a European model for higher education. But by engaging in a radical conversation about revamping American education in a relatively conservative way, Jefferson’s ideas became available to more radical educational innovators, who were often more willing to conceptualize major changes to the way education in America functioned.

The same diversification and expansion of the “middling” class that led to increased market diversity and competition in the economic sector seemed to have created a new middle ground in terms of American higher education. Yes, colonial institutions such as Yale, Harvard, and William and Mary continued to serve a

predominately elite group of young scholars, thus reinforcing class boundaries in the wake of the allegedly egalitarian and democratic revolution. However, new universities, especially in the south and west, began to pop up in numbers hitherto unheard of. And these new institutions of the early nineteenth century tended to embrace a “facility of communicating knowledge” that was more purely American in nature, rather than based on the medieval education institutions of Europe. While America was beginning to come into its own and develop a distinct and independent national identity, people began to rely less on images of classical antiquity to identify with and instead began to focus on the triumphs of American citizens. As more time passed and America continued to develop its own national history, figures such as Brutus and Cincinnatus began to give way to George Washington and Andrew Jackson, especially to members of the new middle class. Just as the classics were becoming less relevant economically, classical languages and the time spent acquiring a knowledge of them became less socially meaningful and therefore had a smaller influence on the curriculum of the developing institutions of American higher education.

Conclusion

When Jefferson reflected on the two major gifts his father left him as inheritance, his classical education and the estate in Albemarle County, he said that if he had to choose between the two, he would undoubtedly choose the education.⁸⁴ Jefferson held the classics in the highest esteem throughout his life and emphasized their importance in educating young citizens of the American republic. He also advocated specialization and utility of studies at the university level, which, once implemented on a wide scale, played a major role in the diminishment of classical studies in higher education. Jefferson never imagined a day when the classics would become less useful in the American republic, since he saw them as essential foundations for the sciences and examples for virtuous citizens who could participate in the new government. But as America developed a political system, economy, and national identity independent of the British Empire, the spirit of democracy, capitalism, and the triumph of the common man took hold in a way that the founding fathers had not anticipated. The changes that took place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century across every aspect of American society ushered in a new era dominated by a market-based economy and increased social mobility and required a revolutionary approach higher education which included the specialization of study and a diminishment of traditional education in the classical languages.

This brief study has traced the early history of the educational changes that took place, specifically in Virginia, as America developed a unique political and cultural identity following the Revolution. It began with analysis of the eighteenth century history of the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg. The study of the college served the

⁸⁴ Thomas Jefferson and Merrill D. Peterson, *Writings*, (1984): 317.

purpose of representing a typical institution of higher education during the colonial period in America. William and Mary was created with the intention of training young seminarians for the Anglican church, focusing on the mastery of classical languages. As the eighteenth century progressed, the tensions that resulted from societal changes—diversification of population, identification of differences between the colonies and Britain, etc.—were mimicked within the institutional community at Williamsburg. As patriots grew more discontented with British rule in the colonies, locally elected trustees at the college had continuous disagreements with the British faculty who answered to England. Tensions, especially regarding changes to curriculum to make it more “useful” or useable in professional life for colonists, were high from about the 1750’s onward, until the break with Britain in 1776. The chapter examined the ways in which the conflicts and problems that existed at the college influenced Thomas Jefferson while he attended in the early 1760s, setting the stage for a more detailed analysis of Jefferson’s educational philosophy and his influence on American education within the context of the rapidly changing society.

This study then jumped forward in time, to the nineteenth century to trace the beginnings of the UVA in Charlottesville with a focus on Jefferson’s contributions. UVA was founded, unlike William and Mary, as a publically funded school to form proper citizens, statesmen, and professionals. Jefferson believed that to attain that goal there needed to be a wider range of subjects taught, extending beyond classical languages to include the sciences and politics. While Jefferson saw to it that Latin and Greek were still taught at the university, they were certainly not the core subjects and there was less rigidity in the coursework the students completed. Jefferson’s plan for the university’s

curriculum allowed students to choose areas of study based on their personal interests or eventual career path, rather than restricting them to the general courses that students in the eighteenth century had been required to complete.

Certainly Jefferson's ideas about changes in the higher education system did not appear out of nowhere. While his individual innovation is undeniable, Jefferson was very much influenced by the society in which he lived and the changes that took place before, during and in the wake of the American Revolution. The study focused on the political change from monarchy to democracy as well as the economic change from mercantilism to capitalism. Both of these changes put more emphasis on the individual citizen, no longer a subject to the crown, and made Americans more politically and economically independent and important than the people of any other nation or empire at the time.

Thus, in Jefferson's and others' opinions, the educational system in America needed to be tailored to better educate the citizens of America who would be able to take a more active role in their government and economy than ever before. In the new market-based economy, the professional began to surpass the landed gentry in terms of social hierarchy, with more respect granted for working professionals than elite educated gentlemen. In time, Jefferson's innovations that had originally included the promotion of classical study began to make classical languages irrelevant to American students as the nineteenth century progressed. This was clearly a result that Jefferson could never have anticipated when he originally suggested the specialization of study, not imagining a day when students would no longer be interested in learning the languages of the ancients because they were focused on more modern topics and disciplines.

Overall this study has sought to explain how the political and economic changes that took place during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in America prompted a gradual change in the way that Americans were educated to become active members of a capitalistic democracy. The opportunities for social mobility and the expansion of the middle class that resulted in the wake of revolution, along with a more diversified job market, resulted in a shift away from the study of classical languages because the traditional role of the highly educated landed gentry class became essentially obsolete as the United States entered the Jacksonian era. Though some universities, most famously Yale, held on to the traditional method of classical education until after the Civil War, most began to adapt to serve the needs of their paying students, who increasingly came from middle-class professional families who could afford to educate their sons and wanted to focus on making their education profitable in the new economy. And Jefferson's work at UVA is representative of the way in which these changes were in no way inevitable, since he initiated plans for system of higher education that would eventually make his beloved classical languages irrelevant to most students. The transition to a more modern education system was anything but smooth, but the changes that were made irreversible by the break with Great Britain and the creation of a unique American society necessitated a change in the way Americans were educated, a change that eventually became much more radical than Jefferson could have ever imagined.

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