

STATE HISTORY IN THE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

In every public high school, as well as in every college and university in our land, history has come to be an important constituent factor in the curriculum. Discussion may still go on as to how much time ought to be given to this study, as to the methods to be adopted in its pursuit, and as to whether it ought to be required of all students. But these are simply matters of school or college administration which do not affect the general proposition, to which all educationists now agree, that the study of history should be adequately represented in the curriculum of every school of secondary or higher grade.

Accepting this general conclusion as sound, I desire in this paper to advance the further proposition that in the study of history in our public high schools a reasonable portion of the time should be given to the study of State history. Nor is it sufficient that the study of local history be made the subject of a few "talks" to the class in United States history, or introduced simply to enliven the course in civics? On the contrary, I believe that the local history of the State within which the high school is located should be seriously taken up and regularly taught as a subject worthy of special study.

In urging this proposition upon the attention of those who are interested in secondary education there is, of course, some danger of assigning undue prominence to the study of

State and local history. I am, however, especially anxious to guard against such error, since I am of the opinion that in constructing schemes of historical study for our schools we have, perhaps, sinned somewhat in placing undue emphasis upon American as compared with general European history. Every country in constructing its scheme of education ought to provide a proper place for the study of its own history; but every country needs also to be on its guard lest by giving too exclusive attention to this subject it warp and distort the views of its children as to the relative importance of local as compared with general, of national as compared with world history.

The history of this country is destined, in our opinion, to play a very prominent part and occupy a leading place in all the future history of the world. But if the American republic were to perish to-day, the place which we should occupy in the grand progress of the world's history would, after all, be very small. And so our students in the high schools should get in the course of their studies some conception of the relative significance which the history of other nations has in the history of the world as compared with our own. We are, however, justified in laying a somewhat exaggerated emphasis upon our own history as compared with that of other nations of the world. That is to say, a certain exaggerated emphasis is not an undue emphasis.

In the first place each nation is bound by the laws of its own being to magnify its own calling, to emphasize its own place in the general history of the world, and to dwell upon its own services to humanity. It is, moreover, necessary in the general interests of human history that each State should

do this in order that ultimately, when the history of the world is written, adequate material shall exist to enable the historian to give each nation its proper place.

We are likewise justified from a pedagogical point of view in this exaggeration of our own history by the fact that there is a certain element of interest in the study of the national annals which is not to be found to the same extent in the study of the world annals. At the same time we must beware against making a very common mistake in this field. It is not true, in my opinion, that the individual is always most interested in that which lies nearest him. The child, as a rule, is far more interested in fairy stories than it would be in the history of children with whom it associates every day. The citizen is often times more interested in the politics of the State or the nation than in that of the city, and in the history of the foreign nations rather than in the history of his own nation, in the history of the ancient rather than in the history of the modern nations, in the history of the world rather than in the history of his own time and his own conditions. In spite of this general fact, however, it is possible to get a certain kind of interest in the events connected with one's own national life which cannot be secured for those incidents connected with other nations and other races in other periods of the world's history. In the same way it is possible to arouse a certain kind of interest in the annals of one's village or city, of one's county or one's State, which it is not possible to excite to the same extent in the history of one's nation. A certain amount of attention, therefore, to State and local history would be justified by the fact that it helps to arouse that special and

peculiar interest in the study of history which is likely to make it a fruitful source of intellectual development and enjoyment for all time to come.

There is another reason justifying the attention of the student of history to local as well as to general affairs, and that is, that it is the best means of getting a clear understanding of certain large events and forces through that accurate knowledge of local events and local forces which the study of local history offers an opportunity of developing. Just as in geography a child may from its own immediate surroundings by studying the local elevations, slight though they may be, by watching the streams, insignificant though they are, get such general geographical ideas as will enable him to understand in a far clearer and better manner the elements in the geography of foreign countries and foreign climes, so in history, the study of the local features and the local traditions will enable the student to collect certain data which will render easy the understanding of the wider sweep of national and world history.

There is still another important circumstance which justifies the study of local history as a part of the general scheme of historical study. I refer to the fact that the life of the local community supplements the life and politics of the larger national community. The entire history of the people is not by any means to be found in the annals of legislative bodies or in the field of what may be called general politics. Many of the most important forces which necessarily determine the course of national development are not reflected in the history of the general governments or in their dealings with foreign nations or with domestic affairs. Thus it

will be found that local history offers an essential supplement to the study of the larger and more general features of national history.

It may also be urged with reason that a knowledge of State and local history conduces to a love of country. He who is a stranger to the history and traditions of his own local community is not likely to possess that patriotism upon which rests, in the long run, the salvation not only of the local community but of the nation as well. The more the citizen knows and understands of the history and government of his own community the greater will be his interest in all public affairs. To be taught that our fathers labored, and fought, and sacrificed for the good of the community is to be inspired with that courage which makes good citizens. From the standpoint of the public good our high schools can offer no more valuable courses of instruction than those which lead to better citizenship.

All these considerations, which apply in a general way to the study of local history as distinguished from general history, have a special force in this our own country owing to the peculiar nature of our government and of our institutions. Our nation is organized on the federal plan, being composed of States themselves organized on the principles of local self-government. The history of townships, counties, and States is, therefore, of special significance in the study of American history.

Owing to the political, social, and industrial constitution of our society a large number of important elements in our national history fail to be reflected within the ordinary field of national policy, national discussion, and national admin-

istration. This is rendered especially apparent by a comparison of our own history with that of England, for example. If you study the history of England you will find that the questions of the support of the poor, of the proper organization of municipal government and the organization of public education, and the administration of public health, have entered into national politics in such a way that no one could write a general history of England without giving large attention to these problems. They are the points about which national policy has turned; they are the questions on which ministries have risen and fallen. Nor are these same questions at bottom of less importance in this country to a full understanding of our history as a nation. But at no place in the field of our national politics do they appear as important considerations. If, therefore, these vital social and political problems are to be studied at all, if they are to receive the attention which they certainly ought to have in any general scheme of historical instruction, they must be included in the study of State history which has turned to so large an extent about their solution.

The study of State history in this sense in the United States is a very essential and necessary supplement to the study of general American history in order to give any adequate view of the course of national progress. Even in the field of national politics, pure and simple, in the field of those questions which, by the terms of our Federal Constitution, are intrusted to our national government, the part which the States as States have played is extremely important. The great struggle for the existence of the Union turned largely upon the attitude of the individual States.

The most important problems in our national history can be understood and appreciated only through the study of State life, of the State idea, and of the part which that idea played in our national existence. Surely, then, these are circumstances which justify giving a certain portion of the time devoted to historical study to the examination of these particular things.

The considerations which I have thus far presented apply to the study of State history generally in the high schools of our country. But here in the Middle West, in the great Valley of the Mississippi, there are special reasons for urging the study of State and local history. The intrinsic interest and importance of the history of this region can no longer be questioned. To be sure the history of Massachusetts, of New York, of Pennsylvania, and of Virginia is fuller of content since it extends over a much longer period of time than does the history of such States as Ohio, Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. But ever since the close of the Revolution, when the defiles of the Alleghanies began to be filled with emigrant wagons bound for the West, the Mississippi Valley has literally been the central region of interest in our American history. The eastern States secured independence and established the nation. It remained for the Territories and States of the West to develop that nation. They brought into American history those factors and elements which are genuinely American. The history of these western States—these frontier democracies—is certainly interesting, important, and full of suggestion.

Take Illinois as an example. The history of the Indian and the Mound-builder, the marvelous story of the explora-

tions of Marquette and LaSalle, and the magnificent efforts by which this territory was annexed to the crown of France stir the imagination and arouse and excite the attention and fix the interest of the student of history the more deeply the longer it is studied. Certainly the annals of no eastern State have to show a more picturesque or interesting chapter calculated to stir the emotions of the historian than the earliest chapter in the history of the Illinois country. Again, the story of the winning of this territory from the French crown, the subsequent story of maintaining its possession in the hands of the English against the Indians, and above all the story of its acquisition by the infant republic during the Revolutionary War may rank in interest with any which the annals of this country can offer. The great march of George Rogers Clarke across the Illinois country to Kaskaskia and back again to Vincennes ranks among the great events of a similar kind, not simply in the history of this western country, or of the United States, but of the world; and the oftener the story is told, and the more fully its significance is understood, the greater the place which will be accorded to it in the history of this country.

The organization of this whole region in the Northwest Territory was not merely an interesting incident in the life of one or two States, but is to be viewed as one of the most important and far reaching events in the life of the republic, as an act the significance of which is not at all seen in the ordinary accounts of it given in the general history of the United States. And when subsequently the time came for the admission of this Illinois territory into the Union as a State, the fact that its northern boundary was placed at

42° 30' instead of at the lower end of Lake Michigan, where it was first designed to be, turned out to be one of the most important events in the history of the country; for, possibly, upon that fact depended the subsequent circumstance that Illinois sided with the North in the great struggle for the Union, and thus turned the scale in favor of a single national existence as opposed to a number of nations on this continent. Then too, the history of the struggle of this State over the slavery question, its experience in the matter of internal improvements, the great struggle over the free school, all these are interesting and vital chapters, not merely in the history of Illinois, but, because they represent similar movements in other States, also in the history of the Union. It is, indeed, a history without which the history of the Union cannot be understood in any proper sense.

The same local interest and the same national importance attaches to the history of Wisconsin. There the romance of Jesuit missionaries and the exploits of French fur traders are no less fascinating; while the early and steadfast support which that State gave to the fundamental principles upon which the nation was founded may justly be regarded as a significant contribution to the political evolution of the American people. Indeed each of the five States of the Old Northwest has made its special contribution to our national as well as to our local annals.

And if we look a little farther and across the Mississippi we behold the vast Province of Louisiana, the event of whose purchase in 1803 from Napoleon has been ranked next in importance and political significance to the Declaration of Independence and the adoption of the federal con-

stitution. The negotiations leading up to the signing of the treaty of purchase are among the most interesting in the annals of American diplomacy. But still more entertaining is the story of the planting and growth of the trans-Mississippi Commonwealths.

The later history of these States of the Middle West, the rise of the railway with all the questions which grew out of railroad regulation and control, the steady tendency to increase the functions of the State in the direction of the support of the poor, the support of higher education, the general social legislation reflected in the laws regulating the employment of children or in those regulating the conduct of the mining business and similar departments, all represent a most important side of the life of the American people—a side which is almost absolutely neglected in our national histories because, forsooth, this particular study of national life does not fall under the jurisdiction of the federal authority. The fundamental and important place which the city is coming to occupy in modern society can be fully seen only from the study of this subject as a part of the State government, although it has, of course, become a most important part of the influence which determines national politics as well.

We citizens of the States of the north Mississippi Valley are fortunate in that in studying the history of our own States we are undoubtedly studying the life of States which are destined to occupy increasingly important positions in the life of the nation. We need not feel, therefore, that in studying the history of our own States we are spending our time upon the study of political units whose parts have

been played and whose importance is destined to wane with every succeeding decade. On the contrary, our children's children are likely to be still looking forward to the increasing importance assigned in the life of our great republic to the work, and thought, and action of these Commonwealths. It is a picturesque, a glorious, and an important history. Their future history is destined to be, if not more picturesque, even more important in our national annals than it has been thus far. Surely we can afford to give our children the opportunity to know something more of their past than is to be found in the ordinary volumes on United States history which are studied in our schools.

As American citizens we have a still more glorious heritage. We all feel that whatever may be the relative position assigned to the history of the American republic in the general history of the world down to 1900, certainly a larger and ever increasing place must be assigned to it in the future if we do not prove recreant to the trusts which are devolved upon us.

George Washington would have been a great man even if he had been condemned to run his career in a State which had come to an end within a generation of his death. He would have been a great figure if he had lived in one of the obscure South American states; but he never could have assumed the commanding place, which is assigned to him to-day, if it had not been for the subsequent growth of this great republic which he helped to found. Every added increment of strength and glory to our nation will give an added prominence to those great men who laid broad and deep its foundations, or to those later men who builded in

many cases wiser than they knew upon the foundations of the fathers of the republic. So the things we are doing to-day will acquire an added importance and an added significance as the years roll on from the ever increasing power and position of this republic among the nations of the earth.

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