

AFD Ep 446 Links and Notes - Horace Mann [Bill/Rachel] - Recording Oct 30, 2022

- [Intro] Today's episode is on a nationally and socially significant industrial revolution-era figure closely associated with my city of Newton, Massachusetts, since he lived for a while just up the street from me in the mid-1840s, although there are schools all across the country bearing his name. Today, public education in the United States is facing a sustained attack from both conservative moral panics and neoliberal charter school proponents. There was also [a recent controversial New York Times expose on publicly-funded religious schools in New York](#) and whether they are teaching critical basic skills to all, as required and expected. It's hard to imagine creating a concept like universal publicly-funded primary and secondary school from scratch today because of all the excuses that people would make for why it shouldn't be publicly-funded or available to all. So, let's turn back the clock to the late 1830s, with the first Industrial Revolution in full swing in the United States and especially Massachusetts – although both were still heavily agrarian societies – and let's examine the emergence of secular public education in the first place, which once also seemed fairly unlikely...

- [Rachel] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Mann
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Horace-Mann>

Personal life/background

- Horace Mann was born in Franklin, Massachusetts, to a poor farming family. He had very little formal education - poverty kept him out of school except for brief sporadic periods - but he had access to Franklin Public Library, the US's first public lending library. Using the library, he educated himself, and he received tutoring in Latin and Greek from Samuel Barrett, who later became a prominent Unitarian minister. At 20 years old, Mann was enrolled in Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, and he was able to graduate in three years as valedictorian. His valedictory address was about how education, philanthropy, and republicanism could be combined to solve the societal problems that beset mankind.
- After graduating from Brown, Mann briefly studied law under a Wrentham, Massachusetts, lawyer. He also taught Greek and Latin and worked at the library at Brown University for a couple of years. After his short stint at Brown, Mann studied law at Litchfield Law School, and in 1823, he was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar. He lived in Dedham, Massachusetts, practicing law for a few years, and in 1827, Mann was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, where he served until 1833. While there, he established a hospital for the insane in Worcester, the first in the country. He also advocated for education and public charities, and he advocated for laws against alcohol consumption and lotteries.
- In 1833, Mann moved to Boston, and in 1835-1837, he served in the Massachusetts State Senate. He served as President of the Senate from 1836-1837. While in the state Senate, he continued advocating for the public good, this time focussing on infrastructure, funding the construction of railroads and canals.
- In 1837, Mann was appointed Secretary of Education for the newly-created Massachusetts Board of Education. As Secretary, Mann developed his philosophy, and became one of the nation's greatest education reformers.
- [Bill] Public Education
 - In 1837, an education reform movement in Massachusetts succeeded in establishing a state board of education. The recent State Senate President Horace Mann was appointed as the first secretary of the new board. He would serve in this capacity for 11 years, before being elected to Congress. He

established the *Common School Journal* to provide updates and thoughts on education to teachers and interested members of the public every other week, and he lectured extensively, becoming well-known not only in Massachusetts but across much of the country. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Horace-Mann>

- Six Principles

- i. the public should no longer remain ignorant – This was important for a republic with elections open to a significant portion of the population, or else ignorant masses might be swayed too easily and uncritically.
- ii. that such education should be paid for, controlled, and sustained by an interested public – He was also concerned that the local model of funding education in New England was leading some districts to balance budgets at the expense of their schools, which unfortunately has remained a persistent problem to present-day, although the state today at least provides more backstop resources to districts struggling to fund their educational obligations locally on their own
- iii. that this education will be best provided in schools that embrace children from a variety of backgrounds – This could mean a lot of things in a current context but at the time mostly alluded to the need to educate poor children, not just middle-class children. (Rich children were usually privately tutored.) Horace Mann believed as well that the mixing of children from different backgrounds in common school experiences would also be socially positive and stabilizing. Unfortunately, given local population sizes and the prevalence of children leaving seasonally for extended periods to help out on the farm, Mann’s vision for this intermixing concept in most communities [also meant](#) “one room schoolhouses,” which we now understand are extremely inconvenient to teaching material successfully to a group of kids of hugely varied ages.
- iv. that this education must be non-sectarian – This was important considering the diversity of Christian religious sects in the early United States, avoiding sectarian silos and minimizing educational disparities based on varying beliefs, differing levels of resources within a sect, and so on... But he still did assume a somewhat Christian character to education, especially when fending off critics of secularism. This was not necessarily consistent over his tenure, however.
- v. that this education must be taught using the tenets of a free society – This point for Horace Mann included abolishing corporal punishment, which we’ll talk more about later...
- vi. that education should be provided by well-trained, professional teachers. – This final point brings us to the next area of discussion. Horace Mann’s emphasis on rethinking and reorganizing ... [next line]

- How to train teachers (teachers’ colleges / normal schools)

- i. *Normal Schools were created to train teachers on the best practices of teaching in the public school system. One could look at this as the first version of a “College of Education” or a form of what we know today as Professional Development.*
<http://evolutionofeducation.leadr.msu.edu/2017/04/18/horace-mann/>
- ii. Horace Mann, beginning his work as Secretary of the Board of Education in 1837, the same year as the founding of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in western Massachusetts, placed a great emphasis on female teachers not male teachers, because he believed that women were naturally better educators and a positive influence on children. This view

is probably reasonably consistent with a wider cultural beliefs growing at the time and for several decades prior embedded in the concept known (retrospectively by later 20th century historians) as “Republican Motherhood,” where women were no longer expected to remain uneducated because they were in fact now expected to transmit important American Republican values to the next generation. In practice of course implementation of this idea had been intermittent and uneven at best in the late 18th and early 19th century United States, but by the 1850s Mann and those who agreed were beginning to carry the day, and teaching was increasingly a feminized occupation over the rest of the 19th century: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republican_motherhood#Education_of Women](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republican_motherhood#Education_of_Women) Many of the newly educated northern women became prominent abolitionists and first-wave feminist suffragists.

- Discouraging corporal punishment (a topic that is weirdly back in the news lately as some conservative US districts try to re-impose it if they aren't barred by state law from doing so)
 - i. Horace Mann was not especially successful in his lifetime (or indeed for more than a century after his lifetime) on this point, but he did argue extensively for ending corporal punishment in schools: [At the time] *The teacher's job was not only to teach basic reading and arithmetic. "School would train children how to behave, how to be members of society, be good citizens, be responsible." Teachers commonly used corporal punishment in the form of a switch, cowhide or ruler, Kafka has written. Students knelt on sharp objects or stood for long periods of time. The authority of teachers to discipline students came from a legal term from English common law, "in loco parentis," which translates to "in the place of a parent." This gave teachers a lot of discretion. Yet many criticized corporal punishment for its ineffectiveness. Education reformer Horace Mann called it "a relic of barbarism" and argued that students should learn how to monitor their own behaviors. Still, educators agreed that discipline was an inherent part of a teacher's job.* <https://www.apmreports.org/story/2016/08/25/two-centuries-of-school-discipline> (See also for more info: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3659266>)
- 1843 Prussia trip and influences on Massachusetts schools
 - i. From the Wiki: *"Mann hoped that by bringing all children of all classes together, they could have a common learning experience. This would also allow the less fortunate to advance in the social scale and education would 'equalize the conditions of men.' Moreover, it was viewed also as a road to social advancement by the early labor movement and as a goal of having common schools. Mann also suggested that having schools would help those students who did not have appropriate discipline in the home. Building a person's character was just as important as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Instilling values such as obedience to authority, promptness in attendance, and organizing the time according to bell ringing helped students prepare for future employment."*
 - ii. Prussian militarism and discipline arguably ends up baked into some of the fundamental concepts of American public education and classrooms
 - iii. [Mann] *"was particularly impressed that teachers [in Prussia] were prepared with lessons and repeatedly mentioned his amazement that they taught without books in their hands. Mann was intrigued by the various topics they discussed, mentioning one being zoology, instead of just*

studying the bible.”

<http://evolutionofeducation.leadr.msu.edu/2017/04/18/horace-mann/>

- [Rachel] Abolitionist politics
 - In 1848, after 11 years of service there, Mann left the Massachusetts Board of Education to fill the vacant US House Seat that John Quincy Adams held until his death. From the very beginning, like his predecessor, Mann was openly anti-slavery; his first speech – which would not have been allowed less than 4 years earlier under [the US House’s infamous “gag rule” on debating slavery](#), which John Quincy Adams had finally gotten lifted – was about excluding slavery from US territories in the West. Regarding the Wilmot Proviso, a proposal to ban slavery in territories seized from Mexico in the Mexican-American War, Mann wrote in a letter, "I really think, if we insist upon passing the Wilmot proviso for the territories, that the south—a part of them—will rebel; but I would pass it, rebellion or not. I consider no evil so great as the extension of slavery." We'll have another Congressional quote from Horace Mann at the end of this episode on the topic as well.
 - In 1850, Mann feuded with Massachusetts US Senator Daniel Webster (soon to be US Secretary of State) over Webster’s support for the Compromise of 1850, which extended slavery into the territories and strengthened the Fugitive Slave Act. Mann called Webster’s support a “vile catastrophe”, and compared Webster to “Lucifer descending from Heaven.” Mann did experience some backlash for his remarks, losing at the Whig nominating convention for his Representative seat. However, Mann ran as an anti-slavery independent candidate, and was re-elected to his House Seat, serving until 1853. After losing his race for the Massachusetts governorship in 1852, Mann left politics in 1853 to become the first President of Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio.
 - It’s worth noting that although Horace Mann was successful in proliferating many of his public education ideas across New England and some of the rest of the north during the 1840s, there were vast sectional differences in the level of industrial and human development, especially prior to the American Civil War, and it was not until the Reconstruction period and the end of slavery that wide-scale public education was attempted in the American South. When Reconstruction was abandoned, so too were many of these experiments in education, especially for former slaves. Or at the very least, in areas where public education remained [<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1084950>], the efforts were significantly modified and certainly segregated with unequal resources allocated. The trajectory of southern public education went off in a very different direction than northern schools, but the principle of public education was kept alive in state constitutions despite the inequities between the races; gravely injured, but still alive. (For more on this, listen to our friend Patrick’s episodes of his podcast “Conspiracy You Can Believe In” where he discusses Alabama educational and constitutional movements in the Redeemer era.
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/episode-15-the-1901-alabama-constitution/id1520336326?i=1000547381238>
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/bonus-episode-alabamas-populist-revolt/id1520336326?i=1000548901739>)
- [Bill] Horace Mann might have been a public education pioneer, but many of his views that were revolutionary at the time would today be regarded as very unfortunate and wrong. For example, he was into the pseudoscience of Phrenology and had some other views we would now consider bad or eccentric, like his hostility to alphabet-based literacy...

- On the other hand for the first point: Mann saw education as a cure to purported phrenological obstacles, so that these alleged skull defects supposedly shaping personality and mental traits would not be permanent barriers dooming someone to failure.
- On the other hand for the second point: English language pronunciations are so bizarre and constantly shifting that you can kind of see why alphabet-based literacy might be a controversial teaching method for English reading & writing, especially at the time. Bear in mind that Noah Webster's pioneering American Dictionary of the English Language had only been published in 1828, in which Webster – already a publisher of spelling guides for schools – had personally put his permanent stamp on American English, interpreting the official spelling choices based on existing American pronunciations at the time and in certain places and based on his own spelling reform preferences. This dictionary was considered radical and shocking at the time.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Webster%27s_Dictionary
- Cool Quotes:
 - December 1848 speech in Congress: "I think the country is to experience serious times. Interference with slavery will excite civil commotion in the South. But it is best to interfere. Now is the time to see whether the Union is a rope of sand or a band of steel." (I guess he was what we could today call an Accelerationist.)
 - "Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity" (1859 commencement address at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where he was college president)