

## **HIST 5453 – New American Republic**

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10/24/2022

### **Church, State, and Education in the Young American Republic**

#### **Response Paper**

Daniel Walker Howe's *Church, State, and Education in the Young American Republic* is divided up into four sections. The main emphasis in the first section "The Strange Passivity of the American Enlightenment" is the route that the American education developed. Howe discusses the struggles of creating a state or national sponsored education system. He states on the second page of the article that one of the failed projects is the creation of a national university. Now that I am contemplating this concept, I come to the realization that we actually do not have an official national university that I am aware of. However, I do recall that it is a common institution in Europe. When I first read this statement, my initial thought was that this could be because people who were part of the Revolutionary War were wanting to separate themselves and the new nation as much as they could from England. Nevertheless, it was a good reminder from Howe that the military academies are considered national universities. This is something that I had not made a connection to previously. Even though Howe did not discuss this idea, I believe that it took so long for a public education system to be placed into effect because of the fear of turning the government similar to the monarchy of England. This fear can trickle down to any element in the life of an Early American after the war.

In his second section “The Disestablishment of Higher Education” Howe discusses the main emphasis on the bickering and fighting between political parties. He argues that this behavior trickled into the religious university system. These divisions paved the way to create public universities and solidify the private universities. Politics and religion started to mingle within these institutions, which in turn, influences the decision making of those in charge. The initial battle began when the Federalists and the Republicans within these institutions started to debate on how to address different religious and personal ideologies. In my opinion, the discord between political and religious leaders within the university caused the later decision of the separation of church and state. I developed this opinion after finishing chapter two and without prior knowledge of what the rest of the book was about.

The emphasis in the third section “The Second Great Awakening as an Educational Movement” describes in what way religion influenced education, and consequently, making religious education successful. On page 13, Howe uses the example of Sunday School. Even though I grew up going regularly, I never knew the origins of Sunday School. I find this fascinating that Sunday School was the free alternative to “regular schooling” during the week. This is because unity was created due to similar ideology. On page 14, Howe states that both religious and secular institutions (specifically Republican) had a common goal of helping people for the greater good. However, with the explosion of religious interest during the Second Great Awakening, the religious community benefited through the explosion of new universities and other education endeavors.

Howe’s final section, “Bringing the State Back into Education” starts off with an overview of what the previous sections covered regarding the events leading up to this point. This includes the back and forth of allowing the government and politics to influence the school

system or not. He continues his discussion on how finally the government and politics made it back in to the local schools. According to Howe, it took almost 100 years after the Revolutionary War and Thomas Jefferson's fight for government involvement to be implemented nationally. Howe states on the last page, page 24, that it actually took the reconstruction era after the American Civil War to officially create the public school system. This was partially because an assumption in the reading suggests that the newly freed African Americans needed an education.

I must admit. I am a big fan of Thomas Jefferson despite his faults. As the saying goes: "We are only human." Do not remember if it was during one of Dr. Pacholl's lectures or if it was the discussion the class had with John Ferling, however, I was surprised about the discussion regarding Thomas Jefferson's "flip-flop" on his stance toward slavery. Page six discussed this "flip-flop" in a detail that I had not heard before. The discussion is continued on page 12 with even more detail due to a quote about his pro slavery and "anticlericalism". By no means do I think of myself as a Thomas Jefferson scholar, but I felt like my time at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello field school had made me knowledgeable and able to correctly discuss his life and beliefs at an academic level. This was the most shocking aspect of the article. I did find the mention of "secondary schools" interesting. I was having a conversation recently with my boyfriend regarding the modern-day high school. I never looked into it, but I was curious when these institutions were established. I wondered how the leap from reading, writing, and arithmetic in school aged children was bridged to the colleges that I knew were as old, if not older, than our country. I found Howe's article to be very intriguing as these are some topics that I have been curious about in the past. I would recommend this reading to any class that has a section on education or religious history.