

Document #1: Report of the Workingman's Committee of Philadelphia On the State of Public Instruction in Pennsylvania (1830) *[This committee was appointed September, 1829, to ascertain the state of public instruction in Pennsylvania, and to propose appropriate improvements.]*

The original element of despotism is a MONOPOLY OF TALENT, which consigns the multitude to comparative ignorance, and secures the balance of knowledge on the side of the rich and the rulers.

If then the healthy existence of a free government be, as the committee believe, rooted in the WILL of the American people, it follows as a necessary consequence, of a government based upon that will, that this monopoly should be broken up, and that the means of equal knowledge, (the only security for equal liberty) should be rendered, by legal provision, the common property of all classes.

In a republic, the people constitute the government, and... [they] frame the laws and create the institutions, that promote their happiness or produce their destruction. If they be wise and intelligent, no laws but what are just and equal will receive their [approval], or be sustained by their [votes]. If they be ignorant... they will be deceived by mistaken or designing rulers, into the support of laws that are unequal and unjust.

It appears, therefore, to the committee that there can be no real liberty without a wide diffusion of real intelligence; that the members of a republic, should all be alike instructed in the nature and character of their equal rights and duties, as human beings, and as citizens...

Document #2: Horace Mann Advocates for Public Libraries (1840) *[Mann was the most influential educational reformer of his day. His influence radiated out from Massachusetts, where he did much to improve the common schools by securing better buildings, higher salaries, and superior teaching methods through teachers' institutes and normal schools.]*

A library will produce one effect upon school children, and upon the neighborhood generally, before they have read one of the books, and even if they should never read one of them.

It is in this way: The most ignorant are the most conceited. Unless a man knows that there is something more to be known, his inference is, of course, that he knows everything. Such a man always usurps the throne of universal knowledge, and assumes the right of deciding all possible questions. We all know that a conceited dunce will decide questions extemporaneously which would puzzle a college of philosophers or a bench of judges. Ignorant and shallow-minded men do not see far enough to see the difficulty.

Now those children who are reared without any advantages of intelligent company, or of travel, or of books—which are both company and travel—naturally fall into the error of supposing that they live in the center of the world, that all society is like their society, or, if different from theirs, that it must be wrong. They come, at length, to regard any part of this vast system of the works of man, and of the wisdom of God, which conflicts with their homebred notions, as baneful, or contemptible, or non-existent...

Now, when this class of persons go out into the world and mingle with their fellow men, they are found to be alike useless on account of their ignorance, and odious for their presumption...

A library, even before it is read, will teach people that there is something more to be known.