

## ■ STUDY OF AMERICAN HISTORY

### Fundamentals in Education

**T**HE Declaration of Independence, Washington's Farewell Address, and the Constitution of the United States, should be studied by the youth of our country, as their political scriptures....

The course pointed out must, it is apparent, make the pupil understand the study; but this may be, and the labour of the teacher not yet accomplished. The pupil must also be made to remember.... When the course of events is studied, for the purpose of gaining general information, the natural order of the thoughts must be regarded, if we expect that memory will treasure up the objects of attention. Each individual is to himself the centre of his own world; and the more intimately he connects his knowledge with himself, the better will it be remembered, and the more effectually can it be rendered in after life subservient to his purposes....

These are reasons why our youth should be directed first to the study of our own history, keeping in view its connexion with our geography; but there are other reasons, why the study of American history is better not only for our own students, but for those of other countries, than that of any other nation, with which we are acquainted. History, it is said, is the school of politics. It is not, however, the mere knowledge of events, in which the student sees little connexion, which lays a foundation for his political knowledge. It is only when he is led to perceive how one state of things, operating on human passions, leads to another, that he is

prepared when he comes into life, to look over the whole moving scene of the world—predict the changes which are to succeed—and should his be the hand of power, to put it forth, to accelerate or stop the springs of change, as he finds their tendency to be good or evil. There is no species of events like those related of America for producing this effect; and the young politician of other countries might begin with this, as the most easily comprehensible subject in the whole field of history. Here effects may be traced to their causes....

As it respects the most important advantage in the study of history, which is improvement in individual and national virtue, we come boldly forward to advocate a preference for the history of the American Republic. Here are no tales of hereditary power and splendour to inflame the imaginations of youth with desires for adventitious distinction. Here are no examples of profligate females, where the trappings of royalty or nobility give to vice an elegant costume; or, as with the celebrated Scot, where beauty and misfortune make sin commiserated, till it is half loved. Here are no demoralizing examples of bold and criminal ambition, which has ‘waded through blood to empire.’ The only desire of greatness which our children can draw from the history of their ancestors, is to be greatly good.

It is not in the formal lesson of virtue, that her principles are most deeply imbibed. It is in moments when her approach is not suspected, that she is fixing her healing empire in the heart of youth. When his indignation rises against the oppressor—when his heart glows with the admiration of suffering virtue—it is then that he resolves never to be an oppressor himself; and he half wishes to suffer, that he too may be virtu-

ous. No country, ancient or modern, affords examples more fitted to raise these ennobling emotions than of America, at the period of her revolution.

And may not these generous feelings of virtue arise, respecting nations as well as individuals; and may not the resolution which the youth makes, with regard to himself individually, be made with regard to his country, as far as his future influence may extend? Would the teacher excite these feelings in his pupil, let him put into his hands the history of the struggle of America for her independence. Though doubtless there existed great personal turpitude in individuals in America, and great personal virtue in those of England, yet, as nations, how great is the disparity in the characters exhibited. England, seeking to make her filial child her slave, refuses to listen to her duteous pleadings, and applies the scourge. She deigns not to give even the privileges of civilized warfare, but sends forth the brand which lights the midnight fire over the heads of the sleeping family, and the tomahawk which cleaves the head of the infant in the presence of the mother. England also descends to base arts. She bribes, she flatters, she sows dissensions, she purchases treason, and she counterfeits money.

In the conduct of France, too, though gratitude rises in our hearts for her actual services, yet history compelled, though sometimes sorrowfully, to follow truth, must pronounce that in her conduct as a nation, there is nothing virtuous or generous. Unlike her La Fayette, it was in success, not in misfortune, that she declared for America; and if at length she combatted with her, it was not that she loved her, or honoured her cause; it was that she feared and hated her enemy. If America

had not taken care of herself, bitter to her would have been the care which France would have taken of her. Her embrace of friendship would have been found the pressure of death. How interesting in her youthful simplicity, in her maiden purity, does America appear, contrasted with these old and wily nations. Who shall say, in reading the history of these transactions, that there is no such thing as national vice, or natural virtue?

Will not acquaintance then with this tale, warm the young heart of the future statesman of America, to the detestation of national as of individual wickedness: and to the love of national as of personal virtue? He will say with exultation, my country was the most virtuous among the nations; this is her pride—not the extent of her dominion, nor the wealth of her revenue; this is the source of that greatness which it becomes her sons to preserve! And he will then resolve, that when manhood shall have placed him among her guardians, he will watch the purity of her character with jealous tenderness and sooner part with existence than be made the instrument of her degradation!

Emma Willard\*, *Abridged History of the United States; or Republic of America*, New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1845. (Cannot be verified.)