

GOALS *for* PUBLIC EDUCATION

printed for the consideration of the PEOPLE.

P Primary education:

To give to every citizen the information he needs for the transaction of his own business;
To enable him to calculate for himself, and to express and preserve his ideas, his contracts and accounts, in writing;
To improve by reading, his morals and faculties;
To understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge with competence the functions confided to him by either;
To know his rights; to exercise with order and justice those he retains; to choose with discretion the fiduciary of those he delegates;
and to notice their conduct with diligence, with candor, and judgment;
And, in general, to observe with intelligence and faithfulness all the social relations under which he shall be placed.

H Higher education:

To form the statesmen, legislators and judges, on whom public prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend;
To expound the principles and structure of government, the laws which regulate the intercourse of nations, those formed municipally for our own government, and a sound spirit of legislation, which, banishing all arbitrary and unnecessary restraint on individual action, shall leave us free to do whatever does not violate the equal rights of another;
To harmonize and promote the interests of agriculture, manufactures and commerce, and by well informed views of political economy to give a free scope to the public industry;
To develop the reasoning faculties of our youth, enlarge their minds, cultivate their morals, and instill into them the precepts of virtue and order;
To enlighten them with mathematical and physical sciences, which advance the arts, and administer to the health, subsistence, and comforts of human life;
And, generally, to form them to habits of reflection and correct action, rendering them examples of virtue to others, and of happiness within themselves.

Thomas Jefferson was the prophet of the American faith in the powers of education to secure the freedom and the happiness of the people. As early as 1778, in his Virginia *Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge* Jefferson set forth a comprehensive plan of public education broadly based in primary schools, rising as in a pyramid through secondary schools, with a state university at the apex. The dual mission was, first, "to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large," and second, to ensure that "those persons whom nature hath endowed with genius and virtue" — Jefferson's "natural aristocracy" — should be educated to the limits of their abilities in order to better serve the mass of citizens.

Quite beyond its practical benefits to the individual, education at all levels had distinctly moral, social, and civic purposes. It should cultivate virtue, teach the obligations of individuals to each other, and, above all, raise up the informed and responsible citizens a democratic government required. Regrettably, Jefferson's plan never came to fruition in Virginia; and although his influence was felt in other states, he finally had to be satisfied with the achievement of the state university — the apex of the pyramid without the foundation in the schools.

Jefferson's faith in democracy was, at bottom, a faith in education. Believing, as he said, "that the people are the only safe depositories of their own liberty," it was essential that they should be educated to a certain degree and prepared to take part in public affairs; moreover, government should be structured in ways that invited widespread citizen participation. Empowerment of the people depended upon education. It was, therefore, a paramount responsibility of democratic government. Tax-supported public education assumed common schools shaping a common citizenship and a common culture.

After his retirement as President, Jefferson preached that the future of democracy hung from two hooks: first, general education to enable every citizen to judge for himself how best to secure freedom and happiness, and second, the establishment everywhere of "little republics," which he called "wards," and compared to New England town meetings, to encourage due participation in public affairs. The wards should be responsible for the public schools. Jefferson distrusted concentrated power. "What," he asked, "has destroyed liberty and the rights of man in every government under the sun? The generalizing and concentrating of all cares in one body." Where power is dispersed, and common schooling is the rule, every citizen may come to identify his own interest with the interests of the whole. With impassioned eloquence, Jefferson declared: "Where every man . . . feels he is a participator in the government of affairs, not merely at an election one day in the year, but every day; where there shall not be a man in the State who will not be a member of some one of its councils, great or small, he will let the heart be torn out of his body sooner than his powers be wrested from him by a Caesar or Bonaparte."

If Jefferson was right, the health, indeed the salvation, of American democracy depends upon the making of informed, responsible, and participating citizens.

GOALS *for* PUBLIC EDUCATION are from Jefferson's *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Fix the Site of the University of Virginia*. The report has been called the "most pregnant and suggestive document of its kind that has been issued in the history of American education." For the complete "Report" (1818) and for Jefferson's *Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge* (1778) visit our website at www.jeffersonlegacy.org and click on **Broadsides**.