

## The More Things Change...

### Group 1 Documents

#### A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge (1779)

“A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge.” *Sociocultural Foundations of American Education, San Diego State University*. [http://edweb.sdsu.edu/People/Dkitchen/TE655/jefferson\\_a.htm](http://edweb.sdsu.edu/People/Dkitchen/TE655/jefferson_a.htm) (accessed July 31, 2014).

Whereas it appeareth that however certain forms of government are better calculated than others to protect individuals in the free exercise of their natural rights, and are at the same time themselves better guarded against degeneracy, yet experience hath shewn, that even under the best forms, those entrusted with power have, in time, and by slow operations, perverted it into tyranny; and it is believed that the most effectual means of preventing this would be, to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large, and more especially to give them knowledge of those facts, which history exhibiteth, that, possessed thereby of the experience of other ages and countries, they may be enabled to know ambition under all its shapes, and prompt to exert their natural powers to defeat its purposes; And whereas it is generally true that the people will be happiest whose laws are best, and are best administered, and that laws will be wisely formed, and honestly administered, in proportion as those who form and administer them are wise and honest; whence it becomes expedient for promoting the publick happiness that those persons, whom nature hath endowed with genius and virtue, should be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens, and that they should be called to that charge without regard to wealth, birth or other accidental condition or circumstance; but the indigence of the greater number disabling them from so educating, at their own expence, those of their children whom nature hath fitly formed and disposed to become useful instruments for the public, it is better that such should be sought for and educated at the common expence of all, than that the happiness of all should be confided to the weak or wicked . . .

The electors being so assembled shall choose the most convenient place within their hundred for building a school-house. . . .

AT every of these schools shall be taught reading, writing, and common arithmetick, and the books which shall be used therein for instructing the children to read shall be such as will at the same time make them acquainted with Graecian, Roman, English, and American history. At these schools all the free children, male and female, resident within the respective hundred, shall be intitled to receive tuition gratis, for the term of three years, and as much longer, at their private expence, as their parents, guardians or friends, shall think proper. . . .

AND in order that grammer schools may be rendered convenient to the youth in every part of the commonwealth, BE it farther enacted, that on the first Monday in November, after the first appointment of overseers for the hundred schools, if fair, and if not, then on the next fair day, excluding Sunday, after the hour of one in the afternoon, the said overseers appointed for the schools . . . shall fix on such place in some one of the counties in their district as shall be most proper for situating a grammar school-house, endeavouring that the situation be as central as may be to the inhabitants of the said counties, that it be furnished

with good water, convenient to plentiful supplies of provision and fuel, and more than all things that it be healthy. . . .

IN these grammar schools shall be taught the Latin and Greek languages, English grammar, geography, and the higher part of numerical arithmetick, to wit, vulgar and decimal fractions, and the extraction of the square and cube roots. . . .

EVERY overseer of the hundred schools shall, in the month of September annually, after the most diligent and impartial examination and enquiry, appoint from among the boys who shall have been two years at the least at some one of the schools under his superintendance, and whose parents are too poor to give them farther education, some one of the best and most promising genius and disposition, to proceed to the grammar school of his district . . .

A visitation shall be held, for the purpose of probation, annually at the said grammar school on the last Monday in September, if fair, and if not, then on the next fair day, excluding Sunday, at which one third of the boys sent thither by appointment of the said overseers, and who shall have been there one year only, shall be discontinued as public foundationers, being those who, on the most diligent examination and enquiry, shall be thought to be of the least promising genius and disposition; and of those who shall have been there two years, all shall be discontinued, save one only the best in genius and disposition, who shall be at liberty to continue there four years longer on the public foundation, and shall thence forward be deemed a senior. . . .

THE visiters for the districts which, or any part of which, be southward and westward of James river, as known by that name, or by the names of Fluvanna and Jackson's river, in every other year, to wit, at the probation meetings held in the years, distinguished in the Christian computation by odd numbers, and the visiters for all the other districts at their said meetings to be held in those years, distinguished by even numbers, after diligent examination and enquiry as before directed, shall chuse one among the said seniors, of the best learning and most hopeful genius and disposition, who shall be authorised by them to proceed to William and Mary College, there to be educated, boarded, and clothed, three years; the expence of which annually shall be paid by the Treasurer on warrant from the Auditors.

### **Thomas Jefferson to John Banister, Jr., 15 October 1785**

“From Thomas Jefferson to John Banister, Jr., 15 October 1785,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-08-02-0499>, ver. 2014-05-09). Source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 8, *25 February–31 October 1785*, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, pp. 635–638.

But why send an American youth to Europe for education? What are the objects of an useful American education? Classical knowledge, modern languages and chiefly French, Spanish, and Italian; Mathematics; Natural philosophy; Natural History; Civil History; Ethics. In Natural philosophy I mean to include Chemistry and Agriculture, and in Natural history to include Botany as well as the other branches of those departments. It is true that the habit of speaking the modern languages cannot be so well acquired in America, but every other article can be as well acquired at William and Mary College as at any place in Europe. When College education is done with and a young man is to prepare himself for public life, he must

cast his eyes (for America) either on Law or Physic. For the former where can he apply so advantageously as to Mr. Wythe? For the latter he must come to Europe; the medical class of students therefore is the only one which need come to Europe. Let us view the disadvantages of sending a youth to Europe. To enumerate them all would require a volume. I will select a few. If he goes to England he learns drinking, horse-racing and boxing. These are the peculiarities of English education. The following circumstances are common to education in that and the other countries of Europe. He acquires a fondness for European luxury and dissipation and a contempt for the simplicity of his own country; he is fascinated with the privileges of the European aristocrats, and sees with abhorrence the lovely equality which the poor enjoys with the rich in his own country: he contracts a partiality for aristocracy or monarchy . . .

### **Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785)**

“Notes on the State of Virginia.” *Internet Archive: Wayback Machine*.

<http://web.archive.org/web/20080914030942/http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/JefVirg.html> (accessed July 31, 2014).

#### Query XIV

By that part of our plan which prescribes the selection of the youths of genius from among the classes of the poor, we hope to avail the state of those talents which nature has sown as liberally among the poor as the rich, but which perish without use, if not sought for and cultivated. . . .

But of all the views of this law none is more important, none more legitimate, than that of rendering the people the safe, as they are the ultimate, guardians of their own liberty. For this purpose the reading in the first stage, where *they* will receive their whole education, is proposed, as has been said, to be chiefly historical. History by apprising them of the past will enable them to judge of the future; it will avail them of the experience of other times and other nations; it will qualify them as judges of the actions and designs of men; it will enable them to know ambition under every disguise it may assume; and knowing it, to defeat its views.

### **An act for regulating conveyances (1785)**

“An act for regulating conveyances (1785).” *Encyclopedia Virginia, Virginia Foundation for the Humanities*.

[http://encyclopediavirginia.org/\\_An\\_act\\_for\\_regulating\\_conveyances\\_1785](http://encyclopediavirginia.org/_An_act_for_regulating_conveyances_1785) (accessed July 31, 2014).

*BE it enacted by the General Assembly*, That no estate of inheritance, or freehold, or for a term of more than five years in lands or tenements, shall be conveyed from one to another unless the conveyance be declared by writing, sealed and delivered . . .

Every estate in lands or slaves, which on the seventh day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-six, was an estate in fee tail, shall be deemed from that time to have been, and from thence forward to continue, an estate in fee simple

## **An Act for establishing religious Freedom (1786)**

“Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom.” *The Monticello Classroom, Thomas Jefferson Foundation*.  
<http://classroom.monticello.org/teachers/gallery/image/275/Statute-of-Virginia-for-Religious-Freedom/> (accessed July 31, 2014).

(I) Whereas, Almighty God hath created the mind free; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burthens, or by civil incapacitations tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, who being Lord, both of body and mind yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do, that the impious presumption of legislators and rulers, civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and uninspired men have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking as the only true and infallible, and as such endeavouring to impose them on others, hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world and through all time; that to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves is sinful and tyrannical; that even the forcing him to support this or that teacher of his own religious persuasion is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor, whose morals he would make his pattern, and whose powers he feels most persuasive to righteousness . . . that our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions any more than our opinions in physics or geometry . . .

(II.) Be it enacted by General Assembly that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of Religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge or affect their civil capacities.

## **Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 28 October 1813**

“Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 28 October 1813,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0446>, ver. 2014-05-09). Source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, vol. 6, *11 March to 27 November 1813*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 562–568.

I agree with you that there is a natural aristocracy among men. the grounds of this are virtue & talents. formerly bodily powers gave place among the aristoi. but since the invention of gunpowder has armed the weak as well as the strong with missile death, bodily strength, like beauty, good humor, politeness and other accomplishments, has become but an auxiliary ground of distinction. there is also an artificial aristocracy founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents; for with these it would belong to the first class. the natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature, for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society. and indeed it would have been inconsistent in creation to have formed man for the social state, and not to have provided virtue and wisdom enough to manage the concerns of the society. may we not even say that that form of government is

the best which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of these natural aristoi into the offices of government? the artificial aristocracy is a mischievous ingredient in government, and provision should be made to prevent it's ascendancy. . . .

at the first session of our legislature after the Declaration of Independance, we passed a law abolishing entails. and this was followed by one abolishing the privilege of Primogeniture, and dividing the lands of intestates equally among all their children, or other representatives. these laws, drawn by myself, laid the axe to the root of Pseudo-aristocracy. and had another which I prepared been adopted by the legislature, our work would have been compleat. it was a Bill for the more general diffusion of learning.