A HISTORY OF FREEDOM OF TEACHING IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

HOWARD K. BEALE

PART XVI: REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON THE SOCIAL STUDIES
AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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ON THE SOCIAL STUDIES
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BY

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A

PREFACE

When the Commission on Social Studies in the Schools asked the present author to make a study of freedom in teaching, he protested that he was not an educator. Professor George S. Counts explained that the Commission wanted not an educator but an historian, partly because it wished the study to be a history done by some one trained in the critical method of the historian, partly because the study could be made more objective by some one who was not himself an educator. Out of this conference with Professor Counts in the winter of 1931–1932 grew the conception of this book. The author brought to the work a knowledge of the social and cultural setting, in which the schools have functioned at various periods of our history, and a background of two years' work on a projected history of tolerance in America. He had to read industriously in books on the theory and history of education in order to orient himself for this particular phase of the history of tolerance. Neither Professor Counts nor the author dreamed in that first conference how stupendous a task, how all-enveloping a subject lay ahead. Indeed, the first plan was to include freedom of teaching in both schools and colleges. When the Commission decided it preferred to limit the scope to teachers' colleges and schools below college grade, the author feared these would not provide sufficient material for a book. Instead of a paucity of material, however, the author's difficulty has been to condense into one book substance enough for several. Finally the work became two books, a detailed study of the problem of freedom in teaching since the World War under the title *Are American Teachers Free?* and this present history of the development of freedom for teachers through

the various phases that repression has assumed from Colonial times to the present.

Obviously, no history of freedom in teaching could be written from a mere collection of cases of dismissal of teachers. For the period before the World War records of these cases do not exist. If they did, such material would by no means tell the story even of the restrictions on freedom in teaching. More subtle repressions are of greater importance. His social environment, for instance, and the opinion of the community in which he lives restrict a teacher as effectively as any specific punishment meted out to him or his fellows. The problem varies from school to school, from community to community, from age to age. It assumes different forms with pupils of different ages. The physical limitations of the school, the social status of the teacher, and the teacher's intelligence and training all affect his freedom. It is important to understand the forces, political, social, and economic, that control the schools. Men's purposes in seeking education for their children vary from period to period of our history and always play a significant rôle in determining how much freedom a teacher will have. Bound up inextricably with the problem of freedom are the ideas men live by, the social objectives that matter enough that men will fight or die for them. These change from era to era.

American history falls naturally into periods with the perpetual problem of freedom for teachers taking first one form and then another as men's interests have changed. In Colonial days it was on religion that teachers were most restricted. In the early national period religion and political views dominated. Conservatives tried to repress freedom when it meant promulgation of "dangerous" French views and the spread of democratic notions that endangered the *status quo*. Jeffersonian liberals, however, inspired by the Revolutionary tradition of liberty, ultimately succeeded in establishing an era of comparative freedom in ideas that affected the school. During the period of supremacy of the slave power, religion and early

manifestations of nationalist feeling in the form of anti-foreign and anti-Catholic movements assumed importance and affected teachers. Overshadowing everything else, however, was the slavery question so vitally important to men, North and South, that freedom to discuss it was vigorously suppressed. Successively, after the Civil War, reconstruction and political and sectional views, the problem of science and its conflict with authoritarian religion, the age-old problem of religious instruction, and new issues of moral teaching in the schools caused trouble. Then reform movements, as reformers sought to use the schools for propaganda purposes, and finally, just before the World War, problems created by the new industrialism arose, *seriatim,* to plague teachers. It was in the period following the World War, however, that life became so complex that the old battle of freedom for teachers raged about a great variety of vital questions all at once, with new impetus now given to the struggle because more and more teachers sought to express unconventional views, because teachers were becoming professionally conscious and were gaining great strength through newly created teacher organizations, and because emotionalism aroused during the War gave popular support to repression. Repressions of freedom, therefore, multiplied many-fold; but so did cases in which teachers insisted upon exercising freedom. These historic phases of the problem of educational freedom bear distinct relationship to other great cultural movements.

The significant fact is that the problem of freedom in teaching is essentially the same in all these diverse manifestations. The causes of difficulty and the principles out of which ultimate solution must grow are the same, whether it be evolution or communism, anti-Catholicism or dancing, that provokes the immediate trouble. Particularly provocative of sober thought are the striking parallels between the attitudes of slaveholders of yesteryear and big-business men of today toward the schools and toward teachers who question the virtues of the dominant

economic systems of their respective periods. In the twentieth century Americans no longer deny men the right to criticize the slave system. Indeed, they would almost unanimously support teachers in freedom to analyze it critically and to point out its evils. They look upon the slavocracy's stifling free discussion of slavery as the narrowness of an outmoded age. Nevertheless, they criticize slaveholders not because they themselves believe in freedom, but because they do not have faith in chattel slavery and do not depend upon it for a livelihood and for maintenance of the political and social order to which they are accustomed. They fail to see the startling similarity between their attitude toward socialism and communism, which threaten to destroy their economic order, and the slaveholder's treatment of abolitionism, which threatened his.

Repression, then, takes on varied forms in different environments. It assumes sectional guises. Sometimes it wears a social, sometimes a moral, sometimes an economic, garb. Sir William Berkeley thanking God that "there are no free schools,"[1] J. D. B. De Bow pleading in his *Review* for schools, teachers, and texts that would not preach abolitionism,[2] and Samuel Insull and Bernard J. Mullaney organizing the Illinois Committee on Public Utility Information to prevent the teaching of socialistic doctrines in the schools[3] are all playing the same rôle. The costumes, the makeup, the language, the scenery are changed to fit the period of the play, but the motivation, the philosophy of life, and the educational theory embraced by each are identical. Much can be learned in attempting to solve the current problem of freedom in teaching by a survey of it in earlier manifestations.

The problem of freedom for the teacher has usually involved the teacher's choice of texts and methods by which he might teach, his expression of views inside or outside the classroom,

[1] *Infra*, 33, 34.
[2] *Infra*, 132–167.
[3] See H. K. Beale, *Are American Teachers Free?* 554–571.

his public activities as a citizen, the causes he may have supported or opposed in the community, his personal life and habits, and, finally, his inability to get appointed as a teacher at all if he belonged to any of a number of groups against whom popular prejudice was strong.[4] A definition of freedom for the teacher, the question whether freedom is desirable or possible and, if so, how much, and the means by which more freedom may be won are all left for treatment elsewhere.[5] A history of academic freedom in the colleges is yet to be written. The present work is limited to an historical account of the restrictions on freedom and the development of freedom for teachers in schools below college level, from period to period of American history. The study reveals that the gradual development of the American school system has tended to improve the quality of both school and teacher, and that, by freeing the teacher from the inadequacies of his physical equipment and of his own training, it has tended to increase the possibilities of enjoyment of real freedom. In recent years, however, highly organized school systems have developed a tendency to subject this now potentially free teacher to new restrictions of supervision, imposition of administrative will, and requirements of uniformity such as teachers in the poorer schools of earlier times never encountered. Organized religion and the religious purpose of the schools have been present throughout American history as restrictive forces but have tended to become relatively less important in recent years as many other issues have come to occupy places as important as religion in the American mind. The effects of democracy and evangelicism upon the American ways of thinking have exerted definitely restrictive, if subtler, pressure upon freedom in teaching. Throughout American history a tendency of teachers to reflect conventional community points of view has at once kept freedom a merely academic question for the aver-

[4] See *ibid.*, 9.
[5] See *ibid.*, 1–17, 659–778.

age teacher, who has felt no need of it, and made the problem a more difficult one for the exceptional teacher, who has needed it and found his fellow-teachers unsympathetic. Throughout American history, too, there has been a persistent purpose on the part of those supporting and controlling the schools to use the schools as a means of preserving the *status quo* and preventing unrest and "novile dispositions." The development of intelligent citizens capable of independent thinking is possible only in schools in which teachers and pupils alike are encouraged to think for themselves. Cultivation of conformity, on the other hand, is incompatible with freedom for either child or teacher. Use of the schools for preservation of the *status quo* implies a theory of education based on handing down to children the views, attitudes, prejudices, and ideals of the older generation to be accepted, learned, and lived by without questioning or analysis. The desire to use the schools to create support for the *status quo* has therefore created a permanent tendency to restrict freedom for teachers as destructive of this function. Finally, this study indicates that teachers are usually allowed freedom to impose conventional views upon their classes, that they are even expected so to impose orthodox views. It also makes clear that men usually object to the expression, without imposition, of unorthodox views or even to a type of teaching that causes children to question orthodox attitudes, even if the teacher does not himself express unconventional views. Men usually "tolerate" opposing views on subjects that they do not regard as important, and then rationalize "intolerance" into necessity when disagreement involves a matter vital to them. Thus the twentieth century looks upon religious intolerance of the seventeenth century as a relic of the Dark Ages largely because it has ceased to care seriously about religion, whereas it is ready to suppress attacks on its economic system or refusals to conform to the dictates of nationalism as vigorously as its ancestors punished religious heresy. It is not that one age is more tolerant or in-

tolerant than the other, but merely that the seventeenth century cared tremendously about religion and was unconcerned about capitalist economics or nationalistic patriotism, while the twentieth century has lost its interest in theology and is vitally interested both emotionally and materially in capitalist economics and nationalistic patriotism. Evolution can usually be taught in the North and not in the rural South, not because the North believes more in freedom for teachers but because the North is generally indifferent to fundamentalist religion, which the evolutionary hypothesis endangers, whereas the rural South still devoutly believes in fundamentalist tenets. Northern critics of Tennessean "intolerance" suppress the teaching of socialism and communism in their own schools because the economic system that such theories endanger seems vitally important to Northern communities. Thus teachers in each century and locality have been allowed freedom to discuss subjects that did not seem to matter and denied freedom on issues about which men did seriously care.

Material on this subject has been extraordinarily difficult to get. In the period before the World War information bearing directly on the problem was almost non-existent. Local and state histories are concerned not at all with freedom of teaching or other problems of social and intellectual development. Furthermore, they are notoriously unreliable. The author went through literally hundreds of them hoping to find something but found them almost useless for this study. Histories of particular schools and of education in individual states proved almost equally barren. Historians of education have not been interested in the problem of freedom nor in other social problems. Furthermore, such similarity was there from volume to volume that one suspected that histories were taken largely one from another. One became fearful of accepting anything on the authority of such historians. A few works like those of Ellwood P. Cubberley of Stanford University and Edgar W. Knight of the University of North Carolina had the earmarks

of careful work and contained material that was useful. Most of the material antedating the World War had, however, to be gleaned painstakingly from scattered sources, an item here, an item there, at the expense of an enormous amount of wasted time and effort in wading through the tedious and useless tomes that yielded perhaps one item each or nothing at all. Even then the paucity of records made it necessary to draw on the general aspects of history of thought and what one already knew of contemporary public attitudes in order to reproduce the story in the earlier periods of our history.

For the period since the World War there is an abundance of material.[6] It is, however, difficult to gather together. In a few places like the issues of *School and Society* and the files of the American Civil Liberties Union, one does find valuable collections of information. Nevertheless, most recent material, too, has to be gleaned from a variety of scattered sources, local newspaper files, clipping collections, even more from personal correspondence and interviews with teachers and other educators. The author resorted to extensive use of a rather exhaustive questionnaire.[7] In the absence of printed material, information about many of the cases involving freedom and many of the facts concerning the more subtle pressures on teachers could be obtained only by talking to men and women actually teaching in the schools.[8]

The author wishes to acknowledge with gratitude the assistance of hundreds of people over the country, professors, teachers, administrators, school board members, and other interested citizens, who have aided him in the preparation of this work. None of these people is responsible for the views here expressed. For these the author assumes all responsibility. Indeed, two or three people who have completely disagreed with the author's views, have, through their criticism, been especially

[6] See *ibid.*

[7] See *infra*, Appendix.

[8] For the difficulties involved in getting this information see H. K. Beale, *op. cit.*, iii–x.

helpful. To several a special debt of gratitude is due. Charles A. Beard, George S. Counts, and Jesse H. Newlon provided encouragement, understanding, and inspiration without which this book could never have been completed. Conyers Read, executive secretary of the American Historical Association, and his wife, Evelyn P. Read, have gone over the manuscript carefully and have conferred with the author on various occasions over particular passages. To them the author is deeply indebted for innumerable suggestions of great value. Their patience in the expenditure of their time has been equalled only by the wisdom of their counsel on difficult questions. To Laurence H. Eldredge, of Montgomery and McCracken in Philadelphia, the author is deeply obligated. The author is indebted to his colleagues, A. Ray Newsome and J. Carlyle Sitterson, of the University of North Carolina, and to his friend, B. I. Wiley, of the University of Mississippi, for critical suggestions on the analysis of lack of freedom in the South. The author is obligated to his friend, Paul Lewinson, for suggestions provided in many discussions of this subject both by his argumentative bent and by his penetrating comments upon his recent experience in education courses. Jean Spaulding, a teacher in English in Washington, D. C., and J. Kester Svendsen, instructor in English at the University of North Carolina, painstakingly read the manuscript and offered valuable stylistic criticism. Katharine Elizabeth Crane, assistant editor of the *Dictionary of American Biography,* gave the manuscript the incisive, sometimes savage, criticism that only editorial experience and true friendship can offer. Merle E. Curti, professor at Columbia University, contributed innumerable valuable suggestions and inspiration in the process of gathering material, and many criticisms and suggestions that resulted from his patient reading of the finished manuscript. The author's father, Frank A. Beale, and his mother, Nellie K. Beale, did a large share of the stupendous labor of compiling the results of the questionnaire and have given criticism throughout the writ-

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Chapter I

FREEDOM IN COLONIAL AMERICA, 1607–1776

In Colonial America there were few schools. Those few were simple institutions that left scant record of their activities. Besides, men who did describe them were not interested in freedom for teachers. A problem difficult to study in contemporary America, where printing presses, educational associations, and research students annually turn out an appalling volume of material, becomes almost inscrutable in the shadowy beginnings of American education. The very inadequacy of Colonial schools directly influenced the teacher's freedom. Certain general tendencies of American Colonial thinking vitally affected teachers. Colonial schools and thought, then, must be analyzed before the early teacher's position can be understood.

The first colonists brought from England a tradition of education. Among Protestants everywhere, Lutherans in Germany, Calvinists in Holland, Presbyterians in Scotland, but especially among English dissenters, the Reformation had given a religious stimulus to education, since Protestant emphasis upon the individual necessitated teaching him to read and understand religious books. Besides, the England left behind by these first colonists offered elementary schooling to many of her people. In the seventeenth century education was, moreover, beginning to be an aid to "getting on" in the world; it combined religious and economic advantages. So the first Americans were keenly eager for schools. Not only New Englanders whose educational laws are well known, but Southerners and Middle-Colony settlers brought a tradition of elementary education. Furthermore, the home governments encouraged schools. James I, for instance, in 1616 ordered the

Bishop of London to collect funds for a college in Virginia. Governor Yeardley in 1618 received instructions for "the planting of a university."[1] In 1621 Sir Francis Wyatt brought orders to see that each town "teach some children fit for the college, intended to be built."[2] In 1629 the Dutch West India Company instructed its patroons and colonists to "endeavor to devise some means whereby they will be able to support . . . a Schoolmaster."[3]

The colonists needed little urging. Harvard College was founded in 1636; by 1639 Connecticut was planning elementary and secondary schools, and a college; New Haven provided for a "free schoole" in 1641.[4] The Massachusetts General Court in 1642 required all towns to see that parents and masters taught their children to read; in 1647 it ordered towns of fifty families to appoint teachers of reading and writing and towns of one hundred families to set up grammar schools.[5] Connecticut enacted an identical law in 1650.[6] Plymouth in 1673 provided funds for a "free schoole"; in 1677 it required all towns to provide elementary teachers and towns of fifty families to maintain grammar schools; in 1684 it ordered all select-

[1] Edwin G. Dexter, *A History of Education in the United States*, 2.

[2] William W. Hening, *Statutes at Large of Virginia*, I, 114.

[3] "Draft of Freedoms and Exemptions for New Netherland," *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (Edmund B. O'Callaghan, ed.), I, 405.

[4] *Records of the Colony and Plantation of New Haven*, I (1638–1649), 62, 210.

[5] *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England* (Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed.), II, 6, 8–9; *ibid.*, II, 203. This law was reenacted in 1671 with the penalty increased to ten pounds (*General Laws and Liberties of the Massachusetts Colony . . . 1672*, sec. 1, p. 136), again in 1692 with the ten-pound penalty (*Acts and Laws of His Majesty's Province of the Massachusetts-Bay in New-England* [1742], chap. X, p. 18), and again in 1701 with the penalty raised to twenty pounds (*ibid.*, chap. XIX, p. 149).

[6] "Schooles," *Code of 1650, Being a Compilation of the Earliest Laws and Orders of the General Court of Connecticut. . . .* In 1672, each town of "Fifty Householders" (*Book of the General Laws for the People within the Jurisdiction of Connecticut; . . . Lately Revised. . . . 1672* [1673], 62–63); in 1678, each town of "thirty famalys" (*Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, III [1678–1689], 9); and in 1702, each town of "seventy Householders" (*Acts and Laws of His Majesty's Colony of Connecticut in New-England. . . . 1702* [revised and reprinted in 1715], p. 110) was required to maintain a school.