
Democracy & Education

Beyond the Schoolhouse Door Educating the Political Animal in Jefferson's Little Republics

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Abstract

Jefferson believed that citizenship must exhibit republican virtue. While education was necessary in a republican polity, it alone was insufficient in sustaining a revolutionary civic spirit. This paper examines Jefferson's expectations for citizen virtue, specifically related to militia and jury service in his 'little republics.' Citizens required not only knowledge of history and republican principles, but also public spaces where they could personify what they learned. Jefferson often analogized the nation as a ship at sea, and while navigational instruments are necessary in charting an accurate course, i.e., republican theories, they become inconsequential without the decisive action required for their successful use.

WRITING TO SAMUEL Kercheval (12 Jul. 1816) regarding his concern over calling a convention to reform Virginia's constitution, Jefferson affirmed his dissatisfaction with the constitution's structural provisions. After expounding on its inadequate design, he disparagingly asked, "Where then is our republicanism to be found" (Jefferson, 1984, p. 1397)? Reminding Kercheval of his earlier and similar disappointment with the nation's organic law, Jefferson (1984) commented, "The infancy of the subject at that moment, and our inexperience of self-government, occasioned gross departures in that draught from genuine republican canons" (p. 1396). His reflection revealed a sense of sustained ineffectuality giving rise to the sterile mechanics of constitutionalism and the administration of state altogether lacking in genuine republican substance. "In truth," he demurred, "the abuses of monarchy had so much filled all the space of political contemplation, that we imagined everything republican which was not monarchy" (1984, p. 1396). Fear, pessimism, and misunderstanding, rather than a true appreciation of republican doctrine, Jefferson believed, explained the architectural deficiencies in and the diminution of republican

principles from the constitutional scaffolding upon which the nation and the State of Virginia were to be governed. Events had proven what Jefferson earlier feared—namely, the potential aggrandizement of national power at the expense of local and state sovereignty.

Jefferson's response to this pervasive setback lay in his reliance on abstract republican principles and the ancient democratic Saxon constitution, which he often drew upon as a means of evaluating existing political practices. He perpetuated this Saxon myth by emphasizing the importance of and necessity in developing citizen

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virtue within small neighborhoods, hundreds, or wards, which were to be divisions within each county “of such size as that every citizen can attend, when called on, and act in person” to govern locally. “These wards, called townships in New England,” he explained to Kercheval, “are the vital principle of government, and have proved themselves the wisest invention ever devised by the wit of man” (Jefferson, 1984, p. 1399). Notwithstanding the fact that he contributed to the size and power of the national government during his tenure as president, Jefferson continued to advocate the significance of local wards throughout his retirement. Jefferson’s little republics were to provide a democratic staging ground that was otherwise unattainable in a larger geographical area. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Jefferson revealed an extraordinary faith in citizens’ capacity to govern themselves in their respective wards by suggesting that they choose their own justices, “a constable, a military company, a patrol, a school, the care of their own poor, their own portion of the public roads, the choice of one or more jurors to serve in some court, and the delivery . . . of their own votes for all elective offices” (Jefferson, 1984, pp. 1396–1403; see also Jefferson’s letter to Major John Cartwright, Monticello, June 5, 1824, *Writings* [1984], pp. 1490–1496).

As Morse (1999) has pointed out, “Formal education was clearly in Jefferson’s mind as one function that the wards could perform, but the political education they provided was of even greater concern” (p. 268). Hellenbrand’s (1990) analysis of Jefferson’s wards offered a similar conclusion: Jefferson’s schools, organized and managed locally, “would involve neighbors in ensuring the instruction of their own children” and “the schools would be but one project to remind adults of their social affiliation and collective responsibilities” (p. 139). Jefferson viewed his little republics as the only political means of maintaining a close-knit community and cultivating the moral sense inherent in the social nature of humans. As if describing Aristotle’s “political animal,” Jefferson believed that people were destined for society and that reaching his own potential required him to be civic minded and politically active. It was, after all, the nature of humans that had been so misunderstood, unappreciated, and unrealized throughout history. This was why Jefferson believed that a political community must provide “both education and practice in public life,” so as to “perfect [humanity’s] potential,” according to Sheldon (2000, p. 60). It was the only conceivable approach in securing a local attachment to republican principles in a federated republic.

These civic responsibilities not only required an educated citizenry but they also included essential republican ingredients intended to cultivate citizen virtue that were absent in the state and national constitutions. In addition, due to the presence of a feudalistic legal system and aristocratic political practices that sustained both social and political inequalities, Jefferson “had come to see an inextricable connection between education and politics at the local level,” according to Cremin (1980, p. 113). Education, Jefferson believed, would provide the most formidable means of counteracting these antiquated and unjust practices that prevented genuine opportunity from occurring. Despite his efforts, access to politics and schooling in Virginia, and the South in general, remained restricted to an elite few until well after the Civil

War (McCabe, 1890, p. 15). Unlike in the New England region, “education throughout the antebellum South was mostly a private matter and not a civic concern, and only those who could afford to pay tuition enjoyed access to schooling,” according to Tyack and Hansot (1982, p. 83). While a few charity schools emerged intermittently, prior to “1870 the majority of all pupils enrolled were in private schools” (1982, p. 83). This was due to elite resistance, slavery, sectionalism, and the inability of those who supported free schooling to “unite on a common plan of state school government” (Maddox, 1969, p. 11). Jefferson’s plans for educational access remained an ideal until well after his death, and his hope of developing vigorous ward democracies remains unrealized today.¹

Jefferson believed that citizenship must exhibit republican virtue, that while education was necessary in a republican polity, it alone was insufficient in sustaining a revolutionary civic spirit. As a parallel to the events leading up to and including the war with Britain, that which was learned—either formally or informally—required individual and collective action on the part of citizens to make that knowledge meaningful and purposeful. Deliberation combined with action invested citizens in the new government, its ideological rationalization, and the expectation that they would share in its future development. With this in mind, Jefferson knew that to sustain a revolutionary spirit to the extent witnessed during the battle with Britain, citizens required not only knowledge of history and republican principles but also public spaces where they could personify what they learned. Jefferson often analogized the nation as a ship at sea, and while navigational instruments are necessary in charting an accurate course—i.e., republican theories—they become inconsequential without the decisive action required for their successful use. Therefore, Jefferson’s revolution did not end with the colonies’ defeat of England. Rather, Jefferson’s expectations included making Virginia a “model republic.”

His radical reforms often paralleled those identified by Whig historians as having existed in the ancient democratic (and mythical) Saxon constitution thought to have existed prior to the Norman Conquest. Likewise, his broad reforms included agrarian laws, such as the abolition of primogeniture and entail, which he believed supported a “pseudo-aristocracy,” as well as his proposing to confer 50 acres of land to every White male in Virginia, to secure not only self-reliance but also independence in thought (Jefferson, 1984, pp. 38, 44, 343). In one of his first drafts of the Virginia constitution, Jefferson (2005) even tied the daily salary of the members of the General Assembly “to the value of two bushels of wheat,” which was to be determined every 10 years by “a special jury of . . . merchants and farmers” (p. 341). Jefferson (1984) also attempted to diminish the influence of established religion or “spiritual tyranny,” as he referred to it in his autobiography, by encouraging the proliferation of dissenting sects and a locally financed system of public education free from religious compulsion, as pillars of a local government truly republican in composition (pp. 34, 44). It is interesting that Jefferson relied upon state government “to effect . . . a general plan of [education],” revealing the symbiotic relationship between a republic and public education (Conant, 1963, p. 9). Moreover, while Jefferson remained devoutly

religious, he understood religion to be a private matter, but sectarianism was neither necessary nor desired in his education proposals. This was why Jefferson (1984) based his principles of government on “a moral instinct” that included “a love of others” and “a sense of duty . . . social dispositions . . . implanted” deep within people that must be discovered “by education, by appeals to reason and calculation” and “motives to do good” (pp. 1337–1338). Highly influenced by the writings of Lord Kames, Jefferson expected his little republics to facilitate this moral instinct, and they remained one of his most important goals, particularly as a countermeasure against a powerful national government.²

Many scholars have devoted extensive analysis of Jefferson’s formal educational proposals and his specific plans for a system of schooling in Virginia (Addis, 2003; Conant, 1963; Hellenbrand, 1990). In addition to these, however, an equally vital but relatively neglected question remains unexplored: How were Jefferson’s formal educational plans expected to prepare citizens for self-government in the wards? In other words, it is one thing to become knowledgeable of republican virtue and quite another to carry out those principles in practice. He knew that any republic true to its name must sustain a literate and knowledgeable citizenry and that formal schooling alone provided no guarantee that republicanism would succeed—hence, the referent: *civic* republicanism. Jefferson (1984) intended to provide the requisite foundation “for a government truly republican,” and schooling was the vehicle intended to propel citizens into active and responsible roles where they could “exercise with intelligence their parts in self-government” (pp. 44, 1337–1338). What were Jefferson’s expectations of citizens once they acquired the basic and formal educational requirements his proposals intended to achieve? How do we arrive at a better understanding of the informal yet significant modes of learning that were to take place in his little republics beyond the school-house door? How is democratic participation in activities such as jury duty and militia service, to name a few, in any way connected to the formal school curriculum or modes of learning in school? What is it about the curriculum that he expected to motivate citizens to action? These questions are worth exploring if we hope to understand Jefferson’s commitment to local democracy, civic virtue, and the role of formal and informal education in his republic.

Understanding How Jefferson’s Curriculum Relates to Ward Democracy

Jefferson’s (1984) formal educational proposals undoubtedly had a purpose beyond the attainment of literacy and the acquisition of knowledge. Notwithstanding his exclusion of women and African Americans and his tracking students into “the laboring and the learned” (p. 1348), educational opportunities for the most promising adult White males was certainly a goal, but how was Jefferson’s curriculum going to prepare citizens to govern themselves collectively? Citizens in a republic become acquainted with what is nearest to them, and they are more likely to develop local affections that are incomparable to any connection they may have with the state and national governments. “In this way,” Jefferson (2005) explained, “we shall be as republican as a large society can be”

(p. 219). Jefferson’s (1984) wards, which were to be “five or six miles square” and include approximately 100 adults (pp. 272, 1492), were expected to achieve exactly what the state or national government could never arrive at without their inclusion: namely, making the revolutionary spirit a recurring feature of one’s social milieu, which meant accepting the fact that human nature is often untidy, unpredictable, and turbulent but otherwise hopeful when educated in republican virtue. Republicanism taught moderation in wealth, a love of liberty and knowledge, informed judgment, interdependence, and maintaining an indefatigable balance between and commitment to individual rights and the public interest. Ideally, the impetus for Jefferson’s (1984) wards was to provide the means through which individuals could practice what they learned. Only a few “natural” aristocrats would move upward in the federal scheme while the rest of the “chaff” would remain locally active (p. 1306).

The nation’s organic law and Virginia’s constitution having failed to live up to republican principles, Jefferson (1984) viewed his “little republics” as “the main strength” of the nation (p.1227). “My most earnest wish,” he explained to Isaac Tiffany, “is to see the republican element of popular control pushed to the maximum of its practicable exercise.” Only then, he added, will “our government . . . be pure and perpetual” (Jefferson, 2005, p. 218). Similarly, in a letter to Joseph Cabell, Jefferson (1984) explained:

The secret will be found to be in the making [man] the depository of the powers respecting himself, so far as he is competent to them, and delegating only what is beyond his competence by a synthetical process, to higher and higher orders of functionaries, so as to trust fewer and fewer powers in proportion as the trustees become more and more oligarchical. The elementary republics of the wards, the county republics, the State republics, and the republic of the Union, would form a gradation of authorities, standing each on the basis of law, holding everyone its delegated share of powers, and constituting truly a system of fundamental balances and checks for the government. Where every man is a sharer in the direction of his ward-republic, or of some of the higher ones, and feels that 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 power be wrested from him by a Caesar or a Bonaparte. (p. 1380)

Notice that Jefferson referred to local citizens as delegating their authority within the artificial structure of federalism while caution and vigilance were necessary toward representatives serving higher (or more distant) levels of government. The federal leaders—the “more oligarchical”—tended otherwise to enjoy greater discretion as their distance from the roots of local democratic governance becomes supplanted (Jefferson, 2005, p. 205).

There are many parallels between Jefferson’s idea of federalism and his pyramidal scheme for schooling. Both were based on the fundamental republican principle of checking political power and authority. While the federal system provided the framework through which citizens could rise in relation to their knowledge

and commitment to the public interest, education was also intended to empower citizens at the local level. Under Jefferson's plan, those who reached the upper echelons of the pyramid would do so purely on merit and by exhibiting a deep respect for republican principles.

Jefferson's Use of History as a Guide to Conscientious Citizenship

To anyone familiar with Jefferson's ideas, the extent to which he contributed to the democratization of republican thought during his time, while very limited, should not be surprising.³ The responsibilities citizens were expected to shoulder in his theories were considerable for his time, and they necessitated a well-informed public. Jefferson's republicanism required independence, and independence required an agile and intelligent mind that could differentiate self-government from despotic forms. This was why Jefferson (1984) proposed the use of "Grecian, Roman, English, and American history" (p. 367), read from the Whig perspective of course, but he also suggested that mature minds read Hume, that "great apostle of toryism," as Jefferson (1984) declared in a letter to John Cartwright (p. 1491). While Jefferson argued that Hume's works, including his *History of England*, needed to be "republicanized," he did concede Hume's elegant style of writing (p. 1177). Yet, he warned that Hume's work should not "be put into the hands of . . . our young people," which would "infect them with the poison of his own principles of government" (p. 1228).⁴ Rather, Jefferson hoped students would come to appreciate the republican principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence, which had much in common with "the elementary books of public right" found in the works of "Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, [and] Sidney" (1984, p. 1501). It is interesting to note that Jefferson often recommended the reading of Cicero, and he quoted from his *De Officiis* in his *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* (Jefferson, 2005, p. 64). So characteristic of Jefferson's view, "the Ciceronian ideal," according to Burstein (1994), "had sought to combine scholarly expertise with worldly engagement" (p. 204).

Jefferson (1984) anticipated that each level of his gradational system of schooling would include classes in history, including the first three years "wherein the great mass of the people will receive their instruction" (pp. 272–273). The moral lessons Jefferson hoped students would retain from history were intended to "teach them how to work out their own greatest happiness, by showing them that it does not depend on the condition of life in which chance has placed them, but is always the result of a good conscience, good health, occupation, and freedom in all just pursuits" (p. 273).

History could provide students with numerous examples of the ways in which republics were undermined by political and religious corruption, greed, and decadence. Republican history instilled the importance of balancing independent thought and action with the public good, a moderation of wealth, the exercise of good judgment, selflessness, and interdependence. The history of republican governments illustrated, and Jefferson understood, that the most seminal way to achieve republican virtue was to decentralize political, economic, and religious power so that society

could benefit from a greater number of informed minds. In many respects, republicanism and free inquiry became synonymous, eventually implying the value of normative critique of government by citizens. This led to the idea that the public good could only be understood and legitimized through public deliberation sustained by an educated citizenry on a local level. It was a common-sense notion at the time that any efforts at establishing public schooling must occur locally (notwithstanding efforts at state funding), which was where Jefferson inextricably linked the importance of formal schooling and ward democracy (Kaestle, 1983, pp. 3, 9, 22, 29, 61; Tyack & Hansot, 1982, pp. 17, 20). One could not exist in any substantive way without the other. Understanding the value in education in promoting opportunity, Jefferson believed adults could ensure, if given opportunities, the creation of formal ward schools and their republican curriculum. "The first elements of morality . . . may be instilled into [the] minds [of children]," according to Jefferson, so that they may strengthen their judgment. History taught in this manner would "apprise [youth] of the past," "enable them to judge of the future," and "avail them of the experience of other times and other nations." It would "qualify them as judges of the actions and designs of men" and "to know ambition under every disguise . . . and . . . to defeat its views" (Jefferson, 1984, pp. 273–274).

The particular Whig history that Jefferson hoped to inculcate in the minds of youth "presented an idealized version of Anglo-Saxon democracy," believed to have been expelled by the Norman Conquest and the subsequent establishment of "feudalism" in England (Colbourn, 1958, p. 59). Notwithstanding his praise of Hume's prose, it was the Whig interpretation of history that Jefferson intended children to read in order to instill within them distinct and practical moral lessons, including those "free principles of the English government" that had been undermined by Tories like Hume (Jefferson, 1984, p. 1229). What children must gain from history, according to Jefferson, included an understanding of the dangers of monarchy and powerful executives, the importance of representative government, the fragility of republics, the value of diligently guarding liberty and one's independence in the face of arbitrary power, and the ability to recognize tyranny and political corruption, particularly in their initial stages, which was often opaque and more difficult to recognize. These original Saxon values could best be inculcated by Tacitus's "great moral and political truths," thought Jefferson. His "would be one of the best school books" to use when "children are learning to read," and having read it, children "could never forget the hatred of vice and tyranny which that author inspires" (Carey, 1803, p. x). The history Jefferson intended children to read would delicately prepare them for a life devoted to the cause of civic republicanism. According to Colbourn (1974), "Students were to have their minds safely enlightened and their morals cultivated along sound whig lines, developing" what Jefferson referred to elsewhere as "habits of reflection and correct action" (p. 176).

Jefferson expected reading in the elementary grades to be "chiefly historical" and practical in its purposes. Finding support in Pestalozzi's educational ideas, for example, Jefferson believed knowledge of history would prepare children to "venture into the

real world.” Yet, beyond formal schooling, Jefferson acknowledged history’s usefulness in “facilitating a lifelong learning experience” (Carpenter, 2004, pp. 141, 143).

Knowledge of history among citizens would also serve as a check on the actions of representatives and enable delegate forms of representation whereby those in power had little room to stray from the wishes of constituents. Rather, a common-sense notion held at the time, but one that began to be questioned, viewed representatives as trustees of the public good since they were formally educated and enjoyed a leisurely independence. Democratic ideas and reforms were often met with resistance and frequently referred to as mob rule, and they were perceived as irrelevant since the masses were without the requisite educational credentials to govern. Many either failed to recognize or refused to accept this as circular reasoning, but Jefferson understood the connection and idealized an educated citizenry holding representatives accountable at all levels of government. The wards, Jefferson (2005) explained to his friend Kercheval, “enables [people] . . . to crush, regularly and peaceably, the usurpations of their unfaithful agents, and rescues them from the dreadful necessity of doing it insurrectionally” (p. 219). Jefferson desired to facilitate what Barber (1999) called “political spontaneity,” which was why Jefferson “embraced the idea of permanent revolution” and generational sovereignty whereby each generation, having been educated properly, could re-enact the revolutionary moment, begin anew with a constitutional convention, and avoid the “politics of stasis” (p. 137). Jefferson did not revere the Constitution, and he refused to subscribe to the view that it was unalterable. As he knew human beings to be, he viewed the nation’s organic law as flawed and in need of improvement, particularly with respect to its initial lack of a Bill of Rights, and in order to continue the revolutionary spirit, he originally believed the Constitution should be revised according to the needs and desires of each generation. This certainly was a radical idea, and it was Madison who subsequently convinced Jefferson of the impracticality of this proposal. Besides, Jefferson’s primary issue was not with the Constitution itself, but with the way in which the Federalists interpreted its provisions including but not limited to their expansion of federal power vis-à-vis the states.⁵ Jefferson believed that his local wards would complement, if not restrain, the national government and would endure by creating spaces for public action and deliberation at the local level, which would serve as anchors to the more distant state and federal governments and keep the ship of state on course. Rather than political decrees filtering down upon a passive community, a citizenry educated in republican history was expected to provide not only the support for but also the resistance to higher levels of government when representatives strayed from their delegated authority. Jefferson believed that a republic could endure only as long as its citizens were willing to remain knowledgeable *and* active in political affairs, which distinguishes a republic from mere representative government. Elazar (1987) has appropriately described this federal relationship by arguing that, “for a *res publica* to exist . . . appropriate publics” must be established for its support (pp. 231–232). This was exactly what Jefferson desired in

his local wards. “The continuance of republican government,” Jefferson (2005) exclaimed, “absolutely hang[s] on” the presence of an educated citizenry “and the sub-division of counties into wards” (p. 197).

Whig historians who idealized Saxon democracy, and whom Jefferson read extensively, included Paul de Rapin (*History of England*), as well as Sir Henry Spelman, Sir John Dalrymple, Francis Sullivan, Roger Acherley, Lord Kames, Sir Edward Coke, Henry Care, Thomas Gordon (particularly his translation of Tacitus’s *Germania*), and Catherine Macaulay. Works by these authors, according to Colbourn (1958), served as “common denominators to each [of Jefferson’s] libraries.” These “core” texts not only informed Jefferson but also explained his “constant aim in politics,” which “was to avoid the political pitfalls into which England had . . . fallen [and] to establish a democracy which would not fall prey to petty ambition and political corruption, and to restore the ancient Saxon principles of polity.” The practical implication here lay in Jefferson’s realization that this form of democracy “could only survive if . . . citizens were suitably informed of their precious heritage, and their reason thus adequately armed for battle” (pp. 58, 69).

While reading, writing, and grammar served as common-sense notions of what elementary education ought to include, political history served as an important part of the curriculum for the primary, grammar, and collegiate levels. “History,” according to the popularly read Charles Rollin, “may properly be called the common school of mankind, equally open and useful to great and small, to princes and subjects,” because “history when it is well taught becomes a school of morality” (quoted in Gribbin, 1972, p. 616).

Because the American republic and its new Constitution failed to create a public space where citizenship could be exemplified, and because political access continued to be restricted to the elite few, Jefferson believed it was necessary for “government to sponsor public education . . . so that the people would question the government’s actions” (Hatzenbuehler, 2006, p. 132). By “sponsoring public education,” Jefferson meant only that government would help fund education without determining the curriculum. The curriculum he favored “reflected the humanist values he had formed as a student at William and Mary” (Addis, 2003, p. 15). Similarly, once citizens became enlightened and capable of exercising good use of their reasoning skills, they would possess the intellectual fortitude and informed judgment required to carry out additional civic responsibilities at the local level, including service in the militia and serving as jurors.

As articulated above, Jefferson expected citizens to be active in their wards in numerous ways. For purposes of this paper, however, I have chosen to limit my focus on only two local activities included in Jefferson’s theory of ward democracy; namely, service in the militia and jury duty. Caring for the poor and holding local office are activities analyzed elsewhere. Having said this, I shall begin with Jefferson’s understanding of the role of the militia.

The Militia as a Form of Democracy

Ancient and modern history, as well as contemporary events, taught Jefferson about the dangers of standing armies and he

repeatedly articulates in his writings his preference for militias, which were citizen groups prepared to defend their homes, their families, and their country. It is often maintained in the republican canon that citizens are eager to serve in the militia since they have a stake in sculpting the political nature of their own republic (see, for example, Harrington 2003; Machiavelli, 1950). Jefferson, an aristocrat who often wrote about republican ideals, sometimes remained blind to or hypocritical of practical realities. Specifically, what I am suggesting is that it was easy for Jefferson to consider militia service as a desirable activity among yeomen, for his aristocratic status skewed his gentleman understanding of public service. For instance, Tillson (1986) has shown that Virginia leaders often viewed “popular defiance in the militia . . . as irrational and self-destructive,” in their actions “toward friendly Indians,” and that small farmers often found it “burdensome” to serve in the militia because doing so detracted from necessary work on family farms. Most yeomen farmers did not enjoy the leisure time needed to serve in militias for weeks at a time, and many of them fled after serving for “only two days.” Finally, rather than illustrating allegiance to the state, “popular opposition to militia duty often resulted from an overriding concern with defense of local neighborhoods,” according to Tillson (pp. 289–294, 299–300). While Washington and Jefferson both experienced problems with militias and their tendency to fall short of the ideals often depicted in the civic republican canon, Jefferson (1984) maintained their continued use and improvement, as stated in his First Annual Message to Congress in 1801 (pp. 505–506). In addition, Jefferson believed schooling could only benefit members of the militia like it would any other groups. In a letter to James Monroe in 1813, for example, Jefferson (1904a) asserted, “We must train and classify the whole of our male citizens, and make military instruction a regular part of collegiate education” (p. 261). Perhaps an understanding of these difficulties and conflicts caused Jefferson to emphasize the need for a well-regulated militia.

In March 1775, the Virginia Assembly appointed Jefferson to serve on the Committee to Prepare a Plan for a Militia. Later that same month, “the Convention resolved ‘that a well regulated militia, composed of Gentlemen and Yeomen, is the natural strength, and only security, of a free government’” (Jefferson, 1950, pp. 160–162). Beyond mere expediency, Jefferson viewed the militia as an important Saxon institution, which provided a public space where citizens could demonstrate civic virtue by means of securing their liberty and independence. He, like so many of his ilk, viewed standing armies as analogous to all other institutions of concentrated power—religious, political, economic—potentially dangerous and oppressive. “The only force which can be ready at every point and competent to oppose [an enemy], is the body of neighboring citizens as formed into a militia,” explained Jefferson (1984) in his first Annual Message to Congress (p. 505).

The opposition to standing armies and concomitant support of citizen militias was emphasized in all the republican literature and Whig historical interpretations, including a popular summary of ancient Saxon England as described by Demophilus in 1776. “The militia,” according to Demophilus, “is the natural support of a government, *founded on the authority of the people only*,” and

likewise, the militia operated within a rather democratic venue as commanding officers were to be chosen by ballot and rotation among those who they were to command (Demophilus, 1983, p. 353; Jefferson, 1984, p. 505). Unlike a standing army, the militia served both military and civil functions, and it was democratically organized. However, at the local level, where security was a minor concern, the militia functioned not only as a security against attack but also as a link among civic obligation, “the preservation of civil liberties, and constitutional stability,” as described in *The Commonwealth of Oceana* and *Discourses Concerning Government* (Cress, 1979, p. 46), by Harrington and Sidney, respectively, two authors Jefferson highly admired.

Whig historians often emphasized militias as “schools of virtue” intended to instill “frugality,” moderation, and “encourage personal sacrifice for the public good” (Cress, 1979, pp. 46, 50–51). Because the militia embodied local citizens who had a personal interest in defending their wards, families, and property, it was preferred over standing armies and the hiring of mercenaries that often came with them. A standing army often had no ties to the nation, let alone a locality, and was dependent solely on the financial and political emoluments promised by a king. As an institution of the wards, the militia served as one of many venues where citizens could collectively exercise their republican virtue in comprehensive ways. According to Jefferson (1984), members of the militia included “every able-bodied freeman, between the ages of 16 and 50” (p. 216), and not unlike the federal nature of America, the militia included a gradation of political authority stretching from the wards and extending to the state of Virginia with the governor serving as its head.

Serving in the militia also heightened awareness of the self as an active participant in the republic, and it was not unusual for those who served to question their not having the right to vote in a country they were defending. Jefferson (1984) again criticized the Virginia constitution in his *Notes*, by pointing out that a “majority of men in the state, who pay and fight for its support, are unrepresented in the legislature.” He explained that “this constitution was formed when we were new and [in]experienced in the science of government [and] it is no wonder then that time and trial have discovered very capital defects in it” (p. 243).

Jefferson understood how these “defects” could be emasculating, and his total theory, which included agrarian reforms and a simultaneous yet limited expansion of the suffrage among white males, sought to address these problems. The success of the republican experiment depended ultimately upon the support of those who fought in its defense. The Revolution rationalized the idea of resisting tyranny in any form, and Jefferson likewise understood the political parallels that could be made if citizens’ expectations were not addressed following the war with Britain. While the conflict did not end with a complete redefinition of social and political relationships, it did heighten expectations among many farmers, artisans, laborers, mechanics, and common folk in an emerging self-consciousness of their political efficacy. A leveling of sorts did take place, according to Foner (1998), particularly in the militia, which was “composed largely of members of the ‘lower orders,’ including servants and apprentices.” The militia has

been identified as a “school of political democracy,” as “its members demanded the right to elect all of their officers and insisted on the enfranchisement of all soldiers.” This “established a long-lasting tradition whereby service in the army enabled excluded groups to stake a claim to full citizenship,” as indicated by Foner (1998, p. 17). Property too became redefined as more than mere land “to include rights and liberties” unassailable from the individual (1998, p. 17). The militia “became a center of intense political debate and discussion,” which further developed a sense of self in relation to the events unfolding during the Revolution (Foner, 2005, p.64). Public debate had been democratized, and individuals began questioning social relationships in the same way political relationships had been examined. Since many who served in the militia had no land, and because they began to question traditional social hierarchies, ordinary citizens began to rationalize their rights to vote by attaching such rights to the individual and militia service. Ownership in land as a prerequisite to vote began to lose its grip on the social fabric and was eventually replaced by the idea that one should vote based on his devotion to the public good or simply because of a birthright. As events during the Revolution unfolded, it is not a stretch of the imagination to assume that those who served in these “schools of political democracy” (Foner, 1998, p. 17; see also Young, 1976, p. 196) carried on such discussions. Therefore, the militia provided a space where average citizens could deliberate about republican and democratic rights, civic obligations, and politics generally. Irrespective, “the role of the Virginia militia” was “undercut by the creation of a larger United States Army of regulars after the ratification of the new federal Constitution in 1788,” as explained by Ethridge (1977, p. 439).

Jurors: The Republic’s Ephori and Tribuni

Whig historians often viewed jury service as one of the most basic rights developed during the ancient Saxon period. “I consider [trial by jury] as the only anchor ever yet imagined by man, by which a government can be held to the principles of its constitution,” Jefferson (2005) exclaimed in a letter to Thomas Paine in 1789 (p. 156). Unhappy with the independence of the executive and the separation of the Senate from popular consent, Jefferson wrote to Judge Spencer Roane in 1819 and complained that “the Constitution . . . is a mere thing of wax in the hands of the judiciary, which they may twist and shape into any form they please” (1984, p. 1426). His concerns over the Constitution made Jefferson depend on the people and their independent judgment as jurors all the more. “It should be remembered,” he explained to Roane, “as an axiom of eternal truth in politics, that whatever power in any government is independent, is absolute also,” and “independence can be trusted nowhere but with the people in mass” (1984, p. 1426). In fact, Jefferson (1984) explained his definition of republicanism to John Tyler in relative terms, asserting it was “a government by its citizens in mass, acting directly and personally . . . and that every other government is more or less republican, in proportion as it has in its composition more or less of this ingredient of the direct action of the citizens” (p. 1391).

Although federal representatives were expected to be a well-educated “natural aristocracy,” in Jefferson’s view, their

presence did not relieve the notion commonly held, that public officials will forget their attachment to the people as they move further away from the wards. The distance between the governors and the governed, he explained to his friend Dupont de Nemours “requires in general constant and immediate control, to prevent . . . the seductions of self-love” (Jefferson, 1984, p. 1386). In America, he further explained, “the people (by which is meant the mass of individuals composing society)” are considered “competent to judge of . . . facts occurring in ordinary life,” and “they have retained,” therefore, “the functions of judges of facts, under the name of jurors . . . [as they are viewed] as competent judges of human character” (p. 1385). This was why Jefferson’s philosophy gave considerable discretion to juries in determining facts *and* law. He referred to them as “the true tribunal of the people,” whereby “the inhabitants of every precinct may meet at a given time and place . . . [to] elect among themselves some one to be a juror,” and “that from among those so chosen in every county, some one may be designated by lot, who shall attend the ensuing session of the federal court within the state, to act as grand and petty jurors,” a system of which, he declared, “may . . . preserve the trial by jury . . . in its pure and original spirit” (Jefferson, 1995, pp. 1076–1078). In his *Notes*, Jefferson (1984) added: “This division of the subject (facts and law) lies with [the jury’s] discretion only. And if the question relate to any point of public liberty, or if it be one of those in which the judges may be suspected of bias, the jury undertake to decide both law and fact” (p. 256). Despite the occasional error committed by a jury, Jefferson (1984) defended this practice, believing that “the common sense of twelve honest men gives still a better chance of just decision, than the hazard of cross and pile” (pp. 256–257).

Proposing that jurors exercise this degree of power clearly differentiates Jefferson from some of his more conservative colleagues, although Middlebrooks (2004) claimed that Jefferson’s desire to give such power to juries was common among “Federalists and Anti-Federalists alike” and that the “original intent” in allowing jurors to decide issues of fact and law occasionally occurred until the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1895 decision in *Sparf and Hansen v. United States* (156 U.S. 51 S. Ct. 273). In this case, the Court ruled that “a jury has no role in deciding the law, but rather must blindly follow the opinion of the law expressed by the trial judge . . . in the federal courts.” This ruling, which represented the culmination of previous cases that slowly diminished juries’ exercise of power, was handed down in order to develop a “science of the law . . . administered by lawyers and judges . . . to uphold laws that allowed slavery to . . . continue,” and to protect the interests of a burgeoning commercial class, according to Middlebrooks (pp. 353–355).

For Jefferson to argue that jurors exercise this level of discretion in relation to judges illustrates the extent to which he (and other key founders) expected jurors to be versed in republican citizenship and protective of fundamental rights, to be cognizant of the laws related to the exercise (or encroachment) of one’s liberty but also to recognize “ambition under every disguise . . . and . . . to defeat its views” (Jefferson, 1984, p. 274). In his autobiography, Jefferson (1993) asserted that he took exception to the absence of many rights, including “trial by jury in *Civil* [emphasis added] as well as Criminal cases,” (p. 76) again illustrating his confidence in

juries. As one of Jefferson's most radical ideas, it is worth examining the basis for this belief.

In a letter to the l'Abbé Arnoux written from Paris in 1789, Jefferson recommended a set of books on the subject of jurors, including the following titles (and their original publication dates): (a) Henry Lintot and Andrew Millar's *The Complete jurymen: or a compendium of the laws relating to jurors* (1752); (b) *Guide to English juries* (1682), author unknown; (c) John Hawles's *Englishman's right* (1680); (d) John Jones's *Jurors judges both of law and fact* (1650); (e) John Somers's *Security of Englishmen's lives: or, the duty of grand juries* (1681); and (f) William Walwyn's *Juries justified* (1651) (Jefferson, 1958, pp. 282–283). It is noteworthy that all of these works favor the independent discretion of juries in determining both fact and law, not to mention that Walwyn was a leader of the Leveller Movement in England during the mid-17th century. Walwyn defended against criticism concerning the ability of ordinary Englishmen serving as jurors within the ancient "Hundreds" or "Parishes," considered at that time to be "the most essential Liberty of England" since "before the [Norman] Conquest" (1651, pp. 2–5). In addition, Walwyn challenged objections to a jury's competence and ability to understand the facts presented during trial, claiming that ordinary citizens have both the practical judgment and the sense of justice, as well as conscience, "in delivering the Captive, and setting the Oppressed free . . . and in faithfully keeping all promises and compacts amongst men" (p. 4). In language Jefferson would utilize over a century later, Walwyn concluded that juries served as the principle means of preserving liberty "as ever the wit of man devised" (p. 11).

According to Barry's *The Present Practice of a Justice of the Peace; and a Complete Library of Parish Law* (1790), "Trial by juries is the *Englishman's* birthright, and is that happy way of trial, which, notwithstanding all revolutions of times, has been continued, beyond all memory, to this present day . . . it being co-temporary with the foundation of this state, and one of the pillars of it, both as to age and consequence" (pp. 527–528). According to de Rapin (1784–1789), one of Jefferson's favorite Whig historians, "the courts of justice were formed with respect to [the] several divisions," namely, the tithings, hundreds, and shires, so that "the end [of] justice might be administered with less charge, greater dispatch, and more exactness" (p. 135). Jefferson (1904b) agreed, asserting that,

Grand juries are the constitutional inquisitors & informers of the country, they are scattered everywhere, see everything, see it while they suppose themselves mere private persons, and not with the prejudiced eye of a permanent & systematic spy. Their information is on oath, is public, it is in the vicinage of the party charged, & can be at once refuted. These officers taken only occasionally from among the people, are familiar to them, the office respected, & the experience of centuries has shewn that it is safely entrusted with our character, property & liberty. A grand juror cannot carry on systematic persecution against a neighbor whom he hates, because he is not permanent in the office. (p. 317).

In order to actualize republican principles and to protect liberty, a juridical system must include avenues for popular participation, such as jury service, "the true tribunal of the people," as Jefferson (2005, p. 166) referred to it, and this particular means of participation must not be superficial, but must require the active, thoughtful, and engaging processes that make citizenship meaningful, relevant, and empowering. In fact, the influence upon Jefferson's thought with regard to this point is found in *A Guide to English Juries*, which he also recommended to the l'Abbé Arnoux. In it, the unknown author, referred to on the title page as a Person of Quality (1682), assigned extraordinary power to grand and petite juries, wherein he described judges as "unessential and needless in a Trial by Jury," with the exception of assisting the jury "by answering and informing what the Law is when difficulties arise" (pp. 22–23). The author began his treatise asserting, "JURY-MEN . . . are England's Ephori and Tribuni," which served "the Boundaries of Prerogative and Privilege, and the living Bulwark of the Laws" (p. A2). Otherwise, the author concluded, if judges could control the decisions of juries, they would simply serve as the "Echo [of] Judges [sic] Trumpets" (p. 26). The author went on to say that the history of English juries extended beyond the Norman Conquest, yet they survived due to their popularity in checking the power of judges. The author criticized more recent "Acts of Parliament, relating to Church Matters, leaving the Trust of Punishing thereby, to the discretion of the Magistrates, without the use of *Juries*. In fact, the author analogized the institution of juries with the "Prophets . . . Apostles . . . the Discoverers . . . and the Stones," highlighting the number twelve in the Old Testament (Person of Quality, 1682, pp. 8, 168). Hawles (1680) asserted that juries, without the power to decide fact and law, served as "mere Echoes to sound back the pleasure of the Courts" (p. 28).

After reviewing nearly all of the books recommended by Jefferson, it becomes apparent that he subscribed to the following general principles. Juries are expected to operate free from judicial control or intimidation; they are considered to be one of the most basic forms of civic activity—an ancient right and liberty deeply rooted in England's history (regardless of the veracity of this assumption) having withstood the Norman Conquest; and twelve jurors are viewed as being more impartial than a single judge who enjoys appointment. Juries are considered capable and more likely to develop informed and honest decisions through their own interactive questioning and deliberation. Judges are to serve a comparatively inferior status during trials and act as a consultant when juries have questions to help them reach their decisions of fact and law. Grand and petit juries are equally praised, and they likewise are seen as bulwarks against the institutional power of the state.

Trial by jury, according to Jefferson, served as one of the most important elements "of our political faith," the principles of which, form "the text of [our] civic instruction" (1984, p. 495). In fact, Jefferson pointed to the new national Constitution as defective by not "establish[ing] trials by the people themselves," and as a consequence, leaving the people "at the mercy of their governors" (2005, p. 113). Trial by jury served as an important check available to the people against an unelected branch of government, operating as another example of the obligations and responsibilities

Jefferson's view of citizenship required if carried through to his expectations of fullest political participation.

Jefferson's faith in juries also illustrated his commitment to the normative conclusions developed through deliberation at the local level. In Hawles's (1680) *The Englishman's Right*, which Jefferson recommended, the author spoke to the advantages of having twelve men review evidence in a trial more "fully and impartially" than a single judge (p. 9). Moreover, Condorcet, whose ideas impacted Jefferson, expressed faith in numbers. Condorcet developed the Jury Theorem, as Schofield (2005) has shown, concluding, "that the 'typical' voter has a better than even chance of choosing [a] 'correct outcome,' and the larger the pool of individuals, 'the possibility of choosing the truth would approach certainty'" (p. 304). Indeed, men disagree, whether they are judges or jurors. Hawles (1680) asserted, for example, "may not the *Judge* and *Jury* honestly differ in their Opinion" in the same way that "two Judges may, which often happens" (p. 29)?

It was through jury service that Englishmen first exercised a form of local popular power in government, as far back as the "twelfth century," serving as a precursor to the "house of commons" during the "thirteenth century," according to Stephenson (1968, p. 29). Because Jefferson viewed juries as quintessentially a local prerogative and an important check against corruption and the protection of republican government, he petitioned "the Virginia legislature to reform its method of jury selection so that both grand juries and trial juries remained 'the true tribunal of the people'" (Jefferson, 1995, p. 1067). Jefferson outlined a system of jury selection to take place within the local confines of his educational wards. Juries provided a local means for citizens to exercise popular democratic protections, considered by Jefferson to be more effective than legislative representation in preventing executive or judicial tyranny (Jefferson, 1995, pp. 1067, 1076–1078). Jefferson was not alone, however, in his views, as juries were given authority in many state constitutions to serve not only as judges of fact but of law. "The jury could function," according to the Federalist turned anti-Federalist William Findley, "like a sitting constitutional convention" and as "an authoritative interpreter of the meaning of constitutional documents" (Cornell, 1999, p. 134). Juries were expected to provide a popular venue for citizens to decide what was right or just in spite of or in opposition to formal legal processes and technicalities imposed by a distant or obscure government.

Like the militia, juries in Jefferson's theory held important civic obligations and expectations. Jury service was to bring ordinary citizens face to face with political reality; it was to provide citizens with a check against judicial abuse, and therefore, required a sophisticated understanding of history and at least a basic understanding of law. It was only logical and rational for Jefferson to argue that formal education need be a prerequisite for any public office or institution, geared as he often says to genius and virtue. Virtually all the founders agreed on this basic republican tenant. In fact, it had become a common-sense notion. The problem, of course, had to do with how, when, and the extent to which citizens were to be educated in the new republic. Historical hindsight suggests that Jefferson's education plans and system of wards was too radical for his time, and common schooling, once it was

established decades later, would take on a completely different justification. Like the new Constitution ratified in 1789, and unlike Jefferson's proposals, the purposes of common schooling that emerged in the mid-19th century focused less on a curriculum that advocated an active democracy and primarily limiting civic expectations in favor of institutionalized order, systematized discipline, routinization, and passive forms of citizenship. The Whigs, who were the primary impetus behind the common school movement, viewed democracy scornfully, and I argue elsewhere (Dotts, 2012) that this fear played a role in their efforts to establish tax-supported schools. The Whigs became extremely anxious over the republic's viability after the franchise was expanded, which resulted in the election of their nemesis, Andrew Jackson. Schooling, in part, was viewed as a new institution that could serve as a bulkhead against mobocracy and steer the ship of state back on course. However, because schools did remain locally controlled during the mid-19th century, their local purposes and their curricula did occasionally present more democratic impulses, immediately illustrating the political character of public schooling.

Conclusion

While historians continue to debate the degree of Jefferson's democratic ideas, I believe it is safe to conclude that while Jefferson was no democrat, he advocated a variety of radical policies that could be viewed as such when compared to his compatriots, yet were not nearly as democratic as others' views at the time, such as Robert Coram's, for example. While it is certainly true that Jefferson's ideas, writings, and public comments changed over his lifetime, like any individual's, his political theories, legislative proposals, and many of his ideas, taken as a whole and in context, do represent a radical and sometimes democratic testing of the waters, particularly with regard to his proposals at the local level. Understanding the conservative nature of his Virginia Assemblymen, friends, and colleagues, Jefferson's proposals could reflect restraint or inhibition on his part. In other words, the expectations and confidence Jefferson held in an educated citizenry, as explained above, suggest that he may have moderated his legislative proposals and recommendations (as radical as they were viewed at the time), knowing very well the difficulty he faced in garnering support for the system of schooling he advocated. Assuredly, he had the political fortitude to recognize the potential difficulty he faced in implementing his radical proposals.

Nevertheless, in comparison to his view of state and federal government, where he expected the brightest and most talented to serve toward the apex of his pyramidal scheme, it is evident that Jefferson's writings do illustrate an affinity for limited local governance among White males. His theoretical framework rested upon the establishment of wards and public schools that did not offer opportunities for African Americans and only very limited schooling for females and instead served as staging grounds for White males who would be tracked according to their perceived intelligence into laborers or those destined for further education. Jefferson recognized the hypocrisy of an elite group that bases its authority on the will of an uneducated people without their enjoying a venue to actively participate and deliberate locally. It is

apparent that Jefferson, like other key founders, attempted to put into practice those cherished republican (and to some extent, democratic) principles he believed to have existed in the ancient Saxon constitution.

The theory of classical republicanism held that citizens must actively deliberate and participate collectively and as fully as possible in order to give identity to their community, an identity that must be molded by the association of its members. Active participation in public forums, such as assemblies, juries, public office, defense of the state, the maintenance of political equality before the law, efforts to maintain awareness of politics, and the relentless balancing of individual liberty and the public good demanded much from citizens. Since Jefferson, like Aristotle before him, believed we are social beings, having a claim or stake in determining the composition of the polis is itself a reward. It is clear that Jefferson desired to create opportunities for White male citizens to govern themselves, and he gave them extraordinary authority in some instances to check elite power. To understand Jefferson's educational plans in context, we must go beyond his ideas for formal schooling, as important as these were, and attempt to understand the ways in which he linked a general diffusion of knowledge with active political participation in his wards—individuals informed by republican history were expected to determine their own fate and their own well-being free from the moral dictates of an elite class and from prior generations. By connecting republican virtue, such as militia service and jury duty as venues for public deliberation, with formal modes of schooling, Jefferson's ideas on the militia and jury service are worth examining.

As we know, Jefferson concluded that tyranny and despotism need not be confined to a single individual or a group of individuals, but could emerge just as easily in a representative government if average citizens were not empowered to prevent this from occurring (Jefferson, 1984, p. 245).⁶ As we know, Jefferson's democratic republicanism applied only to a distinct class of White men. His republican ideal had no place for women or African Americans. As Morgan (1975) pointed out long ago, the brutal irony is that Jefferson's democracy was not possible without the coexistence of slavery.

Jefferson believed in increasing local democracy in ways that empowered citizens to apply what they learned, formally and informally, by assuming greater responsibility over their communities. There is no doubt that this is easier to suggest than to implement in a modern society known for its political apathy. However, Jefferson might tell us that we have not provided many venues at the local level to empower citizens, nor have we coordinated a curriculum that will direct students' attention toward and heighten their interest in taking on more demanding public roles. Perhaps the apathy that is so widely present can be explained, in part, by the lack of political space available to citizens and the concomitant loss of political efficacy that otherwise prods them to take active roles in shaping local communities. Jefferson's ideas suggest a greater obligation among educators in directing students' attention toward the dynamic role they can play in their communities by understanding their relationship to government, why it is important for them to maintain political awareness, and how they can collectively influence the character of their

government and the identity of their communities. How can we modify our curriculum and our local communities in ways that parallel Jefferson's expectations? How can we generate a greater sense of political efficacy among individuals that will result in a perpetual revolutionary spirit? Managed and passive forms of democracy, including voting, does not appear to provide the motive toward action. Should we reconsider giving greater decision making to citizens locally when they serve as jurors or in the militia? Should citizens help determine government policies toward caring for the poor? Should we consider decentralizing politics to the extent that Jefferson suggested by giving neighborhoods greater political empowerment? How can we modify the political structure and the political relationships between and among local schools, local governments, and neighborhoods in ways that enhance democracy? How should we, if at all, make such connections in hopes of enhancing the political power of our neighborhoods in ways that increase our happiness? How might Jefferson's theory of citizen virtue help us in arriving at a more active and engaged citizenry is a question worth considering in light of the broad apathy among citizens today.

As a final note, some scholars identify Jefferson as having further developed the idea of individual rights and notions of negative liberty understood in Lockean theory. While this is true in particular contexts, especially as it relates to citizens and the federal government, we also see in Jefferson's theory of ward democracy a commitment to cultivating a moral sense among members of a community where the public interest may transcend individual rights. Individual rights must be balanced, according to civic republican theory, with the agreed-upon expectations of an active citizenry in determining their own happiness and social and political goals. "True freedom does not consist merely in private liberty and detachment from the community," as some have argued when analyzing Jefferson's theories, "but in the realization of the individual's noblest qualities and submission to the laws he has helped to create," according to Sheldon's (1991) understanding of Jefferson's wards, which he aligned with "a classical conception of democracy (pp. 142–143). Democracy for Jefferson is, in part, a celebration of the possibility of change. Jefferson did not believe that current generations should be weighted down by tradition but instead that each generation should determine on its own which traditions to continue and which were outdated. Democracy and enlightenment for Jefferson were neither static concepts nor something attainable once and for all. Rather, he saw them as embracing change and as always in flux. At the very least, Jefferson deserves the title of "democrat" as he advocated the decentralization of politics to the extent possible in order to facilitate active local involvement among citizens. His apparent desire was to empower citizens to take on extensive, not fewer, civic responsibilities—to democratize republican thought in the American experiment and defining citizenship from the bottom-up rather than from the top-down. In another sense, of course, Jefferson was no democrat. He enjoyed the luxury of theorizing about republican ideals and enjoying an aristocratic lifestyle supported by inheritance and slavery. The irony of a slaveholder writing about the importance of liberty and self-government continues to exist as one of Jefferson's most enduring dichotomies.

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Notes

1. The rural nature of settlement in Virginia also contributed to the lack of public schooling. See Bailey (1979, pp. 124–125). For a detailed history of the development of common schooling in Virginia, see Maddox (1969).
2. Other than Jefferson's own writings, for Lord Kames's influence on Jefferson's view of man's social nature, see Sheldon (1991, pp. 55–57).
3. It should be noted that Jefferson was no democrat in the modern sense of the term. He was an aristocrat who advocated a few radical and democratic ideas, but overall, Jefferson remained an aristocratic and oppressive slave owner. I use the term *democrat* as a relative one to help distinguish his ideas from many of his contemporaries. While Jefferson stood to the left of many in his social group, his ideas were less democratic than, say, Robert Coram's, whose *Political Inquiries* (1791) offered a comparatively more radical and democratic understanding of the American Revolution. The complexity regarding the use of the term *democracy* continues today within a national discourse that refers to contemporary American politics as democratic.
4. For Jefferson's criticism of Hume, see his letter to John Norvell, June 11, 1807 (Jefferson, 1984, pp. 1176–1179). Regarding the principles Jefferson described in the Declaration of Independence, see his letter to Henry Lee, Monticello, May 8, 1825 (Jefferson, 2005, pp. 147–148). See also Burstein (1994).
5. See Jefferson's letter to Justice William Johnson, October 27, 1822 (Jefferson, 1984, pp. 1459–1463). Considering Jefferson's approval of the Constitution, see his letter to James Madison on July 31, 1788 wherein he described the Constitution as “a good canvas, on which some strokes only want retouching” (2005, p. 365).
6. I refer to Jefferson's (1984) comment in his *Notes* that “173 despots would surely be as oppressive as one . . . An elective despotism was not the government we fought for” (p. 245).