Packer Collegiate, c. 1850s
(Courtesy Brooklyn College Library Archives)

The Education of Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic Children In Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York City[1]

Stephan F. Brumberg

New York City grew from just over 60,000 in 1800 to more than 200,000 in 1830, surpassing Philadelphia as the largest city in the United States. In the next thirty years its population more than quadrupled to nearly 814,000. The rush of people and sheer physical transformation of the city was tremendous. Changes were even more dramatic in its sister city, Brooklyn, which saw its 1830 population explode from just over 15,000, living in a collection of small towns and villages, to a city of nearly 267,000 by 1860.[2] The numbers are a crude indicator of the explosive economic growth of the region, enabling it to absorb such a great increase in population. But this growth also reflects enormous immigration into New York and Brooklyn, altering the very composition of the region. The established New Yorkers of English, Scots, and Dutch ancestry (along with freed African Americans and an admixture of many other nationalities) were joined by an ever-growing number of Irish and German immigrants. The social order was irrevocably altered, the religious mix of the city reconfigured, and the languages of the streets changed.

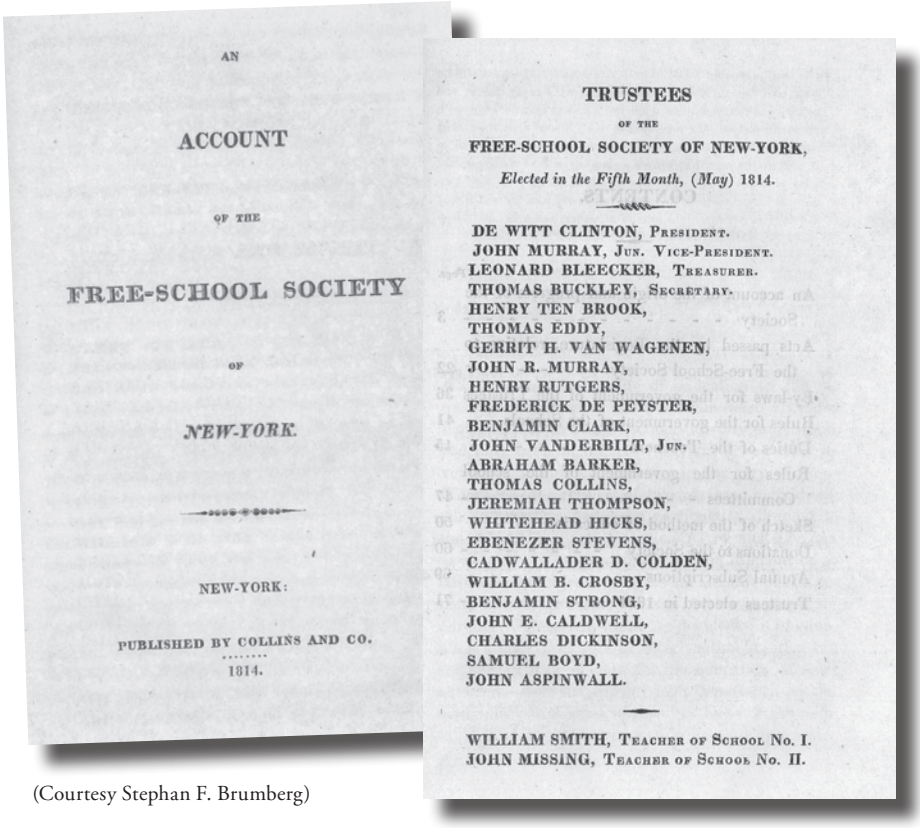
The city's Catholic population, primarily Irish and German,[3] approached nearly half of the city's population by 1860. German Jewish immigrants began to arrive in the Port of New York in substantial numbers in the 1830s.[4] The small Jewish community of 1,150 in 1830[5] grew to 7,000 in 1840, 16,000 in 1850, and 40,000 by 1860, nearly five percent of New York's population.[6]

The established population of New York was challenged by the vast numbers of newcomers, perceived as different in culture, values, allegiances, and faith. They feared that their way of life, their political dominance, and their culture would be lost under the ceaseless waves of strangers. For New York's Protestants, especially the committed evangelical denominations, there was the added fear that Roman Catholicism would conquer the city by the sheer force of its numbers, making New York an outpost of a foreign potentate, the pope in Rome. There was great concern for the education of the children of newcomers: Can they be made into upstanding New Yorkers? Leaders of the established order claimed the right to educate the children of newcomers so that the arriving communities would not culturally replicate themselves and so that their children could be transformed into Americans. Robert C. Cornell, president of the Public School Society (PSS), argued in 1840 that the Society did not lack

> sympathy for the oppressed of other lands, who seek asylum in this; on the contrary, they act under a firm conviction that the sooner such persons abandon any unfavorable prejudices with which they may arrive among us, and become familiar with our language, and reconciled to our institutions and habits, the better it will be for them, and for the country of their adoption. If this be true, the best interests of all will be alike promoted by having their children mingle with ours in the public seminaries of learning.[7]

To what extent were Cornell's goals realized in American common (i.e., public) schools, and to what extent did newcomers create educational paths of their own to realize their own educational goals? We will examine the education received by the children of New Yorkers, especially its newcomers, with a focus on the children of Jews. To understand the Jewish experience, however, we must contrast it with the major immigrant community of the time, the Catholics.

In the 1840s and early 1850s, most Jewish children were enrolled in Jewish day schools and received religious and secular instruction in Hebrew and English subjects. By the end of the 1850s, all synagogue-sponsored day schools had closed, and most Jewish students were enrolled in the city's public schools, where they received the same instruction as their Christian classmates.



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TRUSTEES

OF THE

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WILLIAM SMITH, Teacher of School No. I.
JOHN MISSING, Teacher of School No. II.

(Courtesy Stephan F. Brumberg)

Whatever religious instruction they received was offered in supplementary evening or weekend schools.

By contrast, the Catholic church formally rejected the public schools and set out to create a parallel Catholic system for its children, although a significant number of Catholic children continued to attend the city's public schools. How and why did different faith communities react differently to the changing education sector of New York City?

The Public School Society

The Public School Society (PSS), which began as a charitable venture in 1805, opened its first school in 1806 for the children of impoverished whites who were not members of a religious society. The PSS changed over the decades and came to resemble a public board of education, providing free primary education to the city's children, regardless of church membership or denomination.[8] But it was not a publicly controlled system of schooling, since it was run by a private, self-perpetuating board of trustees. It acted in the public interest, as that interest was interpreted by a self-defined group of citizen-philanthropists—all male, most Protestants, and all members of the city's economic and social elite. It could be, and was, attacked as serving a particular interest and not reflecting the public will. For the board members' part, they believed they acted out of benevolence to the children of the poor and of service to the public good:

> Destitute of all moral and mental culture, [the children of the poor] were wandering about the streets, exposed to the influence of corrupt example, and at a time of life, when the impressions which are made, generally fix the features of the future character. From the want of a virtuous education, they were more liable to become the victims of those evils, by which public hospitals and alms-houses are often filled with objects of disease and poverty, and society burdened with taxes for their support.[9]

In 1840, seven Catholic schools petitioned the New York City Common Council for a share of the state common school funds. The Scotch Presbyterian Church, along with the Jewish congregations Shearith Israel (on Crosby Street) and Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, joined in the petition for a portion of school monies for "schools attached to said Churches or Congregations."[10] In formal opposition were the commissioners of school money, the PSS, and "other (unnamed) societies and individuals," primarily Protestant.[11]

The Catholic campaign for public support of its free schools, directed by Bishop John Hughes, was rejected by the New York City Common Council in 1840 and by the New York State Legislature in 1841 and 1842. However, the state legislature did pass a law in 1842, effectively reaffirming an earlier 1824 decision to ban the use of public funds for sectarian schooling. It directed New York City to establish its own board of education, paralleling the system throughout the state. It also established ward boards of education composed of

elected officials to open and run the schools. Several years later, the city board of education absorbed the schools of the PSS. This monumental "school war" left the nominally secular public schools in control of most education in New York City and the "defeated" Catholic petitioners fully committed to establishing a school system of their own.[12] Where did the Jews fit in?

At the founding of the New York City public schools in 1842, the city contained three religious groups, of unequal size and power, each with different orientations to Bible reading in the public schools and to religious instruction in general. As William Huchison observed, "[W]hereas diversity [defined as a fact or condition] happened to American religion in the first half of the nineteenth century, pluralism [an ideal or impulse] of the kind people now discuss did not arrive until the second half of the twentieth."[13]

Established New Yorkers, overwhelmingly Protestant, were not prepared to concede either their control of the city or their cultural heritage. There were elements of tolerance in the community but little openness to a pluralism that involved full participation by various religious confessions in the ongoing rule and life of the community. The public schools were perceived as liberal efforts to include all groups, but that inclusion required accepting the Protestant definitions of "public" school and the role of religion in those schools. The Catholic hierarchy, for its part, wanted to sustain its separation—religiously and to a considerable degree culturally—hence it was neither attracted to the "public" schools nor willing to accept the proffered conditions for entry. For the Protestant leaders of the city, the Catholic demands were perceived as threats not only to the nonsectarian nature of the public schools but to the separation of religious establishments and the state—at least as this had been worked out over the prior half-century.

Jews, anxious to gain inclusion into the political, economic, and civil life of the city, came to see the public schools as a means to such ends for their children. Hence they were willing to make concessions and tolerate the nonsectarian Protestant religious practices of the public schools. And in any event, as a relatively small community at that time, they were not in a position to make nonnegotiable demands.

For Bishop Hughes, Protestantism was a heresy, no better than deism or "indifferentism," and not on an equal footing with the Roman Catholic Church.[14] He was interested in teaching Catholic children the Truths of the Church, not religious relativism—yet another reason for avoiding the public schools. As he wrote in 1852 to Archbishop Blanc, recollecting the school war of 1840–1842 and the public schools established in its wake,

> This *dragon* of education is, in my mind, devouring the hope of the Country as well as of religion. As at present it is *socialism*, Red republicanism, universalism, infidelity, deism, atheism, pantheism—any thing, every thing, except religionism & patriotism.[15]

It is important to note that Hughes was by no means alone in proposing a system of denominational free schools, supported by public funds, both as a means of resolving religious controversies and allowing the full expression of freedom of conscience and of religious practice. In 1841 the educational committee of the Episcopal Church, at its general convention, recommended a system of diocesan schools. Sectarian religion was seen as indispensable to the proper education of the child, combining the development of his or her moral nature along with the intellectual. Such instruction could only be provided under church auspices.[16]

The Presbyterians, in their general assembly of 1847, voted in favor of a parochial school to be attached to each of their churches. In their view the public schools had repudiated "all connexion [*sic*] with the Church" and had woefully neglected moral education. The mind was addressed but not the heart: "The Chinese custom of bandaging the feet is not a more effectual encroachment on the perfection of the physical system than our political custom of dwarfing the heart is a dishonour to the moral system."[17]

In the 1840s and 1850s, the Jews of New York also set about to create schools attached to their congregations. Many New Yorkers, as well as many other Americans, supported publicly funded denominational schooling, but it was not to happen. The rejection of denominational schooling was due, in part, to the economics of schooling and the inability of most denominations to support systems of education. The proscriptions against public support of denominational schooling found in the laws of many states—not just New York—denied denominational schools the financial support they needed. There was also a reading of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would proscribe state support of religion, a position comfortable to many Americans. But as Timothy Smith has argued, the widespread leadership of Protestant clergy and lay leaders in the establishment, formation, and governance of public schools "stamped upon neighborhoods, states, and nation an interdenominational Protestant ideology which nurtured dreams of personal and social progress. By the middle of the nineteenth century, leading citizens assumed that Americanism and Protestantism were synonyms and that education and Protestantism were allies."[18]

The lack of public funds, it must be noted, did not deter Catholics from creating parochial schools run by the church—the second largest school system in the nation. Nor did it deter the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church from creating its schools, nor, in our day, did it hinder the development of Jewish day schools and schools run by many religious denominations. But the system of free public schools, open to children of all religious backgrounds (or no religious affiliation at all), and supposedly divorced from any religion or denomination, became, and still is, the dominant educational force in America.

Protestants and Politicians

The motley group of petitioners in 1840 had not argued against religious instruction or practice as such, but for denominational schooling—a share in the public funds to support sectarian schools for their own children. Every religious sect, they argued, should share in the school funds to offer free primary schooling that encompassed religious as well as secular instruction.

The New York City Common Council Committee on School Money rejected the proposal of making funds available to all religious denominations as a means of ensuring equity in the disbursement of school funds. Committee members argued that any religious instruction, supported by public funds, was contrary to the settled American principle of religious disestablishment.[19] In rejecting the arguments of the petitioners, the committee cited New York State law prohibiting the distribution of school funds to schools that engaged in sectarian instruction.

> The Legislature intended the Public School Fund to be employed for the purpose of communicating to the children of the state, instruction of a strictly secular character, altogether unconnected with either political or religious education.[20]

There were also fears, expressed by the PSS, that if funds were distributed to every denomination, there would not be adequate funds for "public schools." Additionally, there were concerns that such a system would foment clashes between and among sects, and

> bigotry, fanaticism and violence might assume the place of charity, meekness and love.… The history of the world teems with examples of religious excitement, degenerating into wild and embittered fanaticism; jealousies converted into open dissensions, and dissensions ripening into wars, and those wars devastating whole nations, until the angry feelings of the partizans [*sic*] were satiated by the blood of their victims.[21]

The committee expressed the growing consensus that public schools should confine themselves to secular studies and "moral education," while Sunday schools would provide basic religious instruction. "Without Sunday schools," as Ann Boylan has argued, "'the common school deal' (with all its racial and religious blind spots) would never have worked. Sunday schools enabled Americans to reject denominational schooling and class-oriented public education in favor of the ideal—if not the reality—of free public schooling for all."[22]

It is apparent that the committee wanted to steer clear of religious strife and hoped that the unwritten public school–Sunday school compromise would hold in New York. Inter-denominational hostility was a real and present danger, especially between Protestants and Catholics. The committee members were clearly sensitive to potential fault lines that multiplied and deepened as the city's

population grew and became more variegated.[23] The vivid language and extreme scenarios of the committee's report suggest that the last thing members wanted to do was to exacerbate divisions and encourage sectarianism. They naively believed that a religiously neutral, nonsectarian, secular education would be acceptable to most New Yorkers. Hence their conclusion that

> No desire exists to include one sect in the benefits of the School Fund, and exclude others, but the object of the Committee, has been to keep that fund sacredly appropriated to the purposes for which it was created—the purposes of free and common secular education.[24]

The committee's arguments were consistent with those set out in the First Amendment and in the writings of Jefferson and Madison.[25] They saw a clear distinction between the role of the church and of the state, and they sought to maintain that separation.

The decision also ensured a continued separate educational life for many of New York City's Catholic children. As historian Diane Ravitch concluded in her study of this period, the Catholic clergy believed that

> the religious liberty of Catholic school children could be protected only in a school where the Catholic religion was taught. A school which attempted to teach all creeds or no creed at all was repugnant to them. Devout Catholics did not want their children exposed to other religions, nor did they want their children educated in a school which put error and truth on an equal footing.[26]

The Jewish Petition to the New Board of Education

The Jewish reaction to the rejected petition was more subdued. Jews joined in the petition initiated by the Catholics so that they could share in state funds if the decision were favorable. In 1840, however, they had less at stake. They were still a very small community with perhaps one school; it is not clear if the Polonies Talmud Torah, run by Shearith Israel, was actually in operation as a day school at that time.

The Jews, however, retained interest in public education. As soon as the new board of education was constituted in 1843, they pressed their claims for just treatment and against practices and instructional materials they perceived as anti-Jewish. The trustees of the Fourth Ward, a heavily immigrant neighborhood located just to the east and north of city hall, communicated the Jews' concerns to the board of education. The Jews complained of passages in certain textbooks being used in the ward schools that were anti-Jewish or that explicitly promoted the Christian religion.[27]

The select committee of the board of education that was formed to review the complaints took the position that the law creating the public schools did

not "prohibit the teaching, inculcating or practicing religious doctrines or tenets in our Schools" but only prohibited "religious *sectarian* doctrine."[28] Since Christianity was not a sect, interdenominational Christianity could legitimately be taught and practiced in the public schools as long as the schools avoided sectarian creeds and doctrines. The select committee did not follow the precedent of the 1840 Common Council Committee on School Money, which maintained clear separation of religion and public schooling; nor did it appear to have been influenced by the writings of Madison and Jefferson.

Initially questioning why it was only Jews from the Fourth Ward who complained (overlooking that this ward was the center of the Jewish population in the city, especially of recently immigrated Jews), the committee followed with a back-handed compliment: "It is a well known fact (which is highly creditable to the members of the Jewish persuasion) that they are very little prone to interfere with the institutions of the country."[29] Most of the textbook passages that the Jews found offensive were in *American Popular Lessons* by Eliza Robbins, originally published in 1820 and revised and reprinted frequently.[30] The PSS had long employed the book, which "was used in its original [1820] form for nine years, chiefly in the Public Schools of the city of New York"[31] and by the New York City Board of Education. In it we find the following: "A man asked Jesus Christ what he should do to be good, and to be happy. Jesus Christ told the man, he must love God; and that he must love his neighbor as himself."[32] Aside from the christological reference, this moral lesson can be found in Jewish as well as Christian writings. But we also find:

> There was a city in Asia, called Jerusalem; it was the largest city of the people called Jews. Jesus Christ was killed by the Jews at Jerusalem.[33]

> Jesus Christ was the Son of God. He says of himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life.… I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."[34]

The Jews of the Fourth Ward objected to many passages in this and other textbooks. All were in a similar vein, and Jews across the city would have viewed them as either offensive or inappropriate. They also objected to the reading of the New Testament.

The select committee could find no grounds for objections to the cited passages, "even by the Jews except what may arise from the fact that they are chiefly derived from the New Testament, and inculcate the general principles of Christianity."[35] After all, the committee asserted, they express beautiful and noble sentiments. They rejected as without merit any complaints of the material's Christian nature. We need to examine their argument closely because it frames subsequent arguments regarding religion in the schools. The select committee rejected out of hand the position of the trustees of the Fourth Ward who

> say that they do not see any good reason why the religious opinions of the Jew should not be regarded with the same favor as those of Christians—and they therefore call on this Board to exclude from our Common Schools all books which inculcate the principles of the Christian religion, or else to deprive such Schools of all participation in the public money.
>
> Your Committee cannot but view this as a most extraordinary and untenable position on the part of the said Trustees; and the principles assumed by them, if carried out, would justify the Mohametans, the Chinese or Pagans, on their coming among us, to object to our whole system of public instruction, because it interfered with their monstrous, absurd and unintelligible dogmas and superstitions.
>
> Even the Jews have not, and from the very nature of our systems, cannot have the same privileges as those who embrace the Christian religion.… We have indeed secured to all the full enjoyment of their religious belief and mode of worship; but in offering civil and religious liberty to the oppressed of other nations, it surely was not intended to give them the right of changing or interfering with our own religious institutions.[36]

Tolerance yes, but full participation was not yet acceptable. With Jewish objections summarily dispatched, the committee turned next to the Universalists, who objected to some of the same passages as the Jews, especially those regarding the doctrine of future judgment and future rewards and punishments. The committee, however, argued that the principle of future reward and punishment by a supreme being is central to the United States system of justice. We swear to tell the truth, in the full knowledge of this principle. The law, they claim, "recognizes the principle of future punishments; it is a most salutary principle, and very generally admitted among civilized nations as the great bond of safety in the administration of civil justice" and should be impressed upon children at every occasion.[37]

The final claim the committee rejected relates to reading from the Protestant Bible. The Catholics strenuously objected and were joined by the Jews, albeit for quite different reasons. The committee argued that the legislation creating the board in 1842 "did not intend to exclude the Holy Scriptures from our common schools, nor to prohibit the inculcation of the great and fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion."[38] They argued that Christianity and the use of the Protestant Bible is enshrined in national and state statutes and practices: Sabbath day laws, swearing oaths of office or to give testimony in court, laws requiring that masters give Bibles to apprentices and the state to convicts, and so on. The state, they argued, would hardly have intended to deprive schoolchildren of the Bible.

Following the logic of the committee's argument, if the Bible were to be eliminated from the schools, it implied that God was ejected from the school-

house. It could also be seen as a denial of American history, made comprehensible only in terms of biblical typological narratives.[39] And finally, as the above objections to schoolbooks demonstrated, biblical selections were a mainstay of school readers and spellers, which served the dual purposes of literacy instruction and moral education. Without moral instruction, a principal reason for schooling would be lost.

The presumptions and prejudices of the select committee reflected the rise of evangelical Protestantism and the believed fusion of Protestantism and American civilization.[40] The report can be viewed against the backdrop of evangelical Protestant activism directed at significant religious challenges, especially the growing Catholic presence, and the perceived rise in immorality in America's rapidly growing cities. As Naomi Cohen has written,

> The new climate of opinion, spawned by the second Great Awakening, was… a rude awakening for American Jews. On several levels they found themselves out of step. Just as soon as they had fully appropriated the Jeffersonian teachings on religious freedom, those same Enlightenment principles were being brushed aside or repudiated by religious activists. While Jews remained frozen in an eighteenth-century philosophy that questioned the legitimacy of a religious state, America moved on to a nineteenth-century romantic mood that held Christianity to be the progenitor of individual rights and social values.[41]

But if the tenor of the times impelled the polity to accept the Protestant basis of American society as well as the biblical base of moral instruction, which version of the Bible should be read? It had to be a Protestant version, preferably the King James, since the Catholic Douay Bible "is accompanied with numerous comments and notes illustrating and enforcing the peculiar doctrines and tenets of the Roman Catholic Church, and is so far at least decidedly sectarian in its character, and clearly within the prohibitory clause of the act [creating the education board]."[42]

The committee could not envision schools without the Bible. They asked how one could teach the origin of the world—astronomy, geology, and human origins—"without a resort to the revealed world of God," which, they believed, underlay all instruction.[43] The committee concluded by rejecting all complaints forwarded by the trustees of the Fourth Ward and said that "the Bible [without note or comment] should be retained in our common schools."[44]

Before the rise of public schools in the 1820s and 1830s, nearly all American schools were private, and many were church-related. With the rise of public schools, churches, in their institutional forms, were separated from public education. But the schools remained linked to religion through the Bible. For most Americans, religion could not be divorced from life, nor from a child's education. And for believers, the Bible was the proof text for moral instruction,

the foundation on which to build the lives of the rising generation. To sever the schools from the Bible, the very "word of God," was to eject God from the schools, condemn many children to lives of immorality, and sentence society to potential chaos.

The school system reflected in the select committee report was neither welcoming to Jews nor Catholics. You may enter our schools, it said, but on our terms. This is a Christian (read Protestant) land, and our ways ought to become your ways.

Decentralizing School Decision-Making

The board of education, in the following year, sent signals that it had backed off this confrontational approach to religious diversity. The "Report of the Committee on the Annual Apportionment, on the communications of the County Superintendent, relative to the use of THE BIBLE in the Public Schools of the City of New York" was triggered by an overzealous superintendent of schools who tried to enforce compulsory Bible reading in all the ward schools. This committee argued that the central board of education had no authority to require such readings, nor to select books for ward schools. These were the clear legal prerogatives of the ward trustees, who "are at liberty to pursue such a course [reading or not reading the Bible] as their own sense of duty and the peculiar circumstances of their schools may dictate to them, as most expedient."[45]

The commissioners of the board of education wanted to gather in all children of "poverty and destitution" by practicing tolerance and respect for the wishes of residents in each ward. They feared that "one false step" might drive these children from the schools, where they would be "left to grow up in hopeless ignorance."[46]

The committee concluded that only eleven ward schools had omitted Bible readings.

> When we consider that these schools are made up almost wholly of the children of Catholic parents, who have hitherto been unwilling to send their children to any public school, that they were heretofore confined wholly to the scanty provisions which were made for instruction by the Catholic Church, that the schools in which they are now gathered are prohibited by law from teaching, inculcating, or practicing any of the peculiar tenets of their Church; and that Bible lessons and Scripture histories are among their class books, the Committee thinks there is much reason for congratulation in the progress which has already been made.[47]

A local option, determined by ward trustees, would serve to mollify local constituents. But once in our schools, they implied, we can still shape their sensibilities, even if every outward form is not observed. This was the very covert practice that Hughes found so objectionable—insinuating the Protestant school between the Catholic child, his or her parents, and their church.[48]

Bible Reading in the Schools

The pressure to make Bible reading compulsory continued unabated throughout the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s. The established Protestant churches, especially evangelical denominations, saw the suspension of mandatory Bible reading as a sign of the public school's godlessness, which reinforced their fears that the city would be overrun by illiterate, immoral, and un-Christian immigrants. The need to transform immigrant children into right thinking and believing Americans is captured in a report from a New York Sunday School Union school in 1848:

> Our school is composed of immigrant German children, some of whom have been in this country only a few months. Our room is full. Multitudes of Germans might be gathered into S. [*sic*] schools in this section of the city, with *very little* effort, if rooms and teachers could be procured. What else but the S. school can *Americanize* the thousands of German children in our city, and fit them to become citizens of the republic, and finally of the heavenly Jerusalem?[49]

This is a very early use of the term "Americanize." It is important to note that transformation was as much religious as sociocultural and that the Sunday school rather than the public school was the proper place to realize such changes. One is reborn with a new faith, homeland, and language.

The religious element is crucial to the crusade against immigrants because many religious conservatives believed that immigrants brought with them not just foreign ways but immorality and crime. New York City, they claimed, was a growing cesspool of evil and vice in proportion to the growth of its immigrant population. They feared that the city nurtured Satan and his followers, and only religious truth and morality could confront the devil:

> The population of our city is rapidly increasing; it is also fluctuating and heterogeneous in its character. The great gateway of the Western World, around it gather the men of all climes, of almost every kingdom, people and nation under the whole heaven. Multitudes linger with us. Adventurers of every hue, of all creeds, and of no creed, paupers with minds as degraded as their bodies are brutalized, felons fleeing from justice—such are some of the elements constantly infused into our social system. And these evils of our position are as yet, we have much reason to fear, but in the infancy of their development. But besides this constant infusion of foreign depravity, we are continually imbibing the infection of vice from our interior towns. Reckless and vicious adventurers every where find their most natural prey in the population of large cities. So long, then, as Satan remains unchained, may we look for monsters of evil in our midst, who care neither for age, nor sex, so that they may gloat over their victims. Need we then wonder at the desecration of the Lord's day amongst us, and at the wayward, untractable character of too many of our youth?[50]

To the Protestant religious establishment, the schools could not be neutral. If the public schools did not provide proper religious instruction and did not shape the moral character of its students according to Bible truth, then they became party to the evil and a breeder of vice and crime.

The board of education remained trapped between the Protestant religious forces wishing to enlist the public schools in their crusade against the devil and to instill simple gospel truths[51] in the students, and the board's desire to enroll all children of the city in the public schools to raise the level of literacy and shape future American citizens. The board of education's commissioners, as elected officials, tended to be more "liberal" regarding the religious orientation of schools. Commissioners—especially those from districts with large numbers of immigrant Catholics and Jews—tended to support "local option" and downplay formal religious instruction and practices. This position is best exemplified by Erastus C. Benedict, Esq., board president in the early 1850s. He argued that

> The basis of our system is not that all sects should alike be patronized by the government, but that the government has nothing to do with any of them.… [Religion] cannot be compelled… and it is quite plain that there can be no Common Schools if sectarian peculiarities are to be taught in them, or if the different sects are to be allowed to apply the school moneys to sectarian purposes.[52]

Not only should sectarian instruction be banned, but all religious instruction should be eliminated. For Benedict, there ought to be a clear functional separation of religion and public education;[53] he believed that secular studies could be safely pursued without religious instruction.[54] "No one would think that the musical gamut or the five positions of the dancing school should be mixed up with religious instructions, nor that the teaching of the mechanics' shop and the factory… be alternative with catechism and creeds."[55] Each has its proper place, he said, and religion need not fear the secular studies followed in public schools:

> It is a transparent fallacy that there is anything in learning—no matter how rudimental or how profound—that is inconsistent with religion.… Who can believe, in this age of the world, that it is necessary to exorcise the multiplication table—to cast out devils from orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody, and to protect the youthful mind against heresies and infidelity that lurk in penmanship and arithmetic?[56]

Benedict's clear separation of church and school was not echoed by the influential city superintendent of schools, Samuel S. Randall, who served in that post from 1854 to 1870. Randall came to New York City from Albany, where he had been New York State deputy superintendent of common schools.[57] In his inaugural annual report he proclaimed:

> Upon the broad foundations… of an assured conviction of the immortality of our existence as sentient and intelligent beings, and of the truth of that Christian Revelation which has shed its clear and benignant light upon our path, must we construct the work of education.[58]

The place of religion in the public schools was by no means a settled issue. Interestingly, the Samuel Randall who led the battle to make Bible reading compulsory in all public schools, *with no exceptions*, was the brother of Henry Randall, who, as state superintendent of common schools, had ruled in 1853 that a Catholic child could not be compelled to read the Protestant Bible. However, Henry Randall ruled, teachers could lead Bible reading (without note or comment), hymns, and prayers before school hours, with children attending voluntarily.[59]

In the mid-1850s, the politics of the period in New York City favored tolerance and local option. The laws governing public education in the city were modified in 1853 by the New York State Legislature.[60] While the law—known as the "consolidated law"— permits Bible reading, it was not required. But if read, it could not be accompanied by note or comment, hence excluding the Catholic Douay Bible. Yet another clause prevented the central board of education from selecting which version of the Bible, *if any,* should be used. It prohibited sectarian teachings and barred books that were "prejudicial to the particular doctrines or tenets of any particular Christian *or other religious sect* [italics mine]." This responded directly to Catholic and Jewish criticism of schoolbooks that were anathema to their beliefs and practices. The paragraph didn't speak directly to the issue of school prayer, although the clause protecting "the rights of conscience" obliquely addressed compulsory prayer. It didn't prohibit the recitation of "The Lord's Prayer," for example, but it seemed to have made it voluntary.

To enforce this aspect of the school law, the consolidated law made it incumbent upon all school officers in every ward to "examine, ascertain, and report to the Board of Education… whether the provisions of this Act in relation to the teaching of sectarian doctrines, or the use of sectarian books shall have been violated."[61] The city superintendent was also to visit schools to see that sectarian doctrines and books were not being used and to report back to the board of education if he found any violations.[62]

The Free Academy, which the board of education had established in 1847 and which would be renamed The City College of New York in 1866, was also affected by the consolidated law. The section of the law titled "Regarding the Free Academy" stipulated that applicants are required to "*have attended the Common Schools for twelve months*."[63] This entry requirement elevated the academic status of the common schools and made them relatively more attractive to those—especially in the immigrant community—who were aspiring to a free higher education.

The 1853 revisions of school law made the ward schools reasonably acceptable to Jews. They now had the law on their side in efforts to root out schoolbooks they found offensive. The compromise on Bible reading could work if they lived in wards with concentrations of Jewish residents, as the trustees could be expected to be sympathetic to potential voters. Either public Bible reading could be suspended, or readings could be drawn from the Old Testament, without note or comment, a position comfortable to Jews.[64] The choice of which version of the Bible to use was not critical for Jews since the American Jewish community had yet to produce an American English translation of the Old Testament. And the constitutional right, cited in the revised laws, to freedom of conscience could be exercised to prevent compulsory prayer for Jewish children, while still leaving the door open for Christian prayers and hymns for others.

The law did not work for Catholics, however. It still outlawed their English version of the Bible, since it included notes and commentary, and it denied school funds to any school that gave sectarian instruction. As Dr. John Power, a priest in the New York Diocese, had written, readings from the King James translation of the Bible, without note or comments, were unacceptable:[65]

> The Catholic Church tells her children that they must be taught their religion by AUTHORITY. The Sects say, read the bible, judge for yourselves. The bible is read in the public schools, the children are allowed to judge for themselves. The Protestant principle is therefore acted upon, slyly inculcated, and the schools are Sectarian.[66]

Nothing short of public funding of religious schools, complete with the freedom to incorporate particular religious beliefs and practices into the ongoing instructional program, could meet Catholic requirements. Catholics backed public support for all denominational schools but could not support religiously neutral or secular public schools. Bishop Hughes and his supporters believed that inculcating and protecting the faith of his followers demanded Catholic education run by the Catholic church and staffed by Catholic teachers, preferably drawn from religious orders. Public schools were defined as Protestant (and heretical) and, hence, inappropriate for Catholic children.[67] This was the position Bishop Kenrick came to embrace in Philadelphia, and it was later adopted by the entire American Roman Catholic Church.[68] Catholic schools were necessary not only to impart truth and educate children of the church but as a vital element to preserve, reinforce, and transmit to the new generation belief in, and loyalty to, the authority of the church, to the orthodoxy of its religious teachings, and to the legitimacy of its hierarchy.

The new school law of 1853 was not always acceptable to New York's Protestants. The wealthier Protestants still sent their children to private schools and academies, many affiliated with established churches. But most New Yorkers gravitated to the public schools. Between 1829 and 1850, the public school share

of total enrollments increased from 38 percent to 82 percent, including not only the poorer classes, but the middle classes, as well.[69] Evangelical church leaders increasingly attacked the public schools as ungodly, especially because they tolerated removal of the Bible from the schoolroom (a charge not true for most classrooms, but true enough in many immigrant wards that enrolled the very children felt to be most in need of gospel learning). In 1857, board President Andrew H. Green was forced to respond to such attacks:

> The charge… that the Public Schools are sources of infidelity, vice and crime, is so extraordinary, that the Board are unwilling to believe that it has been made, in seriousness and sincerity, by any person whose opinions on the subject are worthy of any respect.[70]

Citing City Superintendent S. Randall's report, he assured the public that Christian morality was taught by precept and practice. Green argued that many other sources for the crime and vice in the community were responsible without searching out the public schools to blame. In fact, the moral instruction the schools offered buttressed the morals of the community then under attack. His contemporary social critique resonates in the present:

> The principles of trade, as more recently taught, by which it is given up to free selfishness and competition; the doctrine practically set up, that national wealth is the highest national good; the tactics of political parties, so full of temptations to evil; the wonderful activity with which crimes, and even the rumors and suspicions of crimes, are sought for and gathered up, painted in vivid and romantic colors, and spread before the whole people, every day, in the columns of our able and interesting newspapers, so cheap that beggars can buy, and so appetizing as to tempt the dullest palates, and sure to chronicle the ultimate and easy escape of ten times as many suspected and accused as the punished or the convicted, even—these are causes more than enough, unrestrained, to account for all the vice and crime among us.[71]

City Superintendent Randall also took up defense of the schools, albeit without Green's cynicism. He assured the critics that God had not been expelled and that the public schools embraced Christian virtue.

> In all our Public Schools and departments, with a very few and inconsiderable exceptions, the services of each day are commenced by the reading of selections from the Bible, by the Principal or some one of the School Officers, followed by the solemn and reverent repetition of the Lord's Prayer by all the pupils and teachers in concert, and by the singing of one or more appropriate hymns of Christian thanksgiving and praise.[72]

Regardless of the argument's rationale or the eloquence of its presentation, the religious critics could not and did not accept a public school system that

Erasmus Hall, 1850
(Courtesy Brooklyn College Library Archives)

made Bible reading voluntary. For the religious forces, the Bible symbolized the presence of God. God's presence was not "voluntary," to be decided by a political consensus of infidels. It was The Truth. The battle to ensure God's sovereignty could not be broken off.

The board of education, therefore, was caught between the hard place of politics and the rock of religion. It had to serve all communities to spread the benefits of education, upon which a free, democratic society depended; but it could not antagonize the Protestant religious establishment, which was well connected with the social, political, and economic elites of the city, upon whom the board depended for its resources.

Jewish Education in New York City in the 1840s and 1850s

The growing community of German and English Jews in New York City in the 1840s had few alternatives for educating their children. The schools of the Public School Society, and, after 1842, the board of education, were perceived as Protestant and unwelcoming to Jews. In addition, the PSS schools were primarily run on the Lancasterian model: one teacher to hundreds of students, with most actual instruction provided by student "monitors."[73] Such pauper-tainted schools were off-putting to parents with even very modest means, who preferred fee-paying "private schools" with far smaller classes.

Public schools used objectionable schoolbooks, and Jewish parents found the Christian religious practices problematic as well. But most private schooling was church-affiliated and inappropriate for Jewish students, as well. Starting in 1842, New York City synagogues began to establish day schools.[74] By the mid-1850s seven schools had enrolled more than 850 students and employed thirty-five teachers (a student-to-teacher ratio of about 24:1). These numbers can be compared with the substantially larger Catholic community, which

operated seventeen parochial schools, and Protestant denominations, which ran six. The twenty-three Christian schools, which enrolled several thousand students, employed seventy teachers.[75]

Unfortunately, the histories of the Jewish schools were not adequately recorded, nor were their records archived. However, the partial records of two of seven schools established between 1842 and 1857 have survived: the Hebrew National School of Congregation Shaarey Zedek and the B'nai Jeshurun Educational Institute.[76] We can get a sense of the day schools from the "minute book" of the Hebrew National School, which was reviewed and excerpted by Hyman Grinstein in the early 1940s,[77] and from the partial records of the Educational Institute.[78]

Jewish Day Schools in New York City, 1842–1860

Synagogue	***Date(s) Founded***	***Date Closed***
B'nai Jeshurun	1842, 1853	1847, 1855
Ansche Chesed	1845	1857
Rodeph Shalom	1845	(before 1857)
Shaarey Hashamayim	1845	(before 1857)
Emanu-El	1850	(before 1860)
Shaarey Zedek	1853	Jan. 1857
Shearith Israel[79]	1855	(before 1860)

Shaarey Zedek was the first congregation to erect its own school building; other schools used existing vestry rooms or rented quarters. When their school building opened 1 December 1853, among the dignitaries invited to present a toast was the young alderman William M. Tweed, not yet the infamous "Boss" Tweed. Tweed rose through the political ranks serving immigrant neighborhoods, and here was an opportunity to see and be seen among a new and growing group.[80] The Jewish congregation, for its part, felt sufficiently confident of its place in society to call on a government officeholder, who saw it as politic to accept.

The school opened with fifty students on 6 December 1853. Its hours were Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM. (with an hour recess for lunch) and Sundays from 9:00 AM to noon. The principal Hebrew teacher, the Rev. M.S. Cohen, along with his assistant, Mr. Moritz Zepler, gave instruction in Hebrew reading, translation of Hebrew into English, grammar, writing, *Shulhan Aruhk* (code of Jewish law and its application to daily life), cantilation (chanting Torah), *Tanach* (The Five Books of Moses), and Torah commentaries. The school offered a full secular course of study in its English department. Mr. Van Epps was selected as its principal, assisted by Miss A.K. Homer, who was responsible for educating the girls. English instruction included reading,

writing, spelling, arithmetic, grammar, geography, use of maps, ancient and modern history, composition, bookkeeping, and natural philosophy, "including every other branch of a finished English Education."[81] Girls also received instruction in plain needle work and drawing. The intention was to provide a secular education on a par with any American school. They sought experienced teachers "for the English Department, Teachers who have been trained in one of the American Normal Schools will be preferred."[82]

The school did not neglect religious practice or moral instruction. With echoes of the public school debate, the laws and regulations of the school stated that

> It shall be imperative on the Hebrew Teachers respectively to read or have read in the School daily… some portion of Holy Writ from the Bible *in English* and to address them daily on some scriptural or moral subject—The religious and moral training of the pupils being an essential Branch of the School Business. [emphasis added][83]

In addition, each school day was to open and close with prayer, in both Hebrew and English, and students were expected to attend Sabbath services along with their Hebrew teachers.

Unfortunately, the school was hardly launched before it encountered financial problems. Loans and promissory notes had to be arranged to pay for building construction, and additional money had to be raised to support operations. The school charged fees (from four dollars per quarter in the first class to seven dollars per quarter for the fourth and highest class), but many parents did not pay. This was especially irritating to congregation members when the derelict parents were not congregants. In November 1854 the synagogue board "Resolved that this [school] Committee do not feel themselves authorized to admit children into the School without pay more especially such whose parents are not members of the Congregation."[84] The nonpayment of fees continued, as did enrollment of children of nonmembers: By the spring of 1854, fifty-four of the ninety pupils enrolled were nonmembers' children. At that time expenses for the school (most probably on an annual basis) was $1,850, but income from student fees totaled only $1,540, with the congregation making up the difference.[85] The school's record breaks off at this point, although it continued to operate until January 1857.

We know less about the B'nai Jeshurun Educational Institute because the school's records have not survived. However, the minute books of the parent organization, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, include some relevant information.[86] We know it had both Hebrew and English departments, along the lines described for the Hebrew National School. In addition to Hebrew and English, it also taught German and French. Financial concerns are paramount in the minutes of the synagogue board meetings. The congregation backed the school's build-

ing loan and subsequent mortgage and was called on to make up for shortfalls in income. The minutes indicate persistent friction between synagogue board members and the board of directors of the Educational Institute. The school was accused of mismanagement, poor communications with the synagogue board, and a lack of respect and attention the synagogue trustees believed were their due.[87] The school's board of directors ultimately concluded that the school could not be self-governed nor self-financed and proposed returning the responsibility of the school back to the congregation itself.[88] B'nai Jeshurun's board did not receive this proposal enthusiastically, but it did try to help the school collect the substantial amount of overdue school fees.[89]

The situation reached crisis proportions in the spring of 1855, when a special meeting of the entire congregation was held to hear "A Report on the Financial Condition of the Educational Institute and for the Adoption of Measures to prevent the necessity of Closing the School."[90] No plan was adopted and again, on 2 September 1855, a committee was formed "for purpose of making a final effort to continue the School."[91] The committee recommended to the board, on 28 October 1855, that the school be closed on Thursday, 1 November, and that the teachers be notified and paid through that date.[92] Thus, with only three days' notice, the school was closed. By mid-January 1856, a lease was concluded with Mr. A. Loewe, who used the existing building for a private Jewish day school.[93]

The proximate cause of the demise of the synagogue-sponsored day schools was inadequate finances. Jewish education, at least for the well-to-do, did not end with the closing of these schools. Several private Jewish schools survived for decades,[94] and congregations founded supplementary schools in the late 1850s to provide instruction in Jewish subjects to children of congregation members. The problem of sustaining Jewish schools appears to have been twofold: the economics of mass education and inherent interest in Jewish studies.

The economics of Jewish education is intimately tied to the nature of Jewish communal organization. There was no unified *hevrah,* or Jewish community, in New York City in the 1850s. There were a dozen or more Jewish congregations of varying religious expression, each established to serve its members. As the German Jewish community grew, many new, often poor, immigrants could not afford to become "seat-holders" in an established synagogue. Some organized informal *minyanim* (prayer groups) with modest space (in rented quarters or member' homes) and few financial resources—far too few to afford day schools. There was no legally binding *kahal* (Jewish society) in New York City as in many European countries, nor was there even a locally established tradition of collectively providing communal services, such as Jewish education to all the children. Individual congregations might be able to provide a modest financial supplement to a school if limited to members' children and if most members had sufficient wealth to pay for their own children's school fees. But if a school

enrolled children of nonmembers, and parents did not or could not pay fees, individual congregations lacked the wealth to support broad-scale free education. In the absence of community-wide financial support, a mass Jewish educational system could not survive. Those with wealth could send their children to private Jewish schools, but those with modest means, the norm for recent immigrants, could not. The Jewish community was not sufficiently integrated or organized to provide free Jewish education to all its children.

Even if funding were available, was there sufficient interest in Jewish studies to call forth support for Jewish schools? Many of the German Jewish immigrants had received a modest Jewish education in their homelands. It was not a learned community, but a community of peddlers, small-businessmen, and artisans. As Hasia Diner, a scholar of these immigrants, concluded, "[T]he youthful migrants had few skills and had little education in either secular or religious fields."[95]

German Jewish immigrants did come with a background in secular studies. This was due, in part, to government pressure to acculturate Jews as a precondition for civil emancipation. "Governments [in German lands] deemed that equality of rights was appropriate only for Jews who were educated to be at home in the non-Jewish world, and gradually even traditional Jews became at least acquiescent to their children receiving a basic secular education."[96] In Prussia in 1847, half of all Jewish children attended Christian schools. When German Jews immigrated to New York, many were familiar both with secular studies and with sending their children to school with Christians. As secular studies increased, Jewish studies shrank in the curriculum.[97]

The dearth of American Jewish teachers knowledgeable in Jewish subjects, and changes in religious beliefs and practices among some German Jews—which would later give rise to Reform Judaism—reinforced the decline in Jewish studies. In addition, the desire to achieve full emancipation and integration into civil society led "some Jews to believe that their religion too should be made less foreign to its milieu."[98] Hence, many Jewish parents sent their children to Christian schools, providing them with supplementary Jewish education after school hours.

The changes in religious practices among "reforming" Jews resulted in less emphasis on the Hebrew language in ritual and religious practice and less dedication to textual study and commentaries, but greater emphasis on Judaism's moral principles and ethical guidance. Judaism was increasingly recast as a religion among religions rather than a separate and segregated way of life. From a social community "ordering its life on the basis of halakhah [law], Judaism was becoming a 'Konfession.'… the dogmatic content of Judaism… was stressed, its beliefs and creedal affirmations, at the expense of the now more or less dispensable 'Ceremonial Law.'"[99]

As Judaism changed, Jewish educational practices followed suit. There was a decline in the study of Hebrew; an increase in the use of textbooks, especially catechisms, rather than religious texts; and reduced attention to religious ceremony and practices.[100] The changes in religious understanding and practices of "reforming" Jews facilitated their integration into American society. Unlike the German states, this was a nation where civil emancipation was freely available, where the German Jewish project of emancipation could be realized by enacting it in one's own life.

Jewish education, therefore, did not need to be offered in separately sponsored Jewish schools. One could send one's children to public schools or Christian private schools. Jewish education could be condensed, as many Jews of the day believed, and presented in catechetical form and offered in supplementary schools.[101] One by one the synagogues of New York City, reforming as well as more traditional, adopted catechisms for their supplementary schools; the first in New York City, in 1850, was prepared by the Rev. Dr. Merzbacher, the rabbi of Congregation Ansche Chesed.[102]

When one combines the inability of the Jewish community to fund mass Jewish education, the declining interest in rigorous Hebrew and textual studies, and the desire to integrate into the larger American civic community, it becomes easier to understand the wholesale collapse of Jewish day schools in the mid-1850s. When we add to this the relative liberalization due to the Educational Consolidation Law of 1853, which reduced the Christian character of public education and gave greater power to local wards to oversee schoolbooks and practices (hence more directly influenced by the interests and concerns of local constituents), the public schools appeared even more attractive to German Jewish parents. And finally, we need to take note of contemporary economic conditions. The decline of the day schools was coterminous with the banking Panic of 1854–1855 and the more severe Panic of 1857.[103] These were not good times for congregations to raise funds, especially to support the education of nonmembers. Free, "relatively" religiously tolerant public schools must have looked particularly attractive. As Grinstein concluded, "[W]hen the free public schools were… secularized, Jewish children flocked to them, and the all-day Jewish school where a tuition fee was charged collapsed."[104]

The relative attraction of the free public schools was further enhanced by the elimination of the Lancasterian system, improved teacher preparation, new and impressive school buildings, and the potential prize of a free college education for those who graduated from public schools and passed the entrance exams to the Free Academy.

By the late 1850s, most of New York's Jewish students—and indeed, Jewish students across the United States—enrolled in the public schools. Lloyd Gartner has determined that by 1860 most Jewish students were already integrated into American public schools.[105] Public school attendance became the very mark of

American membership and was promoted by the German Jewish community among themselves and among the great wave of East European Jewish immigrants who began to arrive in New York City in the 1880s. Segregated Jewish schools become anathema; public schools were the only training ground for true integration.

> We have no right to open sectarian schools [claims the New York Hebrew Free School Association, which ran supplementary schools]. We cannot, dare not, and must not deprive our children of the benefits of our public schools, the efficiency of which we would never be able to reach or attain. They should and must mingle with children of all nationalities, creeds, and social grades, to grow up to mutual respect, thereby helping us and themselves to break down all barriers of race and creed.[106]

Gartner concluded that as early as the 1860s American Jews believed that "attending public schools and guarding them from sectarianism was the interest and patriotic obligation of American Jews."[107] Here, it was believed, their equality was self-evident and their future within American society assured.

Jews and Catholics in Protestant America: Alternative Paths

The liberal religious consensus in New York City was shaken in 1859. The board of education, over strong opposition and spurred on by City Superintendent Randall, approved changes to the school system's bylaws, making Bible reading compulsory at the start of each school day.[108] Now "all the public schools of this city… shall be opened by the reading of a portion of the Holy Scriptures, without note or comment."[109] For several decades this bylaw was in force, an end-run around state education law, but with sufficient political support to remain in place. The Bible was still read in school assemblies in New York City (and State) well into the 1950s.

The change in bylaws must be read against the backdrop of accelerating immigration and its perceived threat to the established order. By 1860, 47 percent of the city's population was foreign born. If you include the American-born children of immigrants, immigrants' families made up more than half of the city's residents. Schools were the established class's first line of cultural defense, and this class depended on them to Americanize immigrants and teach them Christian morality (anchored in the Bible) to protect the city against crime, vice, pauperism, and chaos.

Most Jewish students were now enrolled in the public schools. There was little chance of turning back. Their Jewish day schools had closed, and it was unlikely that wary congregations would soon leap into new school sponsorships. The goal of the community, many of whom were now entering their second generation in America, was integration, and the public schools were a means to that end. They could live with Bible reading as long as schoolbooks were not

discriminatory and Christian prayers not obligatory. They could speak to Boss Tweed and his colleagues on both sides of the aisle to bring pressure on ward trustees to keep schools as ecumenically friendly as they could.

Bible reading still had symbolic value for the Protestant establishment—the last display of the political dominance they were losing quickly. Jews seemed to understand that religious instruction had, in fact, been removed from the public schools and that Bible reading—without note or comment—recitation of the Lord's Prayer, and the singing of hymns were vestigial practices that had lost their "original intent" and could be ignored.

Although many Catholic children still attended public schools, the Catholic hierarchy had rejected public schools and set out to create a parallel school system of their own.[110] Jews at the time did not follow their fellow immigrants—Irish and German Catholics—into educational separatism, but came to identify more closely with Protestant America and with its public schools. Their desire to accommodate and integrate themselves into American society led them to the schools of the dominant culture.

By the Civil War, the Jews of New York were committed to public education. At the end of the nineteenth century they became the shepherds guiding their coreligionists from eastern Europe into public schools, where they would be transformed and "Americanized" into the very models of modern American citizens.[111] For a century and a half, the Jewish presence in New York City's public schools contributed to the system's legitimacy. By entering and working from within, Jews hastened the diversification of the school's student body and secularization of its instruction.

What if New York's Catholics had been able to reach a compromise with the New York City Board of Education and their children had been incorporated into the public schools? Conversely, what if it had been decided that public funds should be distributed to all religious denominations? What would have been the fate of religious and moral education and of tolerance for diversity?

These questions, while hypothetical, have real implications for today's education. With the considerable growth of Jewish day schools and the significant decline in Catholic school enrollments, with discussions of vouchers, charter schools, and school choice, how will the landscape of schooling be altered? What will children of different religious, racial, ethnic, class, and ideological backgrounds learn, not just from their lessons, but from the nature of the schools they attend and the classmates with whom they study? What lessons will they not learn because they do not attend school with the children of groups who find the public schools unacceptable?

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Notes

*It is an honor to participate in this issue of *The American Jewish Archives Journal* honoring Naomi W. Cohen, my colleague at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Living as I do in the nineteenth century, I have benefited immensely from the work of my fellow time-traveler. I have long relied on Naomi's prodigious contributions to the field of American Jewish history, especially her clear and accurate narratives and illuminating insights. This article attempts to build upon the firm scholarly foundation she has provided to all of us.

[1]I wish to gratefully acknowledge the financial and moral support of the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, which has enabled me to carry out research and writing on this project.

[2]Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press; and New York: The New York Historical Society, 1995), 149, 922, 933.

[3]A small proportion of Irish were Protestant, but German immigration was more varied: Approximately one-third of German immigrants were Catholics, nearly two-thirds Lutherans, and a small proportion Jewish.

[4]Jews who emigrated from middle Europe came from many lands and political jurisdictions, from Alsace-Lorraine on the west to Prussian-controlled Posen in western Poland. For a discussion of the German Jewish immigration, see Hasia Diner, "Immigration, German" in *Jewish-American History and Culture: an Encyclopedia*, ed. Jack Fischel and Sanford Pinsker (New York and London: Garland, 1992), 255–258.

[5]Ira Rosenwaike, *On the edge of Greatness: A Portrait of American Jewry in the Early National Period* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1985), 31.

[6]Deborah Dash Moore, "New York City," in *Jewish-American History and Culture*, 461.

[7]New York (City) - Public Schools [*sic*; Common Council], "Report of the Committee on Arts and Sciences and Schools of the Board of Assistants, on the subject of Appropriating a portion of the School Money to Religious Societies, for the support of Schools." Document No. 80 (New York: n.p., 1840), 375. Documents related to petitions for school funds, debates in the City Council, and legislative enactments are located in the Board of Education Archives, housed in the New York City Municipal Archives.

[8]For the founding and a sympathetic history of the Public School Society, see William Oland Bourne, *History of the Public School Society of the City of New York with Portraits of the Presidents of the Society* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1971) (reprint of 1870 original edition); see also Carl F. Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), esp. ch. 3; A. Emerson Palmer, *The New York Public School: Being a History of Free Education in the City of New York* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1905), chs. 1–12. For a more recent overview and assessment, see Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: New York City, 1805–1973* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 27–76. The children of freed blacks attended schools run by the African Free School Society, the first of which opened in 1787. The PSS eventually took over control of these schools but ran them as separate schools for blacks. When the board of education was established, they too ran separate "colored" schools, and it was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century that school integration took place in New York City.

[9]The Free School Society of New York, *An Account of the Free-School Society of New-York* (New York: Collins and Co., 1814), 4.

[10]New York City Common Council, "Report of the Committee on Arts and Sciences and Schools of the Board of Assistants, on the subject of Appropriating a portion of the School Money to Religious Societies, for the support of Schools," Document no. 80 (1840), 335–336, Board of Education Archives, New York City Municipal Archives.

[11]Ibid., 336. Bishop Hughes was not happy that the Jews and Scotch Presbyterians joined his suit, believing it was opportunistic on their part and fearing that it would raise concerns regarding a rush of requests from other denominations for a share of school funds.

[12]For a discussion of this critical encounter between the Roman Catholic Church and the public authorities, see Vincent Peter Lannie, "William Seward and Common School Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 4 (Sept. 1964): 181–192. For a conflicting viewpoint on Seward and the Catholic schools, see John W. Pratt, "Governor Seward and the New York City School Controversy, 1840–1842: A Milestone in the Advance of Nonsectarian Public Education," *New York History* 42, no. 4 (Oct. 1961): 351–364, and his "Religious Conflict in the Development of the New York City Public School System," *History of Education Quarterly* 5 (June 1965): 110–120. Lannie's response to Pratt is in his "William Seward and the New York School Controversy, 1840–1842," *History of Education Quarterly* 6 (Spring 1966): 52–71. See also Lannie's *Public Money and Parochial Education. Bishop Hughes, Governor Seward and the New York School Controversy* (Cleveland, OH: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968); and Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 3–76.

[13]William R. Huchison, *Religious Pluralism in America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 4–5.

[14]See, for example, John Hughes, "The Decline of Protestantism, and its Cause," (a lecture delivered in St. Patrick's Cathedral, 10 November 1850) in *Complete Works of the Most Rev. John Hughes, D.D., Archbishop of New York* 2, ed. Lawrence Kehoe (New York: Lawrence Kehoe, 1865), 87–102.

[15]John Hughes to Archbishop Blanc (New Orleans), New York, 3 January 1852. Henry Browne Papers, Box 6, file "Hughes Correspondence," Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

[16]"Report on Education: Presented to the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, at its session in New York, October, 1841," *Journal of Christian Education and Family and Sunday-School Visitor* 3, nos. 11/12 (November and December 1841): v–vi.

[17]Presbyterian Church in the USA Board of Education, "Report of the Board of Education of the Presbyterian Church on Parochial Schools," presented to the General Assembly, May 1847 (Philadelphia: Board of Education, Wm. S. Martien, Printer, 1847), 10.

[18]Timothy L. Smith, "Protestant Schooling and American Nationality, 1800–1850," *Journal of American History* 53 (1967): 679–695.

[19]Ibid., 351–352.

[20]New York City Common Council, "Report of the Committee on Arts and Sciences and Schools," 339–340.

[21]Ibid., 353.

[22]Ann M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790–1880* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 59.

[23]Edward K. Spann, *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840–1857* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 337–340.

[24]New York City Common Council, "Report of the Committee on Arts and Sciences and Schools," 355.

[25]For Madison's arguments, see Garry Wills, *Head and Heart: American Christianities* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007), 206–209. For the text of Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance," see Edwin S. Gaustad, *A Documentary History of Religion in America to the Civil War*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eardmans, 1993), 262–267.

[26]Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 44.

[27]New York City Board of Education, "Report of the Select Committee to which was referred a Communication from the Trustees of the Fourth Ward, in relation to the Sectarian character of certain Books in use in the Schools of that Ward," 11 October 1843, Board of Education Archives, New York City Municipal Archives.

[28]Ibid., 5.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Eliza Robbins, *American Popular Lessons, Chiefly Selected from the Writings of Mrs. Barbauld, Miss Edgeworth, and other Approved Authors. Designed Particularly for the Younger Classes of Children in Schools. New York* (New York: W.B. Gilley, 1827). There were also editions in 1829, 1839, and 1848, the last revised in consultation with the Public School Society. In the introduction to the 1848 edition, Robbins writes that she "is greatly indebted to several of the very intelligent and conscientious gentlemen who formed the book committee of the Public School Society for suggestions of improvements which might render this book more effective," v.

[31]Ibid., 1848 ed., v.

[32]Ibid., 1827 ed., 158.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., 1848 ed., 145. This story was not in the 1827 edition but had to be in the edition to which complaints were directed, since it is cited by name. This was probably the 1839 edition.

[35]New York City Board of Education, "Report of the Select Committee to which was referred a Communication," 6.

[36]Ibid., 7.

[37]Ibid., 9.

[38]Ibid., 10.

[39]Mark A. Noll, "The Image of the United States as a Biblical Nation, 1776–1865," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 44–45.

[40]Smith, "Protestant Schooling," 679–680.

[41]Naomi W. Cohen, *Jews in Christian America: the Pursuit of Religious Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 37.

[42]New York City Board of Education, "Report of the Select Committee to which was referred a Communication from the Trustees of the Fourth Ward," 16.

[43]Ibid., 17.

[44]Ibid., 21.

[45]New York City Board of Education, "Report of the Committee on the Annual Apportionment, on the communications of the County Superintendent, relative to the use of THE BIBLE in the Public Schools of the City of New York" (New York: Office of the "Morning News" [corner of Beekman and Nassau Streets], 1844), 4.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Ibid., 7.

[48]See Hughes, quoted in Henry J. Browne, "The Archdiocese of New York a Century Ago: a memoir of Archbishop Hughes, 1838–1858," *Historical Records and Studies* 39/40 (1952): 154–155.

[49]*Thirty-second Annual Report of the New-York Sunday School Union, Auxiliary to the American Sunday School Union, for the year ending May 1848* (New York: Printed by John Gray, 1848), 11. The excerpt is from School No. 75, 124 Houston Street. The site is a public school where the Sunday school classes were held.

[50]Ibid., 19.

[51]Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 417: "In the words of the Edwardsians, it was the preaching of 'plain gospel truths, with which the people had long been acquainted, and had heard with indifference.' These 'plain gospel truths' were God's absolute sovereignty, man's total depravity, and Christ's atoning love."

[52]Documents of the Board of Education, City of New York, May 1850 to December 1852, No. 1, "Remarks of Erastus C. Benedict, Esq., on his re-election as President of the Board of Education, at its organization, January 14, 1852," 6–7, Board of Education Archives, New York City Municipal Archives.

[53]Ibid., 7–8.

[54]Such a position was strongly disputed by minister-educators such as Benjamin Orrs Peers. See his *American Education: or Strictures on the Nature, Necessity, and Practicability of a System of National Education, Suited to the United States* (New York: John S. Taylor, Theological and Sunday-School Bookseller, Brick Church Chapel, 1838), 48, 50.

[55]Board of Education, "Remarks of Erastus C. Benedict, Esq.," 8.

[56]Ibid., 8–9.

[57]He served under his brother, New York Secretary of State Henry Randall, who, as holder of this office, also held the position of state superintendent of common schools.

[58]"Report of the City Superintendent," 9, bound with *The Thirteenth Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City and County of New York, for the Year ending January 1, 1855* (New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., 1855).

[59][Henry Stephens Randall], "Decision of the State Superintendent of Schools, on the Right to Compel Catholic Children to Attend Prayer, and to Read and Commit Portions of the Bible, as School Exercises," State of New York, Secretary's Office, Department of Common Schools, Albany, NY, 27 October 1853.

[60]*Laws Related to Public Instruction in the City of New York. An Act to amend, consolidate, and reduce to one Act, the various Acts relative to the Common Schools of the City of New York. Passed July 3, 1851. As Amended by the Acts severally entitled "An Act Relative to Common Schools in the city of New York."* Passed 4 June 1853, 31 March 1854, 15 April 1854. The revised laws were published in the *Manual of the Board of Education of the City and County of New York, March 1856* (New York: Printed by Edward O. Jenkins, 1856). Among other things, this law provided for the PSS to be incorporated into the board of education and for its schools to become ward schools. The board also received the PSS headquarter's building, on Elm and Grand streets, which then became the new board of education headquarters. Significantly, it placed the seat of public education in the epicenter of the city's rapidly growing immigrant Irish and German (i.e., Catholic, Protestant and Jewish) populations, and just one block from the B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue on Elm Street.

[61]Ibid., 21.

[62]This is similar to the provisions of Massachusetts school laws of 1827 and 1835, the application of which embroiled Horace Mann in intense religious controversy with orthodox (Trinitarian) Protestants. See Raymond B. Culver, *Horace Mann and Religion in the Massachusetts Public Schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), esp. ch. 4; and Jonathan Messerli, *Horace Mann: a Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 309–344.

[63]Ibid., 85.

[64]The first English translation of the Bible under Jewish auspices in America was produced by Isaac Leeser in 1853. Hence before that date there was no possibility of using an American "Jewish" version of the Bible.

[65]The decision to drop notes and comments from the King James translation of the Bible was part of the effort to find common ground among the disparate groups under the umbrella of the Church of England, from Puritans on the one hand to High Church adherents on the

other. The Bible, without commentary, enabled one translation to serve all groups. A similar situation held nearly two centuries later in the United States; the many Protestant sects could read the same translation, unencumbered by interpretive notes. Each sect could arrive at its own interpretation, but they could all unite to form the American Bible Society to distribute Bibles across the United States. For a full discussion of the translation project that yielded the "King James Bible," see Benson Bobrick, *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution it Inspired* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2001); Adam Nicolson, *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

[66]Quoted in Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 45.

[67]For elaboration of the Catholic position and its implications for the Irish Catholic community of New York City, see Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 46–57.

[68]Stephan F. Brumberg, "First Lessons on Learning to be American and Jewish: The Philadelphia Experience," paper presented at Hunter College, 24 April 2002.

[69]Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System*, 89.

[70]*Sixteenth Annual Report of the Board of Education, Dec. 30, 1857* (New York: Department of Public Instruction, 1858), 26.

[71]Ibid., 27.

[72]Ibid., 29.

[73]Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 30–61.

[74]Alexander M. Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City* (New York: The Bureau of Jewish Education, 1918), 32. Dushkin reports twelve synagogues in New York City in 1850. In 1842, however, there were between six and eight (depending on actual dates of founding, which are not well established for several congregations). By the mid-1850s, however, a majority of congregations, including some recently founded ones, had established schools.

[75]Hyman B. Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York, 1654–1860* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1945), 240.

[76]The principal sources of information on Jewish day schools are Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York*, 225–259; Jeremiah J. Berman, "The Return to the Jewish Day School," *Conservative Judaism* 7, no. 2 (Jan. 1951): 1–13; Dushkin, *Jewish Education*; and Stephan F. Brumberg, "Jewish Education," in *Jewish-American History and Culture: an Encyclopedia*, 304–313.

[77]Hyman B. Grinstein, "An Early Parochial School," *Jewish Education* 13, no.1 (April 1941): 23–33. Unfortunately, the minute book cannot be located.

[78]"Minute Book of the Trustees [of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun]," 1825–1838; "B'nai Jeshurun Board of Trustees Minutes," 1854–1865, and the "B'nai Jeshurun Congregational Meeting Minutes Book," 1848–1882, all in the collection of the Rattner Center and housed in the Rare Books Library, The Jewish Theological Seminary, New York. Unfortunately, the minute book of the B'nai Jeshurun Educational Institute does not appear to have survived.

[79]Shearith Israel, New York City's first and only congregation until 1825, intermittently sponsored a day school starting about 1808, known as the Polonies Talmud Torah. However, after 1821 it was run as an evening supplementary school. In the 1810s and 1820s this congregation received a share of the New York State common school funds to support poor Jewish children enrolled in its school. When church schools were no longer able to share in the common school fund, the Polonies Talmud Torah also lost its share; this may be one of the reasons for its demise as a day school.

[80]Grinstein, "An Early Parochial School," 27–28. Tweed's toast was as follows: "The City and State of New York. May it ever remain the Seat of peace and plenty—and the liberal advocates of philanthropy and Freedom."

[81]Ibid., 28.

[82]Grinstein, "An Early Parochial School," 26. The cited passage was from the school's August 1853 advertisement in the Jewish weekly, the *Asmonean*.

[83]Ibid., 30.

[84]Ibid., 32.

[85]Ibid., 33.

[86]"Minute Book of the Trustees [of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun]," 1825–1838; "B'nai Jeshurun Board of Trustees Minutes," 1854–1865, and the "B'nai Jeshurun Congregational Meeting Minutes Book," 1848–1882. See, for example, the entries in the board of trustees minutes for 30 April 1854, 7 May 1854, 14 May 1854, 22 May 1854, 31 August 1854, 21 September 1854, 16 October 1854, 27 November 1854, 14 December 1854, 31 December 1854, 18 January 1855, 14 February 1855, 15 March 1855, every board meeting in the months of April and May of 1855, 1 November 1855, 25 November 1855, 6 January 1856, 15 January 1856, and the final entry in the congregational minutes regarding the school, 11 February 1856.

[87]Ibid., 9 August 1854 and 10 September 1854.

[88]Ibid., 21 September 1854.

[89]Ibid., 27 November 1854.

[90]B'nai Jeshurun Congregational Meeting Minute Book, 1848–1882, 29 April 1855.

[91]Ibid., 2 September 1855.

[92]Board of Trustees Minutes, 28 October 1855.

[93]Ibid., 6 January, 15 January, and 11 February 1856.

[94]For a discussion of private Jewish day schools, see Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York*, 245–247; Alexander M. Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City*, 49–50; and Stephan F. Brumberg, "Jewish Education," 306–307.

[95]Hasia Diner, "Immigration, Jewish," 256; see also Michael A. Meyer, ed., *German-Jewish History in Modern Times, vol. 2: Emancipation and Acculturation, 1780–1871* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 111–119; and Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York*, 226.

[96]Meyer, ed., *German-Jewish History*, 112.

[97]Ibid., 117.

[98]Ibid., 119.

[99]Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Manuals and Catechisms of the Jewish Religion in the Early Period of Emancipation," in *Studies in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Intellectual History*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 62–63.

[100]Ibid., 62f.; Cf. Dianne Ashton, "The Feminization of Jewish Education," *Transformations* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 15; Lance Sussman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 80–101; Grinstein, "An Early Parochial School," 23–33; Jeremiah J. Berman, "Jewish Education in New York City, 1860–1900," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 9 (1954): 247–275; Brumberg, "Jewish Education," 304–312.

[101]Ibid. The first "elementary" catechism produced for an American Jewish Sunday school was by Mrs. Eliezar Pyke, *Scriptural Questions for the use of Sunday Schools for the Instruction of Israelites* (Philadelphia: printed privately, 1840). Isaac Leeser, *hazzan* at Congregation Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, published his *Catechism for Younger Children. Designed as a Familiar Exposition of the Jewish Religion* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Author by Adam Waldie, 5599 [1839]), which went through four editions. Many others were published in the United States through the remainder of the nineteenth century. The importance of textbooks in all of American education in the nineteenth century is supported by extensive studies of Ruth Miller Elson, documented in her *Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1964).

[102]*Catechism of the Faith and Moral Obligations, of an Israelite, for the Use of Schools & Private Families*, translated from a German work of Dr. S. Herxheimer, rabbi at Bernburg, by Dr. Felsenheld and David Barnard, professor of Hebrew, as revised by the Rev. Dr. Merzbacher, under the patronage of Congregation Anshe Chesed (congregation's name was written in Hebrew) (New York: Printed and for sale by Henry Frank, 5610 [1850]).

[103]Spann, *The New Metropolis*, 308–312, 394–395.

[104]Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York*, 244–245.

[105]Lloyd P. Gartner, "Temples of Liberty Unpolluted: American Jews and Public Schools, 1840–1875," in *A Bicentenial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus*, ed. Bertram W. Korn (Waltham, MA and New York: American Jewish Historical Society and KTAV, 1976), 164–166.

[106]*American Hebrew* (10 December 1880), cited in Berman, "Jewish Education," 262.

[107]Gartner, 182.

[108]*Journal of the Board of Education of the City of New York, 1859* (New York: Dudney & Russell, 1859), 163, 196, 201.

[109]*Manual of the Board of Education, 1860* (title page destroyed; no place, no date, presumably New York, 1860), 9. Enforcement sections follow detailing the reporting procedures for noncompliance and subsequent teacher dismissal, 79–80.

[110]Rev. J.A. Burns, *The Growth and Development of the Catholic School System in the United States* (New York: Benziger Bros., 1912); Martin Lazerson, "Understanding American Catholic Educational History," *History of Education Quarterly* (Fall 1977): 297–317.

[111]See Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School: The Jewish Immigrant Public School Encounter in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (New York: Praeger, 1986).