

# Expanding Public Education

## MAIN IDEA

Reforms in public education led to a rise in national literacy and the promotion of public education.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The public education system is the foundation of the democratic ideals of American society.

## Terms & Names

- Booker T. Washington
- Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute
- W. E. B. Du Bois
- Niagara Movement

## One American's Story

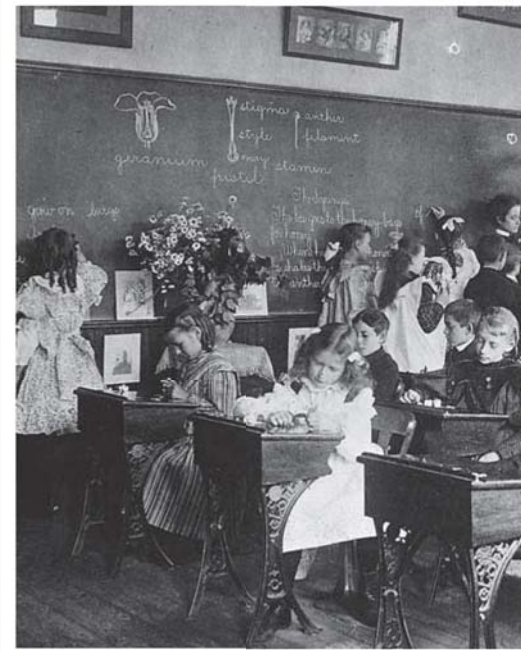
William Torrey Harris was an educational reformer who saw the public schools as a great instrument “to lift all classes of people into . . . civilized life.” As U.S. commissioner of education from 1889 to 1906, Harris promoted the ideas of great educators like Horace Mann and John Dewey—particularly the belief that schools exist for the children and not the teachers. Schools, according to Harris, should properly prepare students for full participation in community life.

### A PERSONAL VOICE WILLIAM TORREY HARRIS

“Every [educational] method must . . . be looked at from two points of view: first, its capacity to secure the development of rationality or of the true adjustment of the individual to the social whole; and, second, its capacity to strengthen the individuality of the pupil and avoid the danger of obliterating the personality of the child by securing blind obedience in place of intelligent cooperation, and by mechanical memorizing in place of rational insight.”

—quoted in *Public Schools and Moral Education*

Many other middle-class reformers agreed with Harris and viewed the public schools as training grounds for employment and citizenship. People believed that economic development depended on scientific and technological knowledge. As a result, they viewed education as a key to greater security and social status. Others saw the public schools as the best opportunity to assimilate the millions of immigrants entering American society. Most people also believed that public education was necessary for a stable and prosperous democratic nation.



▲ **Compulsory attendance laws, though slow to be enforced, helped fill classrooms at the turn of the 20th century.**

## Expanding Public Education

Although most states had established public schools by the Civil War, many school-age children still received no formal schooling. The majority of students who went to school left within four years, and few went to high school.

**SCHOOLS FOR CHILDREN** Between 1865 and 1895, states passed laws requiring 12 to 16 weeks annually of school attendance by students between the ages of 8 and 14. The curriculum emphasized reading, writing, and arithmetic. However, the emphasis on rote memorization and the uneven quality of teachers drew criticism. Strict rules and physical punishment made many students miserable.

One 13-year-old boy explained to a Chicago school inspector why he hid in a warehouse basement instead of going to school.

### A PERSONAL VOICE

“They hits ye if yer don’t learn, and they hits ye if ye whisper, and they hits ye if ye have string in yer pocket, and they hits ye if yer seat squeaks, and they hits ye if ye don’t stan’ up in time, and they hits ye if yer late, and they hits ye if ye fer- get the page.”

—anonymous schoolboy quoted in *The One Best System*

In spite of such problems, children began attending school at a younger age. Kindergartens, which had been created outside the public school system to offer childcare for employed mothers, became increasingly popular. The number of kindergartens surged from 200 in 1880 to 3,000 in 1900, and, under the guidance of William Torrey Harris, public school systems began to add kindergartens to their programs. **A**

Although the pattern in public education in this era was one of growth, opportunities differed sharply for white and black students. In 1880, about 62 percent of white children attended elementary school, compared to about 34 percent of African-American children. Not until the 1940s would public school education become available to the majority of black children living in the South.

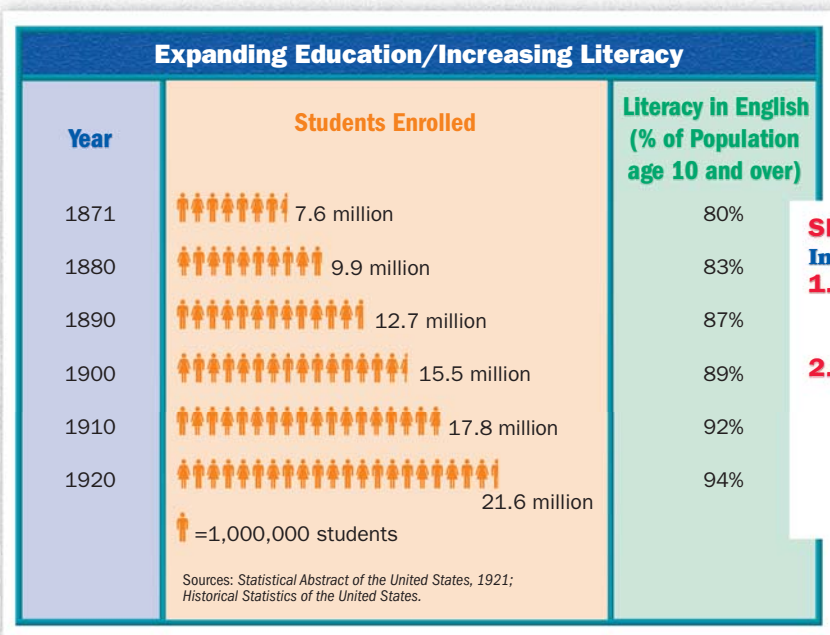
**THE GROWTH OF HIGH SCHOOLS** In the new industrial age, the economy demanded advanced technical and managerial skills. Moreover, business leaders like Andrew Carnegie pointed out that keeping workers loyal to capitalism required society to “provide ladders upon which the aspiring can rise.”

By early 1900, more than half a million students attended high school. The curriculum expanded to include courses in science, civics, and social studies. And new vocational courses prepared male graduates for industrial jobs in drafting, carpentry, and mechanics, and female graduates for office work.

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Drawing Conclusions

**A** Why did American children begin attending school at a younger age?



#### SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Graphs

1. By how much did the illiteracy rate drop from 1870 to 1920?
2. Does the number of immigrants during this period make the reduction more or less impressive? Why?

**RACIAL DISCRIMINATION** African Americans were mostly excluded from public secondary education. In 1890, fewer than 1 percent of black teenagers attended high school. More than two-thirds of these students went to private schools, which received no government financial support. By 1910, about 3 percent of African Americans between the ages of 15 and 19 attended high school, but a majority of these students still attended private schools.

**EDUCATION FOR IMMIGRANTS** Unlike African Americans, immigrants were encouraged to go to school. Of the nearly 10 million European immigrants settled in the United States between 1860 and 1890, many were Jewish people fleeing poverty and systematic oppression in eastern Europe. Most immigrants sent their children to America’s free public schools, where they quickly became “Americanized.” Years after she became a citizen, the Russian Jewish immigrant Mary Antin recalled the large numbers of non-English-speaking immigrant children. By the end of the school year, they could recite “patriotic verses in honor of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln . . . with plenty of enthusiasm.”

Some people resented the suppression of their native languages in favor of English. Catholics were especially concerned because many public school systems had mandatory readings from the (Protestant) King James Version of the Bible. Catholic communities often set up parochial schools to give their children a Catholic education.

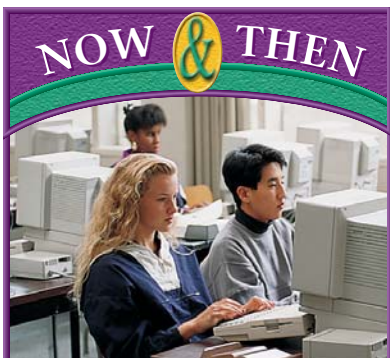
Thousands of adult immigrants attended night school to learn English and to qualify for American citizenship. Employers often offered daytime programs to Americanize their workers. At his Model T plant in Highland Park, Michigan, Henry Ford established a “Sociology Department,” because “men of many nations must be taught American ways, the English language, and the right way to live.” Ford’s ideas were not universally accepted. Labor activists often protested that Ford’s educational goals were aimed at weakening the trade union movement by teaching workers not to confront management. **B**

**Vocabulary**  
**parochial school:**  
a school supported by a church parish

**MAIN IDEA**

**Summarizing**

**B** What institutions encouraged European immigrants to become assimilated?



**TECHNOLOGY AND SCHOOLS**

In 1922, Thomas Edison predicted that motion pictures would eventually replace textbooks. More recently, it has been predicted that computers will replace traditional classrooms and texts. Computers are used for video course sharing, in which students in many locations participate in the same class. Teachers are using electronic interactive whiteboards to help them lead and record presentations and discussions. Students are also using computers to access and share scientific data and to communicate with peers around the world.

## Expanding Higher Education

Although the number of students attending high school had increased by the turn of the century, only a minority of Americans had high school diplomas. At the same time, an even smaller minority—only 2.3 percent—of America’s young people attended colleges and universities.

**CHANGES IN UNIVERSITIES** Between 1880 and 1920, college enrollments more than quadrupled. And colleges instituted major changes in curricula and admission policies. Industrial development changed the nation’s educational

needs. The research university emerged—offering courses in modern languages, the physical sciences, and the new disciplines of psychology and sociology. Professional schools in law and medicine were established. Private colleges and universities required entrance exams, but some state universities began to admit students by using the high school diploma as the entrance requirement.

**HIGHER EDUCATION FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS** After the Civil War, thousands of freed African Americans pursued higher education, despite their exclusion from white institutions. With the help of the Freedmen’s Bureau and other groups, blacks founded Howard, Atlanta, and Fisk Universities, all of which opened

**MAIN IDEA**

**Synthesizing**

**C** Describe the state of higher education for African Americans at the turn of the century.

between 1865 and 1868. Private donors could not, however, financially support or educate a sufficient number of black college graduates to meet the needs of the segregated communities. By 1900, out of about 9 million African Americans, only 3,880 were in attendance at colleges or professional schools. **C**

The prominent African American educator, **Booker T. Washington**, believed that racism would end once blacks acquired useful labor skills and

proved their economic value to society. Washington, who was born enslaved, graduated from Virginia's Hampton Institute. By 1881, he headed the **Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute**, now called Tuskegee University, in Alabama. Tuskegee aimed to equip African Americans with teaching diplomas and useful skills in agricultural, domestic, or mechanical work. "No race," Washington said, "can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem."

By contrast, **W. E. B. Du Bois**, the first African American to receive a doctorate from Harvard (in 1895), strongly disagreed with Washington's gradual approach. In 1905, Du Bois founded the **Niagara Movement**, which insisted that blacks should seek a liberal arts education so that the African-American community would have well-educated leaders.

Du Bois proposed that a group of educated blacks, the most "talented tenth" of the community, attempt to achieve immediate inclusion into mainstream American life. "We are Americans, not only by birth and by citizenship," Du Bois argued, "but by our political ideals. . . . And the greatest of those ideals is that ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL."

By the turn of the 20th century, millions of people received the education they needed to cope with a rapidly changing world. At the same time, however, racial discrimination remained a thorn in the flesh of American society.



**▲** Medical students and their professors work in the operating theater of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University.

**SECTION 2**

**ASSESSMENT**

**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Booker T. Washington
- W. E. B. Du Bois
- Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute
- Niagara Movement

**MAIN IDEA**

**2. TAKING NOTES**

In a chart like the one below, list at least three developments in education at the turn of the 20th century and their major results.

Development	Result
1.	
2.	
3.	

Which educational development do you think was most important? Explain your choice.

**CRITICAL THINKING**

**3. HYPOTHESIZING**

How might the economy and culture of the United States have been different without the expansion of public schools? **Think About:**

- the goals of public schools and whether those goals have been met
- why people supported expanding public education
- the impact of public schools on the development of private schools

**4. COMPARING**

Compare and contrast the views of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois on the subject of the education of African Americans.