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NOAH WEBSTER SPELLED OUT

by

Barbara Youngblood

Bachelor of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
1999

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree
Department of Political Science
College of Liberal Arts

Graduate College
University of Nevada Las Vegas
August 2000
The Thesis prepared by

Barbara Youngblood

Entitled

Noah Webster Spelled Out

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Examination Committee Chair

Dean of the Graduate College

Examination Committee Member

Examination Committee Member

Graduate College Faculty Representative
ABSTRACT

NOAH WEBSTER SPELLED OUT

by

Barbara Youngblood

Dr. Jerry Simich, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Political Science
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

My research of Noah Webster, his moral beliefs, his religious conversion, his political persuasions, and his voluminous writings, has indisputably revealed that Webster intended to shape the entire American nation through his writings and through its public education system. Relying primarily on Webster's early works and his dictionary (1828), I discovered his strong convictions against slavery, his promotion of formal education for women, his moral biases, his political character, and his ardent support for an independent American republic.

The thesis that evolved is developed in five chapters beginning with a characterization of Webster in Chapter One, describing his profound patriotism and his bookish nature. Chapter Two investigates Webster's ideology; Chapter Three imparts his influence on American education and culture; Chapter Four communicates his timely and universal thoughts; Chapter Five reveals Webster's innate abilities and application of effective methods to achieve his ends. Within each chapter, original word entries to include the entire alphabet were selected from Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* to reveal the culture of his time, to convey the extensive influence of Webster's writings, and to express the heart and mind of the man himself.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ......................................................................................................... vi

CHRONOLOGY ........................................................................................................................ vii

INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................................... x

CHAPTER 1 CHARACTERISTICS .................................................................................... 1
  American.................................................................................................................................. 1
  Bookish .................................................................................................................................... 3

CHAPTER 2 IDEOLOGY ..................................................................................................... 9
  Constitution ............................................................................................................................. 9
  Democracy ............................................................................................................................ 12
  Education .............................................................................................................................. 14
  Federalist ............................................................................................................................... 17
  Government .......................................................................................................................... 20

CHAPTER 3 INFLUENCE ................................................................................................23
  History .................................................................................................................................. 23
  Intellect ................................................................................................................................. 25
  Journalist ............................................................................................................................... 27
  “K”, the Letter ......................................................................................................................... 28
  Law ....................................................................................................................................... 30
  Morality ................................................................................................................................. 33
  Nationalism .......................................................................................................................... 34

CHAPTER 4 THOUGHTS .................................................................................................37
  Opinion ................................................................................................................................37
  People ................................................................................................................................... 39
  Quotation. ............................................................................................................................. 41
  Religion ................................................................................................................................43
  School ................................................................................................................................... 46
  Teach ................................................................................................................................... 48
  Uniformity ............................................................................................................................. 50
  Virtue ................................................................................................................................... 52
  Woman .................................................................................................................................. 54

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is no greater friend than one who sacrifices, encourages, and gives time to another. I owe a special thanks to UNLV alumnus and fellow researcher, Diana Leseberg, who has faithfully supported my returning to school after a twenty-five year absence and who has served as a tireless researcher and adviser on this project. Diana's dedication extended to traveling to various universities, searching the archives, copying, and cataloguing thousands of pages of Webster material necessary for this project.

To my family, I owe the greatest appreciation. My daughter Noelle, a UNLV Honors graduate who is currently finishing her own Master's program, has been my greatest fan and strongest critic. Without her love and assurance, creativity and wit, and the countless hours of assistance with her youngest siblings, I would not have been able to complete this thesis and the demanding schedule it required. My oldest sons, Adrian and Justin, have encouraged, listened, and offered positive comments all along the way.

I want to express a special thank you to my youngest children for without them, I would not have had the inclination to return to school, to initially enroll in the more rigorous Honors program, and finally, to pursue a Master's degree in education and political science. Paul and Alexandra, eight and six years at the time, when told that I would be returning to finish my degree, looked incredulously at each other and asked: "What?! You mean you never finished high school?" I knew immediately that although I was promoting higher education by my words, I needed to advance it by my actions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1706</td>
<td>Benjamin Franklin is born</td>
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<tr>
<td>1732</td>
<td>George Washington is born</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1738</td>
<td>John Wesley converts to Christianity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1758</td>
<td>Noah Webster is born in Connecticut</td>
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<tr>
<td>1765</td>
<td>British Parliament imposes the Stamp Act on colonies</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>The Boston Massacre occurs (British troops vs. colonists)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1773</td>
<td>The Boston Tea Party occurs protesting British tax on tea</td>
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<tr>
<td>1774</td>
<td>First Continental Congress is formed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>American Revolution begins and Washington is made commander</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>Declaration of Independence is signed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1777</td>
<td>Continental Congress flag is the Stars and Stripes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>Congress prohibits slave imports</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1779</td>
<td>Webster teaches school in Connecticut</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1780</td>
<td>Webster admitted to Bar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1781</td>
<td>Webster receives M.A., Yale</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1782</td>
<td>Webster finishes the <em>Blue-Backed Speller</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1783</td>
<td>Revolutionary War ends</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1784</td>
<td>Webster publishes <em>Speller</em>, Part I</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Webster publishes <em>Speller</em>, Part II</td>
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<td>Event</td>
<td>Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Webster publishes <em>Sketches of American Policy</em></td>
<td>1785</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Webster travels to gain copyright laws; visits Geo. Washington</td>
<td>1786</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Webster begins <em>Am. Magazine</em> in New York</td>
<td>1787</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Webster publishes <em>Dissertations on the Eng Language</em>; marries</td>
<td>1789</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Webster publishes <em>Collection of Essays &amp; Fugitiv Writings</em></td>
<td>1790</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishes <em>The Prompter</em></td>
<td>1791</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Webster edits daily news, <em>American Minerva</em> in N.Y.</td>
<td>1792</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webster serves in Connecticut state legislature</td>
<td>1793</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Publishes <em>Brief History of Epidemics &amp; Pestilential Diseases</em></td>
<td>1794</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webster begins writing his dictionary</td>
<td>1795</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webster publishes small <em>Compendious Dictionary</em></td>
<td>1796</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Webster has religious conversion</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Websters move to Amherst</td>
<td>1798</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am. Constitution is signed; dollar currency is introduced</td>
<td>1799</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>First US Congress meets in N.Y.</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Franklin dies</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Republican and Federalist political parties are formed</td>
<td>1802</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Adams inaugurated as second president of US</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Washington dies</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, DC becomes capital</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Jefferson inaugurated as third president of US</td>
<td>1806</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Madison inaugurated as fourth president; Lincoln is born</td>
<td>1807</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US declares war on Britain</td>
<td>1808</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British burn Washington, DC</td>
<td>1809</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americans defeat British at Battle of New Orleans</td>
<td>1810</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viii</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Websters move back to New Haven, Connecticut
Yale honors Webster with Doctor of Laws
Webster and son travel to Europe to do research
Webster completes his unabridged dictionary in England
Dictionary is published

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1817</td>
<td>James Monroe inaugurated as fifth president of US</td>
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<tr>
<td>1822</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1823</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1824</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>John Q. Adams inaugurated as sixth president of US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1828</td>
<td>First US railroad for passengers and freight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829</td>
<td>Andrew Jackson inaugurated as seventh president of US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>First horse-drawn &quot;buses&quot; are used in N.Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>Webster publishes <em>History of the World</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>Webster publishes the <em>Webster Bible</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>Martin Van Buren inaugurated as eighth president of US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>First bicycle invented; first baseball game played, N.Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>William Harrison inaugurated as 9th president; dies; Tyler is 10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Second edition of dictionary is published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>Webster publishes <em>Collection of Papers</em>; dies on May 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>Webster's wife dies -- Rebecca Greenleaf Webster</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

References and historical accounts of Noah Webster highly underestimate or ignore Webster’s monumental moral, intellectual, and cultural impact on America. While other American historical names may be more prominent and familiar, I contend that Noah Webster was not only the forgotten founding father, but unquestionably one of the most significant forces behind America’s independence, education, and ideals.

Webster tangibly proves his proficiency in his multiple works, including Advice to the Young, The Elementary Spelling Book, A Collection of Papers on Political, Literary and Moral Subjects, the American Dictionary of the English Language, and others. Webster used language to instruct the young, to stimulate the citizenry, to persuade the leaders, to promote the nation, to empower the government. Noah Webster Spelled Out challenges the reader to fathom Webster’s profound influence and perceive his distinct “America”, and ultimately, to comprehend Noah Webster’s perpetual American legacy.

Language has played an integral part in my own personal and academic development. Little did I know at age seven, I was being exposed to Webster’s influence in order to learn English after arriving in America for the first time. Since then, specific university classes I have taken have discussed the importance of language, the origination of words, their definitions, their usage, and their historical context. Coupled with my high regard for the Constitution, historical documents, and Christian doctrine, Noah Webster’s recorded contributions have only served to strengthen my patriotism, my political ideology, and my intellectual pursuits.
After months of tedious research, I have concluded that Noah Webster remains a formidable proponent of God, country, and republican form of government, while his works are the capstone of American language and education. A contemporary of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, Noah Webster was one of the most important men in the founding of our country. Labeled a patriot, zealot, statesman, writer, philosopher, and federalist, Webster was also involved in early census taking, effecting copyright laws, opposing slavery, fathering the dictionary, establishing a unified American language, and emphasizing educational opportunities for both females and males.

Born in 1758 in West Hartford, Connecticut, Noah Webster was one of five children born to a farmer and a homemaker. He showed keen interest in learning, particularly reading. He asked incessant questions about nature, life, and the meaning of words. Webster's mother read to him primarily from two books, the Bible and an almanac, and was instrumental in encouraging his broad range of interests. His desire to learn increased after entering grade school and he borrowed books to read from local religious ministers.

Because Noah loved words and was fascinated by books, his family sacrificed by mortgaging the family farm so that Noah could attend Yale University in 1774. Although college was canceled periodically because of the Revolutionary War, Webster persevered and graduated, using his education for the academic advancement of others.

Webster began teaching school, transforming a cold and severe schoolhouse into one that was warm and academically inviting. It was during this time that he saw that the scant books available for teaching were written in England for English children. He set out to remedy this by developing American textbooks written in revised American English. Visits with Benjamin Franklin were fruitful and produced a phonetic spelling
of words published in his highly successful, *Blue-Backed Speller*.

Years later, Webster would be regarded as the premier American lexicographer, a proponent of American language usage and spelling simplification. Many differences between present American and British spellings, i.e., *labor* versus *labour* and *music* versus *musick*, are traceable to Webster.

Noah Webster expanded his own learning by traveling, lecturing, writing, and lobbying for a central government with a President and a Congress to represent the colonies. Always on the verge of poverty, Webster often charged people to hear his lectures which sparked animosity and mistrust among his peers and local neighbors. Judging that he had become conceited, the people often rejected his ideas.

In 1789, Webster married Rebecca Greenleaf with whom he reared eight children. His concerns for his family's well being only served to propel him to more scholarly endeavors. Webster published various essays and magazines, founded Amherst College in Massachusetts, and became a vocal supporter of the U.S. Constitution. In 1800, at the age of forty-two, Webster began writing his dictionary and completed it twenty-five years later. It was not until his death in 1843, however, that Webster gained popularity. His books were widely distributed and American education extensively utilized his material.

While there are numerous scholarly works written about Noah Webster, he remains a complex and forgotten figure in American history. Not known for charisma or political correctness even during his time, Webster was forced to be content with few supporters. *Arrogant, unrelenting, severe, humorless, and dogmatic* are adjectives used by critics to describe this larger-than-life character. Referred to by others as the "forgotten" founding father, I understood Webster as one who selflessly donated his vision, skills, and genius.
to the new American nation. He was highly underestimated and undeservedly ignored by the "establishment" of his time.

My aim in Noah Webster Spelled Out is to substantiate Webster's political sphere of influence on the children, culture, education, and history of America through his use of language. Accordingly, I selected original word entries and definitions from Webster's 1828 dictionary that reveal the person of Webster, his ideology, and the lasting mark he left on America.

Noah Webster was the first to reveal the vital connection between popular education and popular sovereignty. He knew the creation of an independent nation would require independent thinkers. As he transitioned from nationalist to Federalist, Webster set out to mold the minds of Americans through moral essays, patriotic editorials, virtuous children's stories, and most importantly, a distinctly American dictionary. The result of his works is powerfully evident in the unique American culture that developed after independence from Great Britain.

Additionally, because many of Noah Webster's works utilized the letter "f" interchangeably with the letter "s" and because the style of these early works are difficult to read and comprehend, I present a simple, straight-forward method of analysis aimed at introducing him to the young or unacquainted. All key chapter words and definitions are quoted directly from Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language.

Like a contemporary Webster, I have been active in politics for more than twenty years, serving as a campaign strategist for former Texas Governor Bill Clements, former presidential Reagan/Bush administration, and initiating a national Crime Stoppers program in Texas and other localities. Paralleling this political involvement is my
advocacy for educational reform. Despite strong efforts, student test scores falter, more students are termed "at risk", educational expectations are lowered year after year, athletics are glorified over academics, and the gifted remain discriminated against with fewer dollars available for advanced programs. 

While the pulse of the community is united in a struggle to find quality education, many educators and legislators remain undecided as to how to improve education. By chairing deconsolidation efforts and parent associations, by seeking higher standards for teachers, by assisting in legislation for school choice and charter schools, and by hosting a television news show on these and other debatable issues, I hoped to provide both sides with relevant information, a conciliatory forum for action, and an avenue for change.

I learned very quickly that one person is not enough. One must persuade and educate others to take up the cause; to keep current and competent on educational and political issues, one must be single-minded, vigilant, vocal, and unwaveringly sturdy. Noah Webster was this type of individual. He instinctively knew that to raise a nation, a unified language was the foundational prerequisite; he wisely sought advice and consent from those in power to establish not only ownership of land and property, but also thoughts and ideas through copyright laws; he discerned the relevance of politics on education and shrewdly advanced the cause of "Americanism"; he esteemed virtues over freedoms and resolutely "practiced what he preached". Applying his ideology to the current American culture, many questions are raised concerning the apathy of voters, the corruption among politicians, the inequity and ineffectiveness in education, and the self-interested interpretation of "rights" overriding an individual's obligations to family and community.

xiv
One may wonder how many progressive "Websters" exist who can address these and other pertinent questions. Noah Webster was not only a premier educator and lexicographer, but his morality and intellect were combined to shape the manners, habits, and thinking of early America. Can these traits be regenerated to shape education, politics, and the workplace today? Can reforms be made by applying a historical perspective to our present situation? Can Webster's writings be revisited in order to discover creative and virtuous solutions?

The more one reads and studies Noah Webster, the more one admires his intellect and diligence, more highly regards his legacy, and more importantly, grasps his zeal and ardent support for the American republic. Ultimately, I hope *Noah Webster Spelled Out* will be a positive catalyst in furthering the reader's involvement into future political and educational endeavors by way of a personal, moral, and ethical foundation for decision-making and energetic action.
CHAPTER ONE

CHARACTERISTICS

The simplicity of life Noah Webster experienced as a youngster established in the young man concrete ideals of respect, faithfulness, and practical wisdom. These ideals would be applied in his education, family life, relationships with others, and career. In that period of America, schools invited intellectual pursuits; families persevered; towns were the center of political life; public concerns were addressed with confident participation by each citizen; and churches provided a strong stimulus to individualism.

Noah Webster was not only affected by his surroundings, but was invigorated by them. He read vociferously, sought academic pursuits, and ultimately, was shaped into one of the most learned and patriotic American figures in our history.

Taken out of his American Dictionary, “American” and “bookish” truly describe this tireless man of letters:

\[
\text{AMERICAN, n. A native of America; originally applied to the aboriginals, or copper-colored races, found here by the Europeans; but now applied to the descendants of Europeans born in America.}
\]
\[
\text{The name American must always exalt the pride of patriotism. Washington.}
\]

Noah Webster was born to be America’s premier writer. As an American statesman, he spoke out for patriotism and the American way in all matters, and pled:
"Americans, unshackle your minds and act like independent beings. You have been children long enough, subject to the control, and subservient to the interest of a haughty parent. You have now an interest of your own to augment and defend: You have an empire to raise and support by your exertions, and a national character to establish and extend by your wisdom and virtues." (Webster's The American Magazine, 1788, quoted in Snyder 119)

The colonies had been England's dutiful children but it was time to break away, molding a brave new nation of liberty constrained by virtue and wisdom.

For Webster, the American theory of a "republic" rejected Britain's control, considered as powerfully aggressive. Americans were thus victims of these corrupt aggressors who sought to deprive the colonies of their liberties. Resistance was necessary to put the states in the hands of newly elected, vigilant, and virtuous representatives who merited their positions.

Webster was clear on the differences between the new republic and the old corrupt powers: Americans should be landowners in order to sustain a republic; they must be educated to responsibly exercise their duties; they must be virtuous, patriotic, and wise in electing talented officials; they must accept the awesome responsibility of trying a novel experiment of government and presenting this superior model to a world filled with tyranny and oppression. (Moss 59-60)

Americans should also free themselves of European thinking, remodeling their own schools to meet the needs of American children. Webster's vision proposed that education be created for a republic, not a monarchy; for the masses, not the elite.

"America must be as independent in literature as she is in politics, as famous for arts as for arms, and it is not impossible, but a person of my youth may have some influence in exciting a spirit of literary industry." (Snyder 52-53)

Because of Webster's work, American cultural independence started with young children learning to read and spell in a simplified and unified American English style.
Additionally, during the French Revolution, Noah Webster noted that Britain appeared to be declining and reverting back to the dark and middle ages, while the United States offered a "haven" for freedom, pure religion, and excellent constitutions of government. In order to stay intact, this haven required vigilance by the people and their obedience to just laws. (Moss 67)

To be cast in such a superior moral, political, and intellectual role, Americans had a mission and a burden. They must reject European manners, practices, and corruption. They must display wisdom, virtue, and patriotism while at the same time adopting literary independence and embellishing the sciences. Only through education, character-building, and industry could Americans avoid the enticements of corruption. (Snyder 83)

Webster's opinion of Europe was "dismal and lost". He labeled Europeans, "in vassalage, without knowledge, without freedom and without hope of relief." Americans, in contrast, could "lay a broad basis for the perfection of human society." (Snyder 81)

Webster fully anticipated an American empire as close to perfection as possible. He desired that optimism and diligence pervade not only the local communities, but ultimately, the new community of Americans striving to establish a new nation. The ideology he and other founders espoused was an optimistic independence from Britain. His analogies of parents (England) and children (Americans) appeared everywhere and spoke of the children's maturing and breaking away from their authority. (Rollins, Long Journey 24-25) Through his books and other writings, Webster would come to influence millions of American minds, young and old.

BOOKISH, a. Given to reading; fond of study; more acquainted with books than with men. Shak.
The "Schoolmaster to America," Noah Webster's energies produced spelling books, grammars, theoretical treatises, dictionaries, persuasive arguments, a dissertation on epidemics, and even a revised version of the Bible. His range of interests began to develop when he was a young lad and expanded with time. Webster thought and wrote within a society that placed the highest importance on written information and persuasive opinion. (Simpson 52-53) Learning was also a way out of farming and manual labor and into the professions that were revered, i.e., law, higher education, and science.

Webster dedicated his life to writing American books for American minds. He looked to establish a morality, culture, and government wherein Americans shed European mannerisms and affiliations. A unified, independent country needed a new clarity and allegiance. This, Webster provided, in his thinking and in his books:

"A fundamental mistake of the Americans has been, that they considered the revolution as completed, when it was but just begun. Having raised the pillars of the building, they ceased to exert themselves, and seemed to forget that the whole superstructure was then to be erected. This country is independent in government; but totally dependent in manners, which are the basis of government." (Webster's Dissertations, quoted in Simpson 55)

The first historically important book that Webster authored was the popularly known Blue-Backed Speller (1783), described by the author as a "new and accurate standard of Pronunciation". (Nelson 13) As the first part of his A Grammatical Institute of the English Language, the speller gave analysis of sounds, a pronunciation guide, simple sentence structure, syllabication, and fables with concise moral lessons. It became the national standard in the education of young children and sold over one million copies each year. Right conduct and morals were intertwined with academic lessons.

The second part of the Institute was a grammar and the third part was a reader. Webster's purpose was achieved as he sought to differentiate American English from
British terms by standardizing spelling, grammar, and pronunciation. In short, these books were...

"so constructed as to condense into the smallest compass a complete System of Elements for teaching the language; and however small such a book may appear, it may be considered as the most important class book, not of a religious character, which the youth of our country are destined to use." (Webster, Spelling Book 7)

Webster's publications filled a great need. Webster's Blue-Backed Speller was regarded as the outstanding authority in spelling matches, a favorite social amusement at that time, and storekeepers stocked his books as staples along with rum, molasses, and cheese. The books were so successful that they became best sellers, second only to the Bible. (Benson 116)

In 1790, Webster's Collection of Essays and Fugitive Writings was published. This particular work did not receive wide acclaim although it dealt with moral, political, and economic virtues such as thrift, simplicity, and self-reliance that underlined American independence. (Webster, Collection of Essays viii-xi) Webster included advice to young men and women, commented on the benefit of harmonious music, and encouraged parents to investigate the character of teachers who taught their children. While places of higher learning employed men of moral virtues, Webster remarked that:

"...many of our inferior schools, which so far as the heart is concerned, are as important as colleges, are kept by men of no breeding, and many of them, by men infamous for the most detestable vices...it was a frequent practice for gentlemen to purchase convicts, who had been transported for their crimes, and employ them as private tutors in their families." (Webster, Collection of Essays 18-19)

Webster also addressed the evils of paper currency and an economy based on coin, rather than on goods and services. (Webster, Collection of Essays 119-124)

Generally suspicious of the "people", Webster relied on the virtues of elected officials and recorded his thoughts supporting government power residing in the legislature.
Throughout the *Essays*, Webster's theme was clear: Americans should draw on their own resources and develop their own institutions utilizing virtuous leaders in the process.

By 1799, Webster had completed *A Brief History of Epidemic and Pestilential Diseases*, a 712 page two-volume treatise and the world’s first study of epidemic diseases. Scientists around the world hailed this work and it became the standard text on the subject in medical schools for much of the nineteenth century. (Unger 230)

Webster's interest in science and medicine may have begun when his own brother contracted smallpox while serving in the military. Regardless, without formal training or practical experience, Noah Webster wrote the book on epidemics after gathering hundreds of documents from churches, ship captains, and America’s and Europe’s most eminent physicians. Webster wanted to encourage all medical and philosophical societies to undertake the registration of medical findings and “reciprocally to communicate them by means of general correspondence”. (quoted in Warfel, as quoted in Unger 230)

Finding it remarkable that a lay person produced such research, the medical establishment, nevertheless, felt that Webster was unqualified to write his findings. The book was enthusiastically received yet violently opposed. Webster was accustomed to both. (Nelson 17)

Webster's months of research had produced a history of the epidemics, such as typhoid fever, smallpox, and diphtheria, that ravaged American cities prior to sanitary and health standards. He described these cities as "artificial reservoirs of filth-hotbeds of atmospheric poisons, great prisons, to breed infection and hurry mankind prematurely to the grave". (Moss 14) A famous Canadian physician and medical historian at Johns Hopkins, Sir William Osler, called the volumes "the most important work written by a layman in this country". (Nelson 18)
In 1806, Webster published his first dictionary. The second dictionary, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, was completed in 1828 when Webster was seventy years old. It was a tediously compiled book of over 70,000 words and definitions, including distinctively American words such as *land-office*, *marshall*, *plantation*, and *selectmen*. Webster made a most significant contribution to America by writing clear, complete definitions, 5,000 of which had never graced the pages of any earlier dictionary. Unger 251) His emphasis on American pronunciation and usage, combined with American English spellings, and technical terms from the arts and sciences made the book invaluable to American posterity. (Nelson 4)

It is important to note here that Webster believed that the misunderstanding of words led to social and political unrest. He was adamant that clear definitions accompany word usage, while, at the same time, employing a personal strategy to define words according to his political or social beliefs. *Jacobinism, democrat*, and *republican* were just a few examples of Webster's political bias. *Jacobinism* he defined as "opposition to established government and...an attempt to overthrow...by private accusations or by violent or illegal means". *Democrat* was "synonymous with the word Jacobian in France". And, *republican* was viewed as friendly to our "Representative Governments". (Rollins, *Long Journey* 131-133)

*The Holy Bible with Amendments to the Language* was the crowning work of Webster's career. Published in 1833, Webster, in his preface, stated that his primary aim in writing this version was to provide a true style, a pure language, deleting offensive or vulgar phrases, and popular and commonly understood words. (Webster, *Bible* iii) He added that the Bible,
"The Book, by way of eminence; the sacred volume, in which are contained the revelations of God, the principles of Christian faith, and the rules of practice. The Bible should be the standard of language as well as of faith. Anon..." (Webster, Bible iv)

considerably influenced the formation and preservation of our national language.

It is evident that the bookish Webster made major contributions as author, editor, researcher, and statesman. In a letter to George Washington in 1785, he wrote: "I wish to enjoy life, but books and business will ever be my principal pleasure. I must write."

(Rollins, Autobiographies 5)
CHAPTER TWO

IDEOLOGY

Noah Webster moved in the leadership circle of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and the writers of the U.S. Constitution. An early proponent of an independent America, he associated with Washington, Madison, Jefferson, and Hamilton. He revered Benjamin Franklin and often asked his opinions on education, language, and politics. Webster's *Sketches of American Policy*, a plea for strong central government and a document to institute it, had considerable influence on the founders prior to the writing of the Constitution. James Madison was quoted as saying it "is believed to have been the first movement toward a national constitution". (Nelson 3)

CONSTITUTION, n. 4. The established form of government in a state, kingdom or country; a system of fundamental rules, principles and ordinances for the government of a state or nation. In free states, the constitution is paramount to the statutes or laws enacted by the legislature, limiting and controlling its power; and in the United States, the legislature is created, and its powers designated, by the constitution.


Prior to the Convention at Annapolis in 1786, Webster wrote several pieces, printed in newspapers and published in his *Sketches*, urging the formation of a new government "more energetic than the Confederation". He spent a year writing on political affairs and establishing the necessity of a new federal compact. "I know of no other person who
took the same active part or who devoted half the time to the subject which I did," wrote Webster. (Rollins, Autobiographies 92)

Noah Webster fit in no particular group but was among the first to call for a constitutional convention, contributed the copyright clause in the Constitution (Article 1, Section 8), and was asked by many delegates to lead the call for ratification. (Barton 124) In correspondence with James Madison and Daniel Webster, Noah Webster wrote of his general idea of "enlarging the scope of the federal" government, "invigorating the federal authority", and necessitating a radical alteration in our system of general government", all referring to a new constitution for America. (Webster, Collection of Papers 168-172)

Fearful of vesting too much authority in the people and their "whims", Webster endorsed strength in the central government and the legislature, in particular. Article I of the Constitution described the Congress at length, specifying its powers. The Framers intended that the people register their public opinions on national issues through the power of their votes. Webster clearly believed that even so, public opinion should not dictate a legislator's conscience and action:

"This practice of looking to the people for direction destroys the independence of the representative, and must, often reduce him to a mere machine, obliging him to act in direct opposition to his own views of what is right and expedient." (Webster, Collection 279)

The Constitution served to establish order, basic rules, enumerated powers, and governmental parameters in currency, taxes, contracts, and peace. Regardless, even a superbly written constitution did not guarantee good government without competent and reliable leaders. Webster admonished the people to:
"...let it be impressed on your mind that God commands you to choose for rulers just men who will rule in the fear of God. The preservation of a republican government depends on the faithful discharge of this duty; if the citizens neglect their duty and place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted..." (quoted in Barton 341-342)

Webster and the founders believed in property-owning, ethical citizens who were "lightly governed". In 1837 in a lengthy letter to Daniel Webster, Noah discussed the faults of the Constitution of the United States in the abstract terms of equality and liberty. (Webster, Collection of Papers 269-285) Equality, Webster concluded, was not an equality of intellect or riches. The term operated as a "right of equality", or the protection of the poor being as important as the protection of the rich. For Webster, liberty was the right to own property and make decisions without interference, all undergirded by just and egalitarian laws. No class of people would prevail over another. Webster continued:

"The principle then which must be the basis of a good constitution is, that every member of the community or state is entitled to all the freedom which the laws permit, and which is compatible with the public safety. This is the right of every citizen; and in the possession of this right, every man is equal." (Webster, Collection 271-272)

To practice a loose and undefined liberty and equality, he warned, would be a source of immense evil.

Webster also disagreed with two aspects of the document: its failure to abolish slavery and its failure to address universal public education system. Regardless, he was urged by Ben Franklin to put his differences aside so that the Constitution would be ratified. He agreed and wrote Examination into the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution, signing it "A Citizen of America" so as not to provoke enemies or blunt the benefits of his essay. (Unger 135-136)
In language ordinary Americans could understand, *Examination* was widely distributed and accepted. Webster anonymously called the Constitution an "improvement on the best constitutions that the world ever saw" (quoted in Unger 136) with the people having an equal voice and suffrage. While admitting the Constitution had its faults, "in short, it is an empire of reason" and it would be ridiculous to oppose it for..."Perfection is not the lot of humanity". (quoted in Unger 137)

In the end, Webster’s short pamphlet was at least as influential as the *Federalist Papers* in the less populated states, where isolated farmers shunned contact with governmental authority. After all, it was to these men that Webster’s arguments for ratification of the Constitution were directed as he urged them to vote for legislators who would support ratification. At age twenty-nine, Webster felt confident he had affected the course of the new nation. (Unger 139)

DEMOCRACY, n. Government by the people; a form of government, in which the supreme power is lodged in the hands of the people collectively, or in which the people exercise the powers of legislation. Such was the government of Athens.

There is ample evidence that Noah Webster emphasized an American mode of language, philosophy, and culture. With the adoption of these independently American styles, the representative democracy the founders and Webster envisioned would become successful and strong. Webster saw clearly the advantages of a representative republic, whereby independent landowners managed their own affairs and chose representatives they respected and in whom they placed their confidence, and the realities of a true democracy where the power was held directly by the people, not entrusted to representatives, and which resulted in mob rule. (Moss 72)
During the spring of 1837, a financial panic swept over the United States and Webster called it God's retribution on the likes of Martin Van Buren and Andrew Jackson for placing their faith on "popular democracy". As the number of the unemployed grew, mobs broke into food warehouses and Webster felt compelled to ask why men were surprised at the outbreaks of violence. To newspapers, he wrote:

"...I appeal to history for the fact that there has never yet been a democratic government, that is, a government in which the whole populace have exercised the whole power of making laws and of choosing executive officers, which has been a free government...the anal of history shows beyond contradiction, that such governments have ever been furious and implacable despotisms." (Webster’s essay in Spectator, 1837, quoted in Unger 332)

Although America was an experiment in free government for the sake of all mankind, Webster remained cautious in defining democratic freedom and denied that the people in such a government could control themselves. (Moss 74-75) Webster's views of the people only diminished with time; he termed them as innately evil, depraved, and incapable of governing themselves. (Rollins, Long Journey 140) He reasoned that American society and its leaders had failed, and in the end, Webster became discouraged:

"I would, if necessary, become a troglodyte and live in a cave in winter, rather than be under the tyranny of our desperate rulers...We deserve all our public evils. We are a degenerate and wicked people." (Webster, 1836, quoted in Rollins, Long Journey 141)

Webster would have agreed with Alexis De Tocqueville that while the American Revolution and the drafters of the Constitution were great democratic leaders with a virtuous vision of democratic rule, "little by little the influence of (these) individuals ceased to carry weight". (De Tocqueville 50)
By the age of forty, Webster rejected true democracy on the basis that people were evil in nature. He advocated the restriction of voting rights to those over forty-five years of age and denounced in essays nearly every aspect of American political life.

(Webster's *A Rod for a Fool's Back*, quoted in Rollins, *Autobiographies* 9)

Readers of Webster can see a clear division in Webster's writings. The first part of his life was marked by policies, ideals, and optimistic attitudes trusting in man's reason and ultimate actions. After experiencing more years of life and watching what Webster termed "corruption" in government, the latter part of Webster's life reflected his determination and dependence on religious ideals as a basis for his writings, subordinating reason to divine guidance and the development of man's character through the practice of virtuous acts. To achieve virtuous living, Webster knew that he would have to start with the young.

EDUCATION, n. The bringing up as of a child; instruction; formation of manners. Education comprehends all that series of instruction and discipline which is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, and form the manners and habits of youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations. To give children a good education in manners, arts and science is important; to give them a religious education is indispensable; and an immense responsibility rests on parents and guardians who neglect these duties.

American education in the New World was a simple mixture of European tradition and Protestant piety devoted to hard work and civic duty. Noah Webster's role in education greatly modified, expanded, and molded the minds of American youngsters, and ultimately, the foundations of American education.

Textbooks spoke of Washington and others in heroic terms. Primers contained
scriptural references and extolled Christian socialization. Webster instinctively knew that the success of the new republic would require loyalty and skill far beyond the available texts and claimed that "as an independent nation, our honor requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as government." (quoted in Foner 314)

Republican virtues -- independence, patriotism, and vision -- were the central goal. Believing New England's intellectual propensities were far superior to the rest of the colonies, Webster embarked on an educational journey establishing uniformity in language, a puritan mode of living, and expanding educational opportunities for both boys and girls. According to Webster, the importance of education could not be overstated:

"the education of youth (is) an employment of more consequence than making laws and preaching the gospel, because it lays the foundation on which both law and gospel rest for success." (Webster's essay in American Magazine, 1788, quoted in McDowell 166)

Displeased with the textbooks of his day, Noah Webster set out to supply Americans with a uniquely American education. His numerous texts and essays were a means of communicating morals, independence, and liberty, promoting a "self-education" of the masses so they could ultimately think for themselves. In Letter to a Young Gentleman Commencing His Education, Webster wrote:

"As men are furnished with powers of reason, it is obviously the design of the Creator, that reason should be employed as their guide, in every state of life." (Webster, Collection 295)

Webster substituted the core subjects, history, science, and especially reading, for the "superficial learning" he had witnessed in his travels. Pictures in schoolbooks were not teaching children how to read. He found children hurried through books. In colleges, he found books for reading were selected for amusement rather than for important facts and
"sound principles". (Webster, Collection 310) Everywhere he went, he lectured or wrote on the proper modes of education.

In assessing Webster’s contribution to education, we should note that many of his textbooks were “ahead of their time”. Webster’s History would become a standard feature of the school curriculum and the Elementary Spelling Book became the single most important text for spelling and reading instruction in American history. “For its first half-century, his Spelling Book taught America’s children to read; for its second half-century, it taught them to spell. Moreover, there were half a million men and women who turned gratefully to the blue-back speller” for reading instruction more than seventy-five years after Webster published it. (Monaghan 208)

Webster consistently combined lessons on virtue with lessons on duty and responsibility. Education was of the "whole" person, addressing mind, body, and soul. Hard work, thrift, and duty to country were the results of educational reform that took place first in the classroom, then in the hearts and minds of American children. With a Websterian education, Americans would be inspired to "just and liberal ideas of government, and...an inviolable attachment to their own country"; without it, Americans would stand to lose their liberties and see a decline in the American republic. (Webster’s essay in American Magazine, 1787, quoted in McDowell 169)

It follows that education was so important that for Webster, it had to include the education of young women as well as young men. In 1788, he wrote that "...every child in America should be acquainted with his own country" through formal schooling and the reading of history. (Bennett 265) And although the educational emphasis for young women was to educate them in order to develop them as teachers of their own children,
Webster promoted the earliest coeducational public school system in America.

Indeed, the answer to the preservation of liberty was universal public education.

Webster believed that a self-governing electorate required this type of knowledge and understanding. Webster wrote:

"Ignorance cramps the powers of the mind, at the same time that it blinds men to all their natural rights. Knowledge enlarges...understanding...and gives a spring to intellectual faculties which direct deliberations..." (Webster's *Sketches of American Policy*, quoted in Unger 19)

Webster's educational philosophy was grounded in his political ideology and virtually summed up his life. By his own definition, education was a path for the intellect, anchored in morality. He not only saw education as the opportunity for literacy for the people but as an intrinsic form of inculcating virtues. (Rollins, *Long Journey* 136)

Education was the acquisition of knowledge, which in turn liberalized mankind and removed man's prejudices:

"Education will gradually eradicate them, and a growing intercourse will harmonize the feelings and the views of all the citizens." (Webster's *Sketches of American Policy*, quoted in Snyder 83)

Noah Webster was just the man who could provide not only educational reformation but political reformation of the American mind.

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**FEDERALIST, n.** An appellation in America, given to the friends of the constitution of the United States, at its formation and adoption, and to the political party which favored the administration of President Washington.

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The "Federalist Papers" appeared regularly in the *Independent Journal* in New York from October 1787 to April 1788. Considering the Articles of Confederation weak and ineffective, the Federalists sought adoption of a new Constitution for the United States.
The arrangement under the Confederation allowed states to take advantage of one another with the state with "the heaviest purse and longest sword" tyrannizing another. (Snyder 98) Webster proposed that a national government, on the other hand, would better represent the people, protecting and equitably distributing resources.

Key segments in Webster’s diaries sketch his support of the federal system and subsequent essays appeared in New York’s The American Minerva and its sister paper, the Herald. In these works, Webster promoted the policies of the Washington administration, contributed to making George Washington a symbol of Americanism, and helped build a nucleus of American folklore on which he and others could elaborate a sense of nationhood. (Morgan 132-133)

While Webster began as a Federalist on reason, as he grew older, he remained a Federalist through Biblical sanction. Higher education and extensive reading initially formulated his thoughts, but when he consciously converted to Christianity later in life, he transferred the authority of man’s intellect to the authority of God’s sovereignty. For Webster, there was no conflict; Federalism fit both. (Snyder 279)

As one of the earliest proponents of strong national government, Webster easily fit into the Federalist mold. He defended the American Revolution, the Constitution, and the new emerging nation. Where he parted with other Federalists, however, was on innovation and culture. While the older Federalists sought to preserve ties with England and its culture and were suspicious of change, Webster professed cutting ties with British culture, altogether, and centering Americans on their own culture, especially through innovations in language and education. (Moss 15)

The Federalists, although in the minority, sought to restrict popular power and profited

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from the ruin of the first Confederation. Fearful of falling into anarchy, the people supported federalist ideals and the federal Constitution serves as a lasting memorial of these men, their patriotism, and their wisdom.

In 1788, Webster began *The American Magazine* seeing it as the avenger of federalism. To Benjamin Rush he wrote:

"The best publications in Europe are conducted by societies of literary Gentlemen, and how much more necessary is it in this country? We want a literary intercourse, we want to be acquainted with each other, we want a mutual knowledge of the state of every part of America—in short we want to be federal." (quoted in Snyder 125)

Webster remained comfortable with Federalists he considered natural aristocracy, the great Washington and Adams. When the Federalists were defeated in 1800, however, Webster saw an administration take the helm that he did not trust. It brought with it divisiveness and party conflict. He believed that the new men in power showed contempt for religious institutions, violated laws, and destroyed the peace. (Moss 70) The old-line Federalists grew more anxious and critical of power in the people, and Webster himself saw the people as a threat to liberty, a source of anarchy, and the supporters of factional politics. (Moss 14-15)

The tension for Webster remained throughout most of his life, that between the people's authority over their own interests and the importance of a strong central government making decisions in the interest of the entire nation. Regardless, Webster yearned that the people recognize and grasp a sense of national identity. Through education and his essays written for the public, he desired to place in the minds of the populace "the principles of virtue and of liberty; and inspire them with just and liberal ideals of government, and with an inviolable attachment to their own country". (Webster, *Collection of Essays and Fugitiv Writings* 3)
GOVERNMENT, n.  5. The system of polity in a state; that form of fundamental rules and principles by which a nation or state is governed, or by which individual members of a body politic are to regulate their social actions; a constitution, either written or unwritten, by which the rights and duties of citizens and public officers are prescribed and defined; as a monarchial government, or a republican government. Thirteen governments thus founded on the natural authority of the people alone, without the pretence of miracle or mystery, are a great point gained in favor of the rights of mankind. Adams.

One of Noah Webster's most original concepts was his notion of ideal government. In *Sketches of American Policy* (1785), Webster envisioned the "equal protection under the law" phrase which would later be incorporated in the United States Bill of Rights. (Unger 86) He described the necessity of laws to benefit the body politic by constraining individuals who infringed on the rights of the public. *Sketches* reflected on the history of despotic governments which used superstition and military force to keep the people in subordination. In the last part of *Sketches*, Webster outlined a new constitution that endorsed universal public education, abolished slavery, and separated church from state affairs. Webster's thesis, at this point in his life, introduced power to the people to elect their representatives and power to the states in their local affairs, but which were "subjects of the federal head for common concerns". (Unger 87-88)

In these writings, Webster promoted a bicameral Congress as the independent and unbiased authority for the nation. The constitution that Webster advocated would help control and regulate the states, place checks on the people's whims, and virtually save the republic from ruin by factions that jockeyed for power or represented special interests. Webster never envisioned the national government having the same temptations or impulses as self-interested state governments. When he saw that occurring, Webster
looked to religion to place ultimate checks on the people and their government. (Moss 60-62) He appealed not to reason, but to virtue, and to the people's deference to a higher authority to reign in self-interests.

In *History of the United States*, Webster wrote that civil liberties bear their origin in the Christian religion which combines humility, piety, benevolence, and equal rights.

"There are two powers only which are sufficient to control men and secure the rights of individuals in a peaceable administration. These are the combined force of religion and law..." (quoted in Barton 15)

Webster's original structural concept of government also included an unrealistic utopia, i.e., an educated property-owning public voting for a wealthy and better-educated elite. Obligations of family and employment would be subordinate to the obligations to one's nation. Webster believed that what was best for the nation was best for the individual, "provincial interest (being) inseparable from national interest". (Moss 54)

A strong executive, educated people, and virtuous leaders would lead the nation with honor, wisdom, and experience.

What Webster did not envisage was the formation of organizations bent on influencing government action and the people's divisiveness and derision aimed at government leaders. By 1800, Webster blamed lack of virtue on the part of the people and absorbing self-interest on the part of men like Thomas Jefferson who courted votes at the price of integrity:

"It is to be wished that the men in power...would quit the business of abusing each other and their fellow citizens with party names and hard words...I will tell you what we all want. We want a wise government, and we want law. It was for these the men of the Revolution fought and suffered; it was for these our fathers adopted a republican form of government; and if the government does not provide and secure to us these blessings, the Constitution is a failure." (quoted in Moss 77)
On these points, Noah Webster's words are timeless. Webster's perfect government was found in the greatest number of individuals *making* the laws and in the smallest number of men holding the power to *execute* them. (Moss 52)
CHAPTER THREE

INFLUENCE

Noah Webster's monumental influence over the cultural development of the new nation may never be fully realized. While not regarded as a great political theorist, Webster labored in a vast number of fields including politics, science, journalism, law, and education. The following word excerpts from his *American Dictionary* are manifested in short essays that only "touch the surface" of his historical, intellectual, and journalistic authority.

**HISTORY, n.** 1. An account of facts, particularly of facts respecting nations or states; a narration of events in the order in which they happened, with their causes and effects... What is the history of nations, but a narrative of the follies, crimes and miseries of man?

The principle school book in America, according to Webster, should consist of "a selection of essays, respecting the settlement and geography of America; the history of the late revolution and of the most remarkable characters and events that distinguished it, and a compendium of the principles of the federal and provincial governments". (Webster, *Essays* 23) Webster continued his themes of nationalism, a strong central government, and the people's interests second to the nation's interests by conveying in his writings a sense of pessimism in the people's primary allegiance.

To reform mankind's self-interest, Webster began with young children and the
classroom. History was taught so students could store, take to heart, and later formulate political questions or opinions. At the same time, Webster's history required an attachment to the new America. He detected defects in available schoolbooks, which provided the histories of foreign and ancient nations. To reform improper allegiance, Webster ventured into uncharted territory by promoting American history for America's youth. The minds were to be turned away from the histories of Greece and Rome and set to their own country where they properly belonged.

Webster wrote in *Education* referring to American children:

"As soon as he opens his lips, he should rehearse the history of his own country; he should lisp the praise of liberty, and of those illustrious heroes and statesmen, who have wrought a revolution in her favor." (Webster, *Essays* 23)

In *Grammatical Institute*, Webster included Table XLIII, which was a chronological account of "remarkable events in America", beginning with the discovery of America by Columbus and noting the battles of the Revolution. (Webster, *Grammatical* 118-119)

Scrupulous attention was paid to education and the inclusion of American history in the classrooms of America in order to produce a generation of nationalists.

Origins were important to Webster, whether it was the origin of a language, a nation, or a philosophical point. Webster wrote about the origin of the United States, which commenced under unique and unprecedented circumstances. He wrote:

"They commenced with civilization, with learning, with science, with constitutions of free government, and with that best gift of God to man, the Christian religion." (quoted in Rollins, *Autobiographies* 107)

And although such a young nation, Webster marveled that it "in some respects...has no superiors". (Rollins, *Autobiographies* 107)
The real marvel lay, however, in the history Webster himself was establishing for future generations. Previously, politics and language had no room for innovation; these areas were to follow the popular will. (Simpson 32) Webster was criticized and ridiculed because he went against popularity and established uniformity, independence, and innovation in both politics and language, and frankly, had no superiors himself.

History has recorded many illustrious nicknames for Webster -- *Schoolmaster to America, Father of the Dictionary, American Patriot, and The Intellectual*. Noah Webster has apparently deserved and earned them all. Through his intellectual pursuits and the diversity of his works, Webster reveals himself as a man seeking to rise above his early struggles to find adequate reading material, to gain personal literary acclaim, and to garner support for American independence.

**INTELLECT**, n. That faculty of the human soul or mind, which receives or comprehends the ideas communicated to it by the senses or by perception, or by other means; the faculty of thinking; otherwise called the understanding.

Webster's intellectual pursuits were rare for a young man from rural Connecticut. It was clear to both Webster's mother and father, however, that Noah's thirst for learning would not be easily quenched. Webster borrowed books from the local ministers and read them time and again. He was tutored privately to prepare for his college entrance.

Yale's curriculum proved to be methodical and burdensome, concentrating on Latin, Greek New Testament, logic, rhetoric, trigonometry, biology, physics, divinity and more. By the time Webster was a senior, he concentrated more time in ethics, history, and English grammar and literature. (Snyder 17-18) Coupled with Webster's love of learning, the young man soaked up the instruction and formulated new rational aspects of
living a virtuous life.

Webster learned from higher education how to place his early childhood religious beliefs second to his human intellect. He tried for many years to combine his Enlightenment tendencies of honoring man's mind with the Christian components of honoring God. Webster would not escape his Puritan upbringing; while he developed intellectual language innovations, he included moral principles and patriotic themes, such as were written in his Reader. (Snyder 77)

After Webster's personal religious conversion in 1808, his writings continued to reflect intellect but also a more personal and active religious base, guided by Divine providence. Intellect and religion were applied to the good of the public by the elevation of private character in the people. Excellence was achieved through diligence, Webster observed:

"In the prosecution of your studies, endeavor to make yourself master of whatever you attempt to learn. Understand well the rudiments or first principles of every branch of study, whether in literature or in science. The first principles are often difficult to beginners; but when you have overcome the first difficulties, your progress will be more easy and pleasant." (quoted in Slater 28)

Webster acknowledged the authority of a Supreme Being over mankind and used intellectual and personal religious beliefs in the virtuous life to instruct and admonish those within his sphere of influence. Education would produce literate and informed citizens; these citizens would have a common world view; in turn, this view would favor and advance the new nation called America.

By educating the young and by providing thought-provoking literature for the older generation, Webster knew he could effect a nation. He began writing as a journalist, creatively redesigning the cover, table of contents, and content of his magazines.
JOURNALIST, n. 1. The writer of a journal or diary.

Mentor and friend to Noah Webster, Benjamin Franklin suggested that Webster establish a magazine of commentary, essay, and pertinent trivia. Webster agreed and founded the *American Magazine* in New York City. The first issue appeared in December 1787 and bore the motto, "Science the guide, and truth the eternal goal". (Unger 140) Always the innovator, Webster experimented with layout and content and became the first to organize materials by category; the first to appeal to a broad audience; the first to invite women both as contributors and readers; and in general, the first to produce a totally modern magazine. (Unger 140)

Webster's journalistic format was similar to today's *Reader's Digest* with the table of contents appearing on the cover, the subjects being condensed, and the essays serialized. Webster wrote about twenty of the sixty-four pages entitling them, "Foreign Intelligence" and "Curiosities", and covering such topics as government, fashion, and theology. His purposes were well-defined:

"The *American Magazine* will be open for every species of decent and valuable Essay; for fair discussion, general satire and wit and humor and for the production of imagination." (quoted in Unger 141)

The magazine was also a new avenue for Webster to write and distribute his educational and Federalist philosophies. "On Education" again introduced his passion for universal public education, better instruction, more schools, and American textbooks. These reforms were reprinted for decades and came to influence educational pioneers such as Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, who founded public school systems based on
Webster's educational proposals. (Unger 143) In the scope of politics, Webster's intentions of magnifying the federalist cause fell short on appeal. Subscriptions to the magazine were slow and he lost money on the venture. (Snyder 125)

During this time, Webster married Rebecca Greenleaf and found in her an anchor and supporter for his writings. Webster followed up his short-lived magazine career by writing essays for the abolition of slavery and by editing a federalist newspaper in New York City. Public divisiveness on both of these controversial issues grew and Webster found himself retiring, in general, as a journalist, stating in 1798:

"I found myself exposed to so many personal indignities from different parties that retirement was essential to my happiness if not my life...to a gentleman of my education and standing in society this treatment became intolerable." (quoted in Moss 14)

This retirement from journalism would fortuitously lead to his concentration on completing the dictionary of American words. Webster could not stay silent. His political intentions and personal inclinations drove him to write and write he did:

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**K**, the eleventh letter of the English Alphabet, is borrowed from the Greeks, being the same character as the Greek kappa, answering to the oriental kaph...

*Formerly k was added to c, in certain words of Latin origin, as in musick, publick, republick. But in modern practice, k is very properly omitted, being entirely superfluous, and the more properly, as it is never in the derivatives, musical, publication, republican...*

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The American *Blue-Backed Speller* was first published in 1783 and became the most popular schoolbook ever published. At first, Webster followed British spelling norms and criticized innovative reformers who "expunged the superfluous letters".

Webster followed suit, however, when he revised his *Speller* in 1804. (Crystal 80)

The major revisions came in the deletion of "k" from words ending in "ick",
such as *musick* and *publick* and the substitution of "k" for England's "que", such as in *checque* and *masque*. Webster's full range of proposals were revised in stages, culminating in the Compendious Dictionary of 1806. They included changes in suffixes, such as *-er* for *-re* (theatre); *-se* for *-ce* (defense); placing a single *l* instead of double *ll* in *traveling* and *canceling*. (Crystal 80)

Spelling reforms were consistent and standardized. Webster dropped the *-u* in *-our* words, like *humour* and *rumour*. He tried unsuccessfully to phoneticize *tongue* as *tung* and *women* as *wimmen*. Overall, however, he was successful and thought to add new terms in medicine, botany, geology and other sciences which were beneficial and trustworthy:

"A living language must keep pace with improvements in knowledge, and with the multiplication of ideas." (Webster’s *Compendious*, quoted in Unger 253)

On the surface, Webster may have appeared biased and overly critical of the English language. Actually, Webster was on a mission. He wanted every book "translated" into American spellings for an American market. (Simpson 53) Webster's educational philosophy told him that greater coherence in American spelling would speed up the development of a national language, and his political philosophy revealed that the American spellings would distance the people from England and ensure their allegiance to the new country.

Although Webster began his language career standardizing and regularizing American English, his efforts also revealed a man of order, conservatism, and patriotism. (Moss 93) He painstakingly journaled his thoughts and actions, diligently hand-wrote thousands of words, traveled abroad to research word derivatives, implanted his
conservative biases in select sentences, and designed his works around patriotic themes for wider audiences and distribution. With age, Webster's nationalism grew and his language reforms became the true American standard. Driven to work, Webster never retired from his intellectual pursuits in writing, government, education, nor the law.

**LAW**, n. 1. A rule, particularly an established or permanent rule, prescribed by the supreme power of a state to its subjects, for regulating their actions, particularly their social actions. *Law is beneficence acting by rule. Burke.*

Noah Webster's genius is evidenced in his legal and economic ideology, as well. The principle of *property* was foundational for the freedom of America. Webster's written accounts in support of the Constitution expressed his ideas succinctly:

"The liberty of the press, trial by jury, the Habeas Corpus writ, even Magna Carta itself, although justly deemed the palladia of freedom, are all inferior considerations, when compared with a general distribution of real property among every class of people." (Rosalie Slater letter in preface of *American Dictionary*, quoted in McDowell 176)

Webster believed the principle of property went far beyond the owning of land, houses, or merchandise. The principle extended to include inventions, writings, and "the production of genius and the imagination are if possible more really and exclusively property...". (Slater letter in preface, *American Dictionary*, quoted in McDowell 176)

Webster also knew that the basics of education were the ability to read and spell. American educators had been using a text written forty years earlier by the Englishman Thomas Dilworth, which in its geographical section contained names of only English villages and counties. As a result, Webster saw a need to correct the deficiencies in Dilworth and a need for a distinctively American textbook which he began compiling in 1782. (Snyder 48)
A man of letters and sentiments, Webster was also a shrewd and wise marketer of innovation. Within months and after much counsel from men he respected, Webster traveled with his unfinished text in hand to New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. His purpose was two-fold — to sell the idea of his new speller and to secure copyright laws in those states. Until that time, authors' works were not considered property of any kind and could be stolen or reprinted by anyone. No national copyright legislation had been written and Webster began appealing to legislators to enact such a law in "the interest of literature and the honor and dignity of the American empire". (Moss 6)

While in New York, Webster fortuitously met Congressman James Madison for the first time. Madison was duly impressed with Webster's school text and his request for copyright legislation. From that point on, Noah Webster met with dozens of individuals, from college scholars to powerful legislators, who could help him achieve his goal of enacting copyright legislation that would protect authors from literary piracy.

Many times Webster became discouraged. State legislators were either not in session or did not place importance on his requests. He persevered, however, and within one year, six states had passed copyright legislation protecting newly published works. James Madison had been instrumental in persuading the Confederation Congress to pass an act recommending to the various states a copyright law that would provide copyright security for a minimum of fourteen years. (Snyder 53)

Webster relentlessly pursued those objectives he believed applied to the property of Americans. From 1783 to 1826, he continued lobbying for copyright laws that guaranteed authors ownership of their seminal works. The laws, although not uniform, provided stability in the field of literature and placed stiff monetary penalties on
offenders. Consequently, authors revered him and called him "the father of copyright laws in America". (Unger 108)

Webster's first appeals were as an unknown young visionary traveling to each state requesting local copyright laws. Forty years later, Webster was a famous writer, and he used this influence and his numerous friendships with elected officials to further lobby for copyright extensions, greater uniformity in the law, and national legislation. Finally, a visit to his cousin, U.S. congressman Daniel Webster, produced a law that issued national copyrights for an initial ten years with an additional fourteen-year renewal clause. (Nelson 14-15)

Webster's national influence on the association of property and copyright laws permeated the landscape of America. His labor in securing these laws on the state and national level encouraged invention and literary production among Americans. His efforts proved not only beneficial for Webster personally, but they touched the spirit and soul of a people in need of good laws, good books, and good government.

When the U.S. Constitution was adopted, it was clear that Webster's efforts had made a monumental and historical impact, for in Article I, Section 8, Paragraph 8, Congress was granted the power "to promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive rights to their respective writings and discoveries." (Unger 133)

Webster's persistence and foresight produced copyright protection that is enacted to this day. Although the protection afforded him set historical precedent, Webster gained very little monetarily. His main focus remained in the availability and distribution of his authentic spellers, essays, and dictionaries. Monetary gain was not on Webster's agenda;
he was ensconced in ethics and morality.

**MORALITY.** n. The doctrine or system of moral duties, or the duties of men in their social character; ethics.

*The system of morality to be gathered from the writings of ancient sages, falls very short of that delivered in the gospel.* Swift.

In his writings and in his character, Webster promoted the moral traits necessary in the individuals who constituted good government, i.e., obedience to God's laws producing humility, service, and wisdom.

"The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom," Webster wrote in *Moral Excellence.* This wisdom produced moral excellence causing individuals to respect and serve others. Webster continued by connecting God's justice, mercy, and sovereignty to man. Likewise, a wise nation enacted just laws, conducted equal protection, and directed government action beneficial to man by adopting these moral principles. (Slater 12-13)

"They are the best principles and precepts, because they are exactly adapted to secure the practice of universal justice and kindness among men and of course to prevent crimes, war, and disorder in society. No human laws...can ever secure these objects." (Webster, *Value* 99)

Morality for Webster was absolutely necessary for good government and the maintenance of a free and just society. The lack of it resulted in war, strife, and loss of liberties. One had only to reflect on history, Webster thought, to see the consequences on nations because of immoral men.

In *Political Evils,* Noah Webster wrote that "men...have been devising forms of government best adapted to secure their safety, property, peace, justice and liberty..."

Among the best of these governments, defects had been found, and Webster noted why:
"Men have not obeyed God's precepts...Corrupt, selfish men, are often elected, and such men abuse their authority, neglect or violate the laws, and occasion great public evils." (Webster, Value VI)

According to Webster, divine scriptures, "the genuine principles of civil life -- the only principles which can perfect the work of civilization," (Webster's Letters to a Young Gentleman, quoted in McDowell 179) were the basis for morality and were designed to produce good laws from people of good character. To develop good character, morality should begin with individual reform that was achieved "through the heart, and not the head," wrote Webster. (Webster's letter to the editor, Vermont Chronicle, 1840, quoted in McDowell 179) In turn, moral principles not only reformed the individual, they "ought to form the basis of all our civil constitutions and laws." (Webster, Advice 39)

Webster was committed to establishing morality in a youthful nation. Through his belief in Christianity and godly moral precepts, the means he chose to imprint this morality were found in his textbooks for children, historical essays, and political lectures. After all, wrote Webster, "...the Christian religion...is the real source of genuine republican principles. It teaches the equality of men as to rights and duties; and while it forbids all oppression, it commands due subordination to law and rulers." (Webster, Value 99-100) Nationalism was a natural consequence.

NATIONALISM, n. 3. Attached or unduly attached to one's own country. The writer manifested much national prejudice. He was too national to be impartial.

Noah Webster consistently called for a national unity through a national language. Both England and America perceived a relationship between democratic politics and
spelling reform. Changes in the American language were inevitable to establish national unity, and only by the people purposing to adopt the new language and instructing their children in it, could the national consciousness emerge. As a firm nationalist, Webster was committed to doing everything possible to that end. (Rollins, Long Journey 74)

Nationalism was complex in Webster's society. Patriotism was only one element. Pride of self, love of country, duty to serve were all integral parts of the whole. Self-interest, as Webster saw it, was a good thing -- the nation was interested in the perpetuation and promotion of itself. The self-interest of the people should, therefore, be aligned with the overall goals and self-interest of a nation that was being instituted. (Snyder 84)

As Webster became more established regionally through his texts and essays, he also began to promote his works nationally. Webster believed that words would have the greatest impact on national unity and presented his objectives in writing:

"Now is the time to plan. The minds of the Americans are roused by the events of a revolution; the necessity of organizing the political body and of forming constitutions of government that shall secure freedom and property, has called all the faculties of the mind into exertion...to reconcile the people of America to each other..." (Webster's Essays, quoted in Snyder 92-93)

Stability and strength for a national government required persistent persuasion, the very thing Webster did best:

"Banish...forever the distinction and the names of the present parties: away with Federalists, Democrat, Republican, Jacobin. Take the nobler title of American Patriots. Elect to the principal offices in the national government men of both parties, and unite in measures which shall restore the honor and the commerce of our country." (Webster's To All American Patriots, quoted in Unger 268)

Traveling and lecturing on the English language, Webster met with the presidents of many major colleges, who had favorable reviews for his work. By consistently urging the people to consider the national interest and the honor and dignity of the United States,
Webster's revolutionary ideology for cultural independence and a language that was nationalistic caught momentum and secured a national unity for the people. (Rollins, *Long Journey* 47)
CHAPTER FOUR

THOUGHTS

In all that he accomplished, Noah Webster did it exceptionally well. Critics and friends alike formed opinions of the man and his writings.

OPINION, n. 1. The judgment which the mind forms of any proposition, statement, theory or event, the truth or falsehood of which is supported by a degree of evidence that renders it probable, but does not produce absolute knowledge or certainty. It has been a received opinion that all matter is comprised in four elements. This opinion is proved by many discoveries to be false. From circumstances we form opinions respecting future events.

During Noah Webster's lifetime, he wrote thousands of words, lectured on as many topics, and unashamedly professed his relationship with an active and omnipotent God. Is it any wonder that many historians, politicians, and authors wrote opinions of him and his works?

In reference to Webster's enormous talent in writing for the cause of the Revolution, historian Horace Scudder, writing in his book, *Noah Webster*, called him the most effective propagandist of the 1780s. Richard Rollins commenting on Webster's revolutionary ideology found him to be "usually abstract...often confused and superficial (and) far from original". (Rollins, *Long Journey* 24)

During the Constitutional Convention of 1787, the president of the University of Pennsylvania referred to Webster as the "retailer of nouns and pronouns" and a "fomenter
of rebellion". (Rollins, *Long Journey* 52) Critics accused him of being headstrong and arrogant, intolerable and self-aggrandizing. During heated debates between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists, Webster bore the brunt of professional denunciations and personal attacks. A friend described him as "the Monarch". Disagreements led to confrontations in words and print. (Rollins, *Autobiographies* 8-9)

One of Webster's many publishers, Samuel Campbell, said he was "full of vanity" and William Cobbett, a newspaper publisher, denounced him as a "spiteful viper", a "great fool and barefaced liar" and "villain". (Mencken 22) Regardless, most found Webster almost always right.

William Cullen Bryant thought of him as a man of "narrow but forcible intellect". (Nelson 19) Horace Mann strongly disapproved of Webster's method of teaching reading and called it "the torture of the innocents". (Nelson 13) Bryson, in *The Mother Tongue*, pulled no punches when he wrote of Webster as a "severe, correct, humorless, religious, temperate man who was not easy to like, even by other severe, religious, temperate, humorless people...he was short, pale, smug...charmless loner who criticized almost everyone but was himself not above stealing material from others..." (Bryson 154-155)

Thomas Jefferson referred to Webster as a "mere pedagogue of very limited understanding and very strong prejudices and party passions". Charles Swann labels him as "rash" in writing his dictionary, a "coat-trailer", and basically two-faced. (Swann 63, 67-70) And, finally, in 1801, Warren Dutton wrote in reference to Webster's dictionary:

"But if he will persist, in spite of common sense, to furnish us with a dictionary which we do not want, in return for his generosity, I will furnish him with a title for it...*Noah's Ark.*" (Swann 66)

Webster, characteristically, was a straight-shooter, stating the obvious or the lofty,
refuting men's ideas, and oftentimes retaliating in writing. To sum up his opinions, *Essays* said it best:

"The truth is, government originates in necessity and utility; and whether there is an implied compact or not, the opinions of the *few* must be overruled, and submit to the opinions of the *many.*" (Webster, *Essays* 56)

History reflects and even critics agree, that Webster was forthright, innovative, bold, extremely gifted, and a master at forming opinions. After all, Webster knew that to control and direct men's opinions one could employ force, or better, one could control language. (Moss 113) His mark left on history, language, education, and politics was beyond the scope of human abilities. He appears to have been divinely ordained to leave such a heritage. The American people, then and now, can only profit by it.

**PEOPLE,** n. 2. The vulgar; the mass of illiterate persons. *The knowing artist may judge better than the people.* Waller.
3. The commonality, as distinct from men of rank. *Myself shall mount the rostrum in his favor, And strive to gain his pardon from the people.* Addison.

Webster’s purpose in standardizing the American language was to reconcile the people to each other and weaken any disunion among them. *People* and *yeomanry* were often synonymously utilized by Webster. In describing them, Webster wrote:

"Let Englishmen take note that when I speak of the American yeomanry, the latter are not to be compared to the illiterate peasantry of their own country. The yeomanry of this country consist of substantial independent freeholders, masters of their own persons and lords of their own soil." (quoted in Simpson 70)

Division of labor and land ownership were different in America than in England. While there were classes of poor in the mother country, America with its plentiful land and pioneering spirit did not need to adopt the social divisions and inequality so prevalent
in Europe. A uniform language, therefore, produced a united people who lived in a republic, not an aristocracy, and who shared abundant opportunities. (Simpson 71)

This was not to say that Webster saw all people as equal. They were equal in only two ways -- in their possession and enjoyment of personal protection and property, and in the freedom to use their "powers and faculties" for their benefit without restraint. (Snyder 276)

A natural hierarchical society existed but not to the point of frustration or resentment. Again, Webster's famous analogies proved his points:

"The rich depend on the poor for labor and services; the poor depend on the rich for employment and the means of subsistence. The parent depends on the child for assistance in his business...the child depends on the parent for food...for protection and instruction." (quoted in Snyder 277)

These inequalities were not only normal, but essential, in producing harmony in the people and the nation through "mutual dependencies (and) mutual attachments" which counteract haughty and selfish natures in man. (Snyder 277)

The people, by their will or sovereignty, established the nation. Sovereignty in a nation as large as the United States, however, required modifying the exact definition of the word. First, the people elected representatives to determine policies. This constituted sovereign power in a legislature until the next election. Webster believed that if the people were exalted beyond this point, they would falsely assume they had power, assume control over the nation's laws, and ultimately destroy the public will. The law, therefore, and not the people must remain sovereign, Webster wrote. (Snyder 279)

The people were to be educated and hardworking, practicing thrift, patriotism, and self-reliance. From Webster's Puritan background, however, he felt that the people's passions would not allow self-control, so they must be saved from themselves. (Rollins,
This negative view of human nature permeated Webster's middle and later works as he relied more on Christian consciousness to curb people's conduct. The new nation of Americans was being shaped by Webster's Christian ideology, his writings, and his school textbooks.

Webster's skills were not merely found in his writings, however. To produce works of such magnitude, Webster was skilled in "thinking":

**QUOTATION, n. 2.** The passage quoted or cited; the part of a book or writing named, repeated or adduced as evidence or illustration.  
*Locke.*

Noah Webster was a master of writing styles. From persuasive argument to scholarly works to short lessons for the young, Webster, although a "deep thinker", adapted his style to fit the reader. The following quotes are sometimes humorous, sometimes simple, but always novel. Webster's originality attracts the young and the old, and is appealing even in our present-day culture. While Webster often wrote dozens of words to form one sentence, at other times he utilized concise language to make his point. His quotes and his styles were stimulating:

On power:
"In what does real power consist? The answer is short and plain--in property." (quoted in Bailyn 263)

On humility:
"The advantages of humility in this life are very numerous and great. The humble man has few or no enemies. Every one loves him and is ready to do him good." (Webster, *Advice* 42)

On fraud:
"The farmer who brings his produce to market, and sells it in a bad state, knowing it to be defective...or giving a false representation of it, is guilty of fraud and falls within the purview of the eighth commandment." (quoted in Slater 15)
On friends:
"In forming your connections in society, be careful to select for your companions, young men of good breeding, and of virtuous principles and habits. The company of the profligate and irreligious is to be shunned as poison." (quoted in Slater 21)

On women:
"Let justice be done to their merits; guard their purity; defend their honor; treat them with tenderness and respect." (Webster’s *Value of the Bible*, quoted in Bennett 124)

On simplicity:
"The love of finery is of savage origin; the rude inhabitant of the forest delights to deck his person with pieces of shining metal, with painted feathers, and with some appendage dangling from the ears or nose. The same love of finery infects civilized men and women...and the body is adorned with brilliant gems and gaudy attire. But true taste demands great simplicity...A well made person is one of the most beautiful of all God’s works..." (Webster’s *Advice to the Young*, 1834, quoted in Bennett 303)

On slavery:
"Let our efforts then be united to devise the most easy and effectual mode of gradually abolishing slavery in this country. The industry, the commerce and the moral character of the United States will be immensely benefited by the change--Justice and humanity require it--Christianity commands it." (Webster, 1793, quoted in McDowell 177)

On voting:
"In selecting men for office, let principle be your guide. Regard not the particular sect or denomination of the candidate--look to his character as a man of known principle, of tried integrity, and undoubted ability for the office." (quoted in Slater 25)

On the good and bad student:
"When they were fourteen years of age, Tommy was a good reader, an excellent penman, and could perform any question in arithmetic without the master's help. But Harry could neither write nor read--he was the greatest dunce in the school--he was hated and despised by all his school-fellows; and all this was because he would be lazy and wicked." (Webster, *Institute* 115)

On tattling:
"A tattler is only a softer name for a liar, and a liar is the meanest and worst being that lives." (Webster, *Institute* 113)

On truth:
"Truth is the end to which all learning should be directed. We want truth in literature; we want truth in science; we want truth in politics; we want truth in morals; we want truth in religion; we want truth in everything." (Webster Papers, quoted in McDowell 168)
Religion, in its most comprehensive sense, includes a belief in the being and perfections of God, in the revelation of his will to man, in man's obligation to obey his commands, in a state of reward and punishment, and in man's accountableness to God; and also true godliness or piety of life, with the practice of all moral duties. It therefore comprehends theology, as a system of doctrines or principles, as well as practical piety; for the practice of moral duties without a belief in a divine lawgiver, and without reference to his will or commands, is not religion.

Noah Webster's ancestors were both Pilgrim Separatists and Puritans who migrated from England in the 1620s and thereafter. Puritans believed that all questions could be answered by the Bible, and Webster's family maintained a highly religious and moral tone in the home. The children were often reminded to stop and inspect their souls and reevaluate their relationship with God. (Snyder 9-13) The parents sought to keep the family's spiritual life at the core of family activity.

In the Puritan Congregational Church where the Websters attended, Sunday services lasted hours with the spiritual worship portion of the service blending into a typical town meeting. As most of the church elders were also town officials, talk turned to taxes, school curriculum, and the settlement of disputes between neighbors. (Unger 10-11) Politics mixed easily with religion, and young Webster learned early to listen, absorb, and later, participate. Children, at that time, formed positive opinions about their religion and their country, and they understood their duty to act with respect and deference to family and authority.

Webster's father recognized the love of learning in his middle son, and decided to mortgage the family farm to pay for Noah's college expenses at Yale. What both did not know, however, was that Yale, once the base for Puritan ministry education, had changed...
dramatically. From its Calvinist founding in 1701 to prepare young men for the ministry to seventy-three years later when young Noah entered Yale, the students who were enrolled for the ministry had declined to four. Divinity studies had been condensed from two days a week to a half-day on Saturday, and the Latin recitations were displaced by English in the secular classes. Yale was now preparing men for "important stations in civil life", while at the same time, ignoring fights, food brawls, and profane language. Sunday worship developed the minds of the students in "notions of honor, politeness, and a love of virtue", (Unger 12-15) but not necessarily based on a pure and holy God.

It is no wonder, then, that Webster's early spellers stood out as "relative secularity", teaching morality unrelated to any particular religion, omitting threats of eternal damnation, and many times, deleting references to deity:

"Nothing has greater tendency to lessen the reverence which mankind ought to have for the Supreme Being than a careless repetition of his name upon every trifling occasion." (quoted in Unger 69)

Young Webster's commitments to his orthodox upbringing never left him, but as a younger man, he established man's reason as the authority for politics and good government over God's authority. With his religious conversion in 1808, however, Webster emerged boldly professing that the true authority in men's affairs was the word of God. (Snyder 279) This core belief revised not only his public policy and politics, but his stance on education, as well:

"The sublime views of God and of his works, which the scriptures exhibit have a wonderful effect in strengthening the intellect and expanding its power." (quoted in Snyder 289)

As Webster changed his core worldview elevating man's intellect and reason to a core belief in divine sanction and intervention, Webster wrote with more dedication and
purpose. From his extensive studies of original languages, he wrote a revised version of the Bible, connecting it to all fields of study. Webster wanted the Bible to be the governmental textbook in the home, sustaining the free republic he had so passionately endorsed. Morality and virtuous living was no longer a societal decision, but a powerful tool of God to cultivate right relationships with Him and with our fellow man:

"So in the moral system, God has given powers and faculties to man, and laws to govern him; but he has left men to cultivate their own faculties, and apply them to the discovery of truth, to the invention of useful arts, and to improvement in government, morals and religion." (Webster, Value of the Bible VI)

Difficult as it is to pinpoint the exact factors leading to Webster's religious conversion in 1808, it appeared that the French Revolution and its radical innovations frightened him and he began seeking the value of religion in abating the passions of the people and bringing order to their lives. Webster was also angry at the American election of 1800 when Thomas Jefferson, whom Webster branded as immoral and an atheist, won the presidency. Regardless of the reasons, Webster's conversion led to a period of somber reflection and a renewed focus in writing. Webster reasoned that stability and order were based in a strict moral code derived from religion and he more fervently produced themes in his writings that supported those convictions. (Moss 16)

Between the church and the schoolhouse, Noah Webster had learned that both are useful in establishing a belief system and in producing an educated and enlightened body of citizens faithful to a cause. Both institutions were good places to begin inculcating values. Beginning with the family attending church services together, children were to embrace ethical and moral doctrines, as well as welcome the academic opportunities in the new American nation.
SCHOOL, n. 1. A place or house in which persons are instructed in arts, science, languages or any species of learning; or the pupils assembled for instruction. In American usage, school more generally denotes the collective body of pupils in any place of instruction, and under the direction and discipline of one or more teachers. Thus we say, a school consists of fifty pupils. The preceptor has a large school, or a small school. His discipline keeps the school well regulated and quiet.

During Webster's time, schools were scarce and existing facilities lacked heat, light, textbooks, and good teachers. Webster purposed to clean, furnish, and fill the schools with the necessary equipment for early and proper training of students. He envisioned a civic education creating and promoting unity and national spirit for the young American nation. Academics were important, but it is evident that Webster valued more proper conduct leading to national unity and tranquility. (Rollins, Words 430)

In the essay, On the Education of Youth in America, Webster specified a school that met for at least four months, while boys were not working their family farms or otherwise employed. Education would include not merely the diffusion of knowledge but an "acquaintance with ethics...the general principles of law, commerce, money and government". These would be taught as materials were obtained, i.e., texts and circulated papers. (Webster's On the Education of Youth in America, 1788, as found in Bennett 265-266) A female teacher would be hired in the summer to teach small children in the rural areas while schools remained open year-round in the larger towns. Webster wrote:

"Now is the time and this is the country, in which we may expect success, in attempting changes favorable to language, science and government." (quoted in Scudder, Noah Webster, as quoted in Unger 96)

Webster's curriculum began with the extensive use of phonics, including language rules and their exceptions. Grammar utilized the ancient languages and religious
examples. In addition to language, Webster imparted knowledge in several other subjects, especially history and the sciences. According to Webster, history included the necessity of virtue and morality in elected officials, as well as man's duty to his community and country. Science established orderly laws in nature. Webster also addressed economics, teaching the proper use of money in borrowing and lending. His later curricular goals included the active relationship between man and God, obedience of the first to the latter, and the divine origin in all aspects of knowledge. (Newman 12-13)

The marvel is that a one-room schoolhouse could facilitate all this knowledge and learning and all in just four months! Webster's school reforms were drastic. He introduced the notion that desks and chairs were to be properly proportioned to a pupil's growing stature. He was the first "class-size reduction" proponent, openly critical of the seventy to eighty students per instructor, and recommended reducing these ratios to twenty-five children to one teacher. "The pupil should have nothing to discourage him," he wrote. (Unger 36) Webster's conception of new texts for student use would be entertaining, interesting, and make reading pleasurable.

In 1781, Webster was able to open his own academy and began testing his educational theories. The school was an overwhelming success, so much so that Webster added French and other courses to the daily workload. He also experimented with a graduated tuition charge with the poorest students paying the least amount. (Rollins, Long Journey 33) By adding young women, "republican mothers", to the equation, education became the preferred instrument of social policy after the Revolution. (Foner 314-315)

Schools were to be the springboard for the preservation and perpetuation of the newly
independent nation. In addition to furnishing schools with proper equipment and
interesting readers, moral stories and patriotic essays, schools housed the earliest attempts
to influence and mold the children of America. In the preface of *History of the United
States*, Webster again emphasized the importance of character in the citizens and in the
nation:

"Republican government loses half of its value, where the moral and social duties are
imperfectly understood, or negligently practiced. To exterminate our popular vices is a
work of far more importance to the character and happiness of our citizens, than any
other improvements in our system of education." (Webster's *History*, quoted in
McDowell 169)

Who better to teach these “moral and social duties” than the teachers serving the schools?

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**TEACH**, v. t. pret. and pp. taught. 1. To instruct; to inform; to communicate to another
the knowledge of that of which he was before ignorant.

*He will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths.* *Is. ii.*

*Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.* *Luke xi.*

2. To deliver any doctrine, art, principles or words for instruction. One sect of ancient
philosophers taught the doctrines of stoicism, another those of epicureanism.

*In vain they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.* *Matt. xv.*

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Proper facilities and reading material were paramount to Webster, but equally so, was
his idea of the qualifications of the person entrusted to teach. Remembering his early
school years, Webster noted the severity of the teacher and the uninviting somber
atmosphere. Webster's educational philosophy would improve these conditions.

Webster was convinced through his political and educational experiences that
teaching required more than the *ability* to teach books; it also required the *character* to
teach. Educators were to advance in children what they possessed in themselves -- the
intellectual and moral character in love of country, respect for authority, service to others,
high regard for education, and a superior work ethic. In order to gain the desired results, it was important to teach not only to the abilities of the child but to the "heart" as well. (Bennett 219)

If moral character was important for the students, then it was of primary importance for the teachers who taught them. One of the principle defects of American education, as Webster saw it, was the lack of moral teachers. Webster warned that it was better to receive no education due to lack of teachers than to be taught by immoral men:

"It is more difficult to eradicate habits, than to impress new ideas. The tender shrub is easily bent to any figure; but the tree, which has acquired its full growth, resists all impressions." (quoted in Snyder 113)

Remembering his own early academic experiences, Webster criticized any teacher who threatened a child with a lash from his rod and who consequently killed the joy of learning. In developing his reforms, Webster broke from Puritan tradition, calling for extensive teacher training, the use of rewards instead of punishment, and the legal power to revise existing school regulations. Class size reduction, newer texts, and high quality teachers were all part of the agenda. For education to be effective, Webster knew a law degree would be required, and he embarked on that journey in 1780. (Unger 36-37)

Astutely, Webster covered much ground, first by being a curious learner; second, by becoming a teacher; third, by exploring new themes in teaching and writing; fourth, by studying and practicing law; fifth, by developing his personal character. With passion, Noah Webster was able to achieve many goals and extend his own knowledge in law, medicine, music, religion, languages, and politics. In so doing, he reciprocated by teaching and writing until his death. Either implicitly or explicitly, the theme Webster wrote on most often was uniformity.
UNIFORMITY, n. Resemblance to itself at all times; even tenor; as the uniformity of design in a poem.
2. Consistency; sameness; as the uniformity of a man's opinions.

As necessary as the American Revolution had been with England, Webster maintained that unity among Americans was even more vital. The question was how to achieve such a unified state. Noah Webster's thoughts turned to what he was most familiar with -- words. Unity in the nation could be achieved by uniformity in language. England's influence was being felt in America's towns either by their British names, i.e., Ivanhoe and Waverley, or by the limited availability of books, written exclusively by English writers. While hundreds of American words were being coined, they were not receiving a wide enough audience to make them uniform. (Crystal 83) Noah Webster would change all that.

Webster used words most effectively when persuading or defending:

"The more I look into our language and the methods of instruction practiced in this country the more I am convinced of the necessity of improving one and correcting the other. And however some may think, a book of this kind too trifling for public notice, I am fully of the opinion, that the reformation of the language we speak, will some time or other be thought an object of legislative importance." (Snyder 51)

For Webster, American literary independence from England was necessary and could only be obtained by a uniformity of spoken and written language. "Language in a nation should be uniform; the same words should, among all classes of people, express the same ideas," Webster announced. (Swann 53)

Webster was disturbed by the various dialects and peculiarities he heard in his travels around the country and determined to remedy the problem. Only thus, could Americans
finalize their separation from England and seal their new identity. For the most effective union of the states, Americans must "unite in destroying provincial and local distinctions...and in establishing one uniform standard of elegant pronunciation". (Snyder 57)

Webster's Speller not only met the challenge, but surpassed all expectations. Even Webster's critics had to admit that unlike other spellers, Webster's introduced "uniformity and accuracy of pronunciation into common schools". (Snyder 57) The "fashion of the day" or countryside no longer ruled; Webster established a guide for proper speech among Americans. (Moss 110)

The young visionary, Webster had made a name for himself and he continued to voice his theme of uniformity. Differences in language made for ridicule or disrespect. Words were not merely expressing opinions or passing information. Words determined a nation's moral and political well-being and its ultimate unity or division. Therefore, political harmony was dependent on linguistic harmony. Webster saw a clear connection between language and logic and "the influence which a uniformity of speech may have on national attachments". (Snyder 90)

Webster discovered that language influenced behavior and shaped opinions. With this knowledge, Webster practiced his own brand of influence. He passionately wrote on agriculture, politics, history, disease, health, religion, education, money, marriage, and even manner of dress. By the end of his life, Webster equated truth with the clarity of word definitions. He believed that conflicts were caused by misunderstandings of words and set out to transform misinterpretations by writing his famous dictionary. (Rollins, Long Journey 126-131)
In the meantime, he continued to call on important men such as Aaron Burr, George Washington, Benjamin Rush, and Thomas Paine to discuss his themes and promote his books. By 1787, Webster, without financial backing or family influence, had become a well-known and widely read author. Webster's accomplishments were a credit to his own ingenuity, marketing, and zeal. (Rollins, Long Journey 46-48) Merely by using words, Webster's political ideology had established language uniformity in the American nation. Webster further believed that this uniformity would result in virtuous citizens, seeking to stamp out political and moral corruption.

VIRTUE, n. 4. A particular moral excellence; as the virtue of temperance, of chastity, of charity. Remember all his virtues. Addison. 7. Excellence; or that which constitutes value and merit.

To bring about true and lasting reforms in education, government, society, and in every other area of life, Webster knew that it would take a special quality in leaders to achieve what had previously only been an ideal. This quality was virtue.

Even with diligence, study, and hard work, ideas and reforms would not go far without virtue. In 1839, Webster wrote:

"...Without religious and moral principles deeply impressed on the mind, and controlling the whole conduct, science and literature will not make men what the laws of God require them to be..." (Webster's Manual of Useful Studies, quoted in McDowell 169)

It would take both knowledge and virtue for men to achieve the supernatural blessings God had in store for them. From friendships to personal conduct to selection of able men for office, Webster repeatedly spoke and wrote of virtue. (Slater 21-26) In an early preface, Webster explained his reasoning behind the short stories for children was "not
only to entertain, but to inspire the minds of youth, with an abhorrence of vice, indolence and meanness, and with a love of virtue, industry and good manners". (Webster, Institute 12)

In his *Collection of Essays and Fugitiv Writings*, Webster extended virtue to theater and entertainment (86), paper currency (134), and simplicity (140), stressing the political and economic virtues of thrift, self-reliance, and duty throughout the essays.

De Tocqueville wrote strikingly about the word, *virtue*, and categorized it as a generic term meaning "courage" in French, yet little esteemed as courage in America; it meant "honor" in aristocratic circles, and so on. He seemed to think that virtue was relative to its place and time. (De Tocqueville 616-627)

If De Tocqueville was right, it would explain why Webster's *virtue* was a repetitive theme in his estimation of America, its people, and its representatives. Webster's America took virtue to its extreme, incorporating the highest standards. It meant *valor* to break away from England; it meant *self-respect* to form a nation; it meant *chastity* to women of beauty; it meant *integrity* to elected officials; it meant *industry* to the head of a family; it meant *morality* to educators.

Virtue was the beginning and the end for Webster. The United States Constitution had virtues, which placed America on a firmer footing. Like young children in whom education should place both knowledge and virtue, America was a young nation not yet fully formed in character. Consequently, the educational methodology was essential in teaching "the principles of virtue and liberty" so that young students would form a strong attachment to their own country (another virtue). (Snyder 99-111)

Webster believed virtues created a better society, and he wanted to ensure society's
allegiance to America by mirroring virtue in the political and educational systems.

Historical events proved that virtues are difficult to teach and even more difficult to maintain. Webster thought it imperative, therefore, that the women, or “first teachers”, set the tone through their civility, modesty, and tender nature.

WOMAN, n. 1. The female of the human race, grown to adult years.

And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from the man, made he a woman. Gen. ii.

Women are soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible. Shak.

We see every day women perish with infamy, by having been too willing to set their beauty to show. Rambler.

I have observed among all nations that the women ornament themselves more than the men; that wherever found, they are the same kind, civil, obliging, humane, tender beings, inclined to be gay and cheerful, timorous and modest. Ledyard.

In 1788, Webster wrote an Address to Young Ladies, which portrayed the sentiments and traditions representing women in 18th century America. In kind words and appeals, Webster exalted the female gender, laid virtuous responsibilities on her in regard to male-female relationships, and generally implored women to create and maintain their outer and inner beauties:

"May your influence over our sex be increased and not merely the influence of beauty and gay accomplishments, but the influence of your virtues, whose dominion controls the evils, and multiplies the blessings of society." (Webster, Essays 414)

Describing women as the "tender sex", Webster enthusiastically included females in his treatise on universal public education. A man always ahead of his time in the treatment of slaves, Indians, and women, Webster staunchly defended his educational stance by stating the benefits and the outcome:

"Females when properly educated and devoted to their appropriate duties, are qualified to add greatly to the happiness of society, and of domestic life...carefully tending and anxiously guarding her children and forming their minds to virtue and to piety..." (Webster, Advice 37)
Webster emphasized the moral and intellectual aspects because as the keepers of the home, women, had the best chance of shaping the earliest and most critical years of their children's minds. To shape a mind in the present was to shape a country in the future.

Noah Webster was well aware of the economic opposition to universal public education. Farmers, manufacturers, and plantations all depended on child labor. Educational deprivation, he pleaded, would leave the majority of future Americans intellectually deficient and unable to govern themselves. The reins of government would then be taken over by the educated aristocracy. It was imperative that young men and young women both be educated. (Unger 143)

Webster developed his new theory of education to include girls receiving a similar, but not exact, education as boys. The arts, such as dancing, drawing, and music, were subordinate to history, geography, and arithmetic. Schools were to also teach young women their legal rights so they could protect their property and interests if they were widowed or fatherless. (Unger 39)

Webster's core beliefs about the importance of universal education could not be dispelled by political or cultural opposition. The education of young women was not a popular theme, nor was it met with apathy. Webster, however, relentlessly advocated female education as necessary and proper. A pioneer in women's rights to education, he firmly believed that the next generation naturally depended on mothers and sisters to be the first teachers. Webster's views wisely prevailed.
CHAPTER FIVE
METHODS

Even among his critics, Noah Webster was known as having a genius for detail. He possessed the "priceless faculty of being able to write a finished draft offhand and have it as correct as all the resources of his data". (Leavitt 21)

Save for the times his son and he traveled to Europe to research word origins and historical contexts, Webster worked alone. He painstakingly wrote out in his own hand the entire manuscript of the American Dictionary, comprised of 70,000 listings, i.e.,

XYLOGRAPHY, n. Wood engraving; the act or art of cutting figures in wood, in representation of natural objects.

Noah Webster learned over twenty-eight languages while researching and writing his dictionaries. (Slater 6) Xylography was one word he learned, derived from the Greek words, Ξύλο, wood, and Γράφω, to engrave. The oldest method of printmaking required cutting away portions of wood from a wood block so that the desired image remained. Boxwood, cherry, or pine were first smoothed then hardened with shellac to make them more durable under the pressure of a press. An artist etched an image on the cross-section of the block, black ink was applied to the surface, and a sheet of smooth paper was placed on the block and printed by hand or through a press. Webster used these woodcuttings as illustrations in his books.

56
Webster was industrious, patient, enthusiastic, and pragmatic. He was organized and exacting. Webster's talents and temperament matched up with his desires to promote a distinct American heritage. All that Webster wanted to promote could be achieved by reaching the young.

**YOUTH, n.** 1. The part of life that succeeds to childhood. In a general sense, youth denotes the whole early part of life, from infancy to manhood; but it is not unusual to divide the stages of life into infancy, childhood, youth, and manhood. In this sense the word can have no plural.

*Those who pass their youth in vice, are justly condemned to spend their age in folly.*

_Rambler._

_Advice to the Young_ was written in fifty-six paragraphs, each one establishing a duty or moral lesson for the youth of America. Webster began with a logical sequence of responsibilities, first with the children's duty to obey their parents, the parents' obligation to exercise their authority with kindness, and the family's responsibility to honor and reflect on God and on His creation. (Webster, _Advice_ 21-25)

From one point to another, Webster taught the importance of the Scriptures in revealing the character of God and the relationship of man to creator. Proper conduct, respect for others, personal decisions, and ultimately, the path of one's life should emanate from this foundational relationship:

"A wise being would not have made you without a wise purpose. It is very certain then that God requires you to perform some duties, and fill some useful stations among other beings." (Webster, _Advice_ 26)

Webster then turned to admonishments on stealing, fraud, drinking, idleness, and all kinds of mischief. He advised young men on the treatment of females and reminded readers of Christianity's elevation of the female character. Webster's summary
recommended the reading of *Bible* stories to address faith, economy, forgiveness, and humility. (Webster, *Advice* 27-40)

A child of the Enlightenment, Webster combined religion with common sense:

"Play not with bad boys; use no ill words at play; spend your time well; live in peace, and shun all strife. This is the way to make God love you, and to save your soul from the pains of hell." (quoted in Snyder 62)

After 1808 and his religious recommitment to orthodox Christianity, Webster altered his political, educational, and societal purposes, further establishing his conservative influence. In founding Amherst College on August 9, 1820, Webster gave the opening remarks:

"The object of this institution, that of educating for the gospel ministry young men in indigent circumstances, but of hopeful piety and promising talents, is one of the noblest which can occupy the attention and claim the contributions of the public...to aid in...raising the human race from ignorance...to enlighten their minds; to exalt their character;...to teach them the way to happiness...We live to see a new era in the history of man--an era when reason and religion begin to resume their sway, and to impress the heavenly truth, that the appropriate business of men, is to imitate the Savior; to serve their God; and bless their fellow-men." (quoted in Snyder 294-295)

Habit, imitation, and tradition were the modes of early education, according to Webster. Reasoning powers had not been fully developed, so children learned from observation. Parents and others in authority could teach children to gradually develop into independent thinkers by modeling respect, fulfillment of duties, control over passions, and pursuing excellence. (Snyder 297-298)

Rational men of character rooted in moral, ethical, and religious foundations were truly educated, Webster believed. The educational development of youth depended on excellent role models, good judgment, right companions, and religious grounding. These criteria should be given utmost attention. Webster encouraged young people to
"...acquire the means of public usefulness, and of private elevation of character"

(Snyder 303) so that America may fulfill its destiny. In Webster's treatises, good education taught good character, and good collective character determined the character of a nation.

Character combined with zeal reached into posterity. Without zeal, Webster could not have reached the level of significance historical accounts of his achievements record.

ZEAL, n. Passionate ardor in the pursuit of any thing. Excessive zeal may rise to enthusiasm. In general, zeal is an eagerness of desire to accomplish or obtain some object, and it may be manifested either in favor of any person or thing, or in opposition to it, and in a good or bad cause. Zeal, the blind conductor of the will. Dryden. They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. Rom. x. A zeal for liberty is sometimes an eagerness to subvert, with little care what shall be established. Johnson.

Noah Webster would be labeled a zealot if he were alive and writing today. The negative connotations surrounding the word are probably similar to Webster's time, but examining his definition, we might be inclined to take the higher road in applying zeal to Webster -- passionate, enthusiastic, dedicated, and eager.

Beginning with his zeal for religious instruction, Webster wrote his dictionary and other essays with Biblical references and moral lessons. He not only advocated Christian principles but strict adherence to doctrine and tradition. In Letters to a Young Gentleman, Webster addressed the Sabbath:

"When you abstain from secular employments, on the sabbath, and attend public worship, you must not suppose that you fully comply with the requisitions of the fourth Commandment, unless you devote the whole day to religious improvement. If you spend any part of the day in convivial entertainment, in reading novels, plays, history, geography or travels, you undoubtedly violate the letter as well as the spirit of that command." (quoted in Slater 13-14)
In the dedication of the *Webster Bible*, Noah was passionate about the supernatural origin of language, noting that Adam and Eve spoke with God and asked his forgiveness after eating the forbidden fruit. Webster concluded that language was of "divine origin". (Moss 104)

Enthusiastic in his political proposals, he shaped an American mindset on independence and nationalism. His convictions that the United States were in need of a stronger federal union produced *Sketches of American Policy* in 1785. His profound dedication caused him to travel, taking his *Sketches* and schoolbooks to influential people. For eighteen months, he visited every major city in the United States and lectured consistently on American ideals in an effort to "deliver literature and my countrymen from the errors that fashion and ignorance are palming upon Englishmen". (Moss 8-9)

From his early writings wherein America was going to be "the closing scene of a vast drama" (Moss 49) to the end of his life when he published a revised King James version of the Bible, Webster exhibited strong patriotism and respect for authority based on absolute principles. Reared in a God-fearing and industrious home, Noah Webster grew up in a somber environment that taught sacrifice and service to country, virtue in personal and social relationships, and hard work, simplicity, and thrift. He took his existence on earth seriously and pursued goals characteristic of these early principles. With zeal, Webster defended truth and order against opposition and anarchy. (Moss 89)

Eager to establish a distinctly American education, Webster molded the children and history of America. The *Speller* was composed to "inspire the minds of youth, with an abhorrence of vice, indolence and meanness; and with a love of virtue, industry and good
manner". (Webster, Autobiographies 33) His dictionary references, quoting American authors such as Washington and Franklin, served to esteem these domestic writers to the level foreign-acclaimed authors, i.e., Addison and Swift, were held. (Moss 110)

Webster cited:

"the style of the authors of the Federalist papers...the prose...the legal decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States and many other writings as unsurpassed by any works in English of a similar kind." (Webster's preface in American Dictionary, quoted in Unger 305)

Webster's zeal extended to reversing some of his earlier positions, as he watched America's history unfold. For example, Webster deemed the people worthy of unalienable rights and power in his early writings, but later viewed them as "a degenerate and wicked people". (Unger 336) After endorsing sound principles and virtuous men for public office, Webster found in the years following that the nation and the candidates fell short of his expectations, concluding "we deserve all our public evils". (Webster's letter to Emily Webster Ellsworth, 1840, quoted in Unger 336)

Webster's zeal emanated from his religious fervency, his political passion, and his keen intellect. At first, he was religious by birthright only, promoting reason and intellect as paramount. With his evangelical conversion in 1808, however, his emphasis changed to one based on Christian history, morals, and God's authority over man.

In language, where once Webster adamantly sponsored only the American perspective, he found himself bending objectively to include the English mother tongue for better regularization of words and out of respect for the "parent" of America. When Webster sent Queen Victoria a copy of his dictionary in 1841, he told her that he hoped the book showed evidence that the "genuine descendants of English ancestors born on the west of the Atlantic, have not forgotten either the land or the language of their fathers". (Rollins, Words 421)
Noah Webster's methods of unifying a nation taught millions of children how to read and spell, how to embrace the American political system, and how to unify as one people, despite differences in nationality, religion, race, and language. Webster's life did not simply and laboriously produce a dictionary. In short, his life produced a nation of men and women, young and old, committed to distinctly American ideals.
CONCLUSION

“Language is the strongest and most enduring link that unites men.” (DeTocqueville 33) Language is more than shared symbols of communication through reading, writing, and speaking. It connotes community, human rights, and even nationhood. It becomes intensely personal, emotional, a gift to the nation’s children, almost a birthright.

Combined with education, language enlightens, anchors, and activates a citizenry. Protection against misgovernment is derived from the development of citizens through a school system producing democratic men and women. Political democracy, therefore, stands firm on educated, and if you will, indoctrinated citizens.

Noah Webster stands unique as a symbol of the spirit of America. His political ideology directed his energies to making a recognizable difference in education, in government, and in American culture and history. For Webster, language was the vehicle. The words character and virtue, education and government were all synonymous. The development of the first two (character, virtue) were determined by the third (education), and they in turn, determined the last (government). To fall short in these areas was to fail in the ultimate preservation of a free nation and its people.

Webster set out to transform American education by providing American textbooks for America’s children. He sought uniformity in language, common political thought, nationalistic values, and the resulting stable republic.

Staunchly anti-aristocratic, Noah Webster was the first to carry a spirit of “democracy
into letters,” wrote historian Horace Scudder. He was the first to lobby for national copyright laws; the first layperson to write about diseases, propose sanitation standards, and paved roads for cities; the first to draft an early constitution that would form a strong central government and denounce slavery.

Webster was the first to propose desk sizes to fit all ages and sizes of children; the first proponent of class-size reduction; the first to establish a uniform and phonetic spelling of words designed to diminish American differences and unify regions; the first to call for universal public education for both boys and girls.

Noah was the first to rewrite the Bible, omitting offensive words and ideas. In journalism, Webster was the first in formatting a magazine with the “Table of Contents” on the front page and in condensing the articles, similar to today’s Reader’s Digest.

Webster was the first to compile a 70,000 word dictionary introducing American words such as *chowder* and *hickory*, redefining English words, such as *marshall* and *plantation*, respelling *color*, *music*, and others. He was the first to introduce new terms in medicine, botany, and geology and set himself in twenty five years of constant daily labor to complete this work for posterity.

A bold advocate of strong government, Noah Webster resisted ridicule and fortune in order to attain his dream of a united America. In his infinite wisdom, Webster raised the consciousness of the young republic by writing and speaking on politics, education, and godly character. He was a leader of the growing consciousness of Americanism and of the spirit which hailed the new democracy.

If the purpose of politics is to promote and preserve a particular brand of government as the best and most powerful, Webster achieved this goal by writing and lobbying for the
property and liberties of America's people, by formulating essays imploring Americans to embrace virtue for themselves and for their leaders, and by conceiving and presenting a distinctively American form of government through his constitutional ideals.

If the purpose of education is to teach and prepare young minds, Webster achieved abundantly more than he ever imagined by distributing his spellers and dictionaries, by offering both boys and girls, both wealthy and poor, an equal education, and by revealing the connection between morals and academics in a free society.

If the purpose of religion is to enlighten and instill godly character, Webster secured the right to express himself before God and countrymen by guiding the young through sage advice, by basing his political and educational beliefs in a Supreme Being, and by directing an American nation toward lofty yet attainable goals.

*Noah Webster Spelled Out* was conceived to establish the importance of this prolific writer. It concludes in awe of what one individual can attain if motivated by vision and conviction:

“It is the business of Americans to select the wisdom of all nations, as the basis of her constitutions, to avoid their errors, to prevent the introduction of foreign vices and corruptions and check the career of her own, to promote virtue and patriotism, to embellish and improve the sciences, to diffuse an uniformity and purity of language, to add superior dignity to this infant Empire and to human nature.” (Webster, *American Dictionary* 11)

In endeavoring to liberate America from European ties, Webster’s life and politics were expressed in words that touched every facet of American life.
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Noah Webster Spelled Out

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