

# A short history of schools

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The word school comes from the Latin word *schola* meaning “free time consecrated to learning,” an institution idealized by the philosophers and ideologues and perceived as being a socially valued category, in opposition to the sphere of manual or productive labor.

In early civilizations, school was created by scribes and other government functionaries who occupied religious and administrative posts. Among the ancient Greeks, school had the purpose of training future soldiers before it was transformed to teach philosophy and rhetoric by the Sophists for the children of the rich who would never have to work.

When the Roman empire began to expand, so did the influence of the Greeks, and schools started to have the training of future functionaries as their objective. Christianity developed within the Greco-Roman civilization, and it incorporated the intellectualism of the Greeks and the severity of the Romans into its own educational practices, putting on a pedestal the Western image of a man who is kneeling before the law and who is ready to sacrifice for an ideal.

Monastic schools appeared in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Cathedral schools were created in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and their programs became increasingly more complex until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the first universities were born. The elementary schools among the Christians, starting in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, were founded primarily to Christianize people and to combat the “laziness of the poor.”

With the Renaissance, the goal of discipline became even more central to the educational project, and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century schools began to systematically evaluate students, to organize the classrooms by rows, put the students in age categories, and organize a series of subjects taught in order of increasing difficulty. National schools were established to create a more homogenous citizenry. Students were taught that they did not belong to themselves, but rather to the nation.

The advocates of public schools (the Humanists) were primarily interested in integrating the masses into the new industrial economy and in diminishing the social tensions created by increasingly greater inequalities. The children of proletarians had to be educated efficiently for the developing industrial capitalist economy: the centralization of decisions, individual writing, the standardization of the curriculum and mandatory uniforms. Education thus acquired its institutional character. This development, which paved the road for the bureaucracies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was essential to the reproduction of the new industrial social order as well as capitalist social relationships.

It was also over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (in 1871 in the US) that school began to be perceived as an effective medium for the assimilation and acculturation of Indigenous peoples and immigrants to the dominant white society.

To insure the loyalty of the working classes, the state created a system of mandatory education for all. In 1900, the majority of US states had their own public schools and in 1915, corporations were spending more money on post-secondary education than governments. The management of the education system was based on a scientific management strategy developed by Frederick W. Taylor (based on organization by task). After World War II, different governments around the world adopted universal elementary school education as a main objective. In indus-

trial societies, high school education took on an increasingly greater importance with the increasing complexity of technologies of social control and a more complex division of labor.

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A version of this appeared in “En suspense,” inspired by *Toward the Destruction of Schooling* by Jan D. Matthews, [anti-politics.net/school](http://anti-politics.net/school).

# fifth Estate

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