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THE DECLINE OF CLASSICAL EDUCATION AMONGST UNITED STATES
SENATORS 1789 – 1899

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Vasili Brett Hillhouse

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Caroline Winterer".

Dr. Caroline Winterer

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor".

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jonathan Roth".

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APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

THE DECLINE OF CLASSICAL EDUCATION AMONGST UNITED STATES SENATORS 1789 – 1899

by Vasili Brett Hillhouse

This thesis addresses the topic of the decline of classical education amongst United States senators in the nineteenth century. It examines the education received by a total of 392 senators. Through the collection and analysis of the specific curricula from the colleges and universities attended by these senators, and with the additional help of various secondary sources, it was established whether or not each individual senator had or had not received a classical education. This study was conducted in an effort to define the relationship between the decline of classical education amongst US politicians and the decline of classical culture in US politics. Upon the completion of research, it was determined that this relationship was one of cause and effect. The decline in percentage of senators that were classically trained directly affected the use of classical imagery and reference in US politics.

Introduction

Historians do not debate the fact that classicism¹ largely disappeared from American political culture during the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Historians Daniel Howe and Michael Meckler have recently written articles addressing this topic and suggested that further research is needed in order to better understand the relationship between the decline of classical education in America and the deterioration of the culture of classicism in US politics. That relationship is the subject of this study. Howe states that by the end of the nineteenth century civic humanism had “lost its hold on the American political imagination;”² and Meckler, that the classical curriculum had been relegated “from the center of political thought to a dusty corner in the ivory tower.”³ This study focuses on one direct cause of this decline: the metamorphosis of curricula in higher education. By examining the education received by United States senators over a hundred-year period, this study provides a record and interpretation of that education, which gives an answer to the question, “What caused the decline of classical culture in US politics?”

A curriculum based on classical literature was a staple of the education given at America’s elite universities in the eighteenth century, and this education always began with the study of Latin and Greek. University students came to the programs having already obtained a proficiency in the ancient languages. Instruction in Greek and Latin continued as professors taught Greek and Roman history, geography, and philosophy

through the writings of ancient writers such as Sallust, Xenophon, Virgil, and Demosthenes.

University entrance exams and admission requirements emphasized the aforementioned classical subjects. In 1826 at Washington College (now Washington and Lee University) students came into their freshman year having previously obtained a grasp of ancient history and geography. They were also proficient enough in Latin and Greek grammar as to have the ability to read Virgil and Sallust in the original language. In the four years of their residency, students would read Xenophon, Cicero, Tacitus, and Euclid. They would receive instruction in rhetoric, criticism and logic, as well as the fundamental subjects such as English grammar, mathematics, astronomy, and chemistry.⁴ At Union College in 1815, the freshmen class was immediately expected to write compositions in Latin and read Cicero's de Officiis along with Xenophon.⁵ Union employed a similar curriculum for all students (even those who took the "Scientific Course" – available in 1828) until they finally established a totally separate program in 1854 for those desiring a purely scientific curriculum.⁶

The preferred status that the classics held in early American education transferred over into the political arena. Young statesmen, who had been instructed through the universities in the oratorical atmosphere of Demosthenes and Cicero, naturally showed a propensity for quoting ancient Greek and Roman history in their political speeches, which were modeled after the speeches of the aforementioned fathers of oratory. Yet, as Howe has stated, this classical influence in American political life all but disappeared by the late nineteenth century. To find out why, this study begins by looking at American

education and at the effect that societal trends had on the decline in importance of the classical curriculum at institutions of higher learning. By looking specifically at the education received by US Senators, one finds a direct correlation between the demise of the classical tradition in American curricula and the near extinction of classicism in American politics.

As the elite house of the Congress, the Senate stands as the obvious place to begin to chart one reason for the decline of classicism in American politics. When James Madison envisioned a bicameral legislature for the United States, he was attempting to collect the most gifted men for service in the elite legislative body, the Senate. In Madison's original plan, the lower house would be elected by popular vote and the upper house would be elected by the lower. The philosophical approach to this reflects the idea of what Madison called "successive filtration," which was designed to prevent the general populace from directly electing the members of the most powerful body in the US government. As far as Madison was concerned, the stability of the national government would rest squarely upon the shoulders of the Senate – and he believed that the election of its members was too important a task to allow the average citizen to largely affect it.

Madison was mistrustful of the mob. He had read his ancient history and he paid heed to the warnings of Cicero and the examples provided by the narratives of Julius Caesar and Marc Antony. He even harkened back to Socrates when he stated that, had there been a filtration system in place to check the Athenian populace, "popular liberty might then have escaped the indelible reproach of decreeing to the same citizens hemlock on the one day and statues on the next."⁷ Madison further expounded on this idea in The

Federalist, No. 63: “There are particular moments in public affairs when the people, stimulated by some irregular passion, or some illicit advantage, or misled by the artful misrepresentations of interested men, may call for measures which they themselves will afterwards be the most ready to lament and condemn.”⁸ Madison viewed the unpredictability of the electorate as something to protect the government against – hence the bicameral legislature that favored the Senate, giving it the ability to reject the mistakes of “popular liberty.” For Madison and the majority of founding fathers, this check had to be in place because it was the crème-de-la-crème alone that had the natural ability to protect the new nation against the inherent propensity of the populace for rash decision-making. Madison hearkened to the examples of Sparta, Rome and Carthage in arguing the importance of the Senate; all three of these republics were long-lived and Madison attributes this longevity to the fact that they all had a senate to function as “the anchor against popular fluctuations.”⁹

Madison’s model of the senate came directly from ancient Rome, where a hundred nobles had presided as the supreme council of state. As there were no proper “nobles” in the newly formed union of states, Madison and Jefferson saw themselves (and those who were educated and enlightened like them) as the inheritors of the Roman noble’s role of guardian and headship for the nation. As in ancient Rome, the American aristocracy, which was often termed by its members a “natural aristocracy”¹⁰ (based on ability rather than birth), was educated, enlightened, and, as the elite class, bore the responsibility of saving the people from their own momentary lapses of judgment.

Because the elite in American politics tended to come from the well-to-do families, which had the greatest access to classical learning, the impact of a classical education should have been prominent in the political culture of the Senate. However, studies such as the ones conducted by Howe and Ferguson have found that as the nineteenth century progressed, the classical content in American politics decreased. This present study seeks then to answer this question: Despite their privileged upbringing, did these elite senators, who had the most ready access to all classical learning in the United States, really receive a classical education? An examination of the education received by specific congresses of senators throughout the nineteenth century revealed that there was in fact a drastic decline in the percentage of serving senators that had received a classical education. A presentation of this specific data will follow a brief exposition on the causes of the decline of the classical curriculum in American colleges and universities.

Threats to the Classical Curriculum in American Education

The reason for the decline of the classical curriculum is multi-faceted. The nineteenth century brought many changes to the cultural landscape of the United States. Large events like the Civil War radically affected the world of most Americans, but small events and less prominent currents in society had an even larger effect on the life of the classical curriculum. Some of these factors include: Thomas Jefferson's adoption of the

“Elective System” for the University of Virginia; the socio-political movement known as “Jacksonian Democracy”; the rising popularity of science and modern foreign languages; the Industrial Revolution; and the introduction of new, “practical” methods of studying the law. Each of these factors proved to be a threat to the study of classical literature, history and philosophy in American education.

Thomas Jefferson is a bit of an enigma when it comes to studying the decline of classical education in the United States. Jefferson’s reading lists for law students were what Ferguson calls “virtual bibliographies of the Enlightenment”¹¹ that contained some elements of classical study along with modern texts on law such as Blackstone’s Commentaries.¹² In 1825, as the University of Virginia’s foremost supporter, Jefferson encouraged the deployment of a curriculum that contained some classical elements along with many “modern” subjects. While recommending a classical reading list to his nephew on the one hand, on the other he stated that classical instruction in ancient languages, pure mathematics, moral philosophy and theology suited “Old World aristocrats but not New World republicans.”¹³ His recommended curriculum included Ancient Greek, Latin, Hebrew, astronomy, botany, commerce, geography, modern languages, architecture and zoology.¹⁴ He saw the need to emphasize the study of each of the branches of science “deemed useful”¹⁵ for contemporary America. He proposed an institution that incorporated schools of agriculture, military science, and a technical school that would train carpenters, distillers, machinists, opticians, and other craftsmen.¹⁶

Jefferson had been classically trained and believed in the classical model of history – the belief that history is cyclical and provides a blueprint for avoiding the fall of

republics. In Jefferson's classical view of history, the morality or virtue of a nation was key to preserving its stability. In the histories of ancient Greece and Rome, the fall of the republics came when the virtue of a state was overshadowed by its vice. Those who believed in the classical model of history thought that the virtue of a nation was best preserved by an agrarian society free from the debauchery and filth of cities. An agrarian society was marked by its labor – where men and women worked with their hands to produce beautiful goods for subsistence and enjoyment. If a young man were only to exercise his brain without the physical toil that produced something useful for society, his education would still leave him incompetent. This is the reason that Jefferson proposed such “practical” schools within the university; these schools would train up good republicans in virtuous labors such as farming and woodworking.

Jefferson preached the classics and utility – he did not view them as being mutually exclusive but believed that they each had their place. The university presidents that followed Jefferson's example seem to have missed the fact that he had a love for the classics and was not intending to wholly abandon them. Francis Wayland, the president of Brown University, and others like him, developed programs that completely excluded classical literature in the name of utility. Wayland, who became president of Brown University beginning in 1827, was one of the first to implement a program of “utilitarian” studies,¹⁷ and other universities followed suit.

Jefferson, with his “elective system” of education, did not directly lead to the abandonment of the classics in antebellum American education, but he unwittingly laid the foundation for it. His elective system, what Edwin Miles calls “the ultimate in

educational popular sovereignty,”¹⁸ was born at the University of Virginia in 1825 and was later incorporated into the other universities around the nation. Dan Frost, a historian of education in the South, argued that Jefferson’s system paved the way for the discontinuation of the study of the classics at southern universities.¹⁹

Under the elective system, students were free to choose many of their own classes in order to fulfill graduation requirements in the program of studies to which they belonged. For those studying subjects in the humanities, some classical elements were required but the classics were often avoided by students, who had a distaste for Greek and Latin. It became common for students to fulfill the ancient language requirement simply by studying the grammar without further delving into the actual Greek and Latin authors.²⁰ The elective system did not have an immediate impact on the classical curriculum upon its introduction by Jefferson, but by mid-century it had been employed by many universities and provided a way for students to opt out of the study of Latin and ancient Greek literature. The system of electives did not destroy the classical curriculum of its own accord, it simply provided the way for societal distastes to marginalize them.

The so-called “egalitarian” principles of 1830’s Jacksonian Democracy, dealt a severe blow to the culture of classicism in American society. In the decades of the 1830’s and 1840’s classicists were forced to defend the curricula from those who, in the name of egalitarianism, sought to wipe out all vestiges of what they considered “elitism.” The classical curriculum, which required the use of ancient languages, was an easy target. As Edwin A. Miles states in his study on American culture and the classics, “Since the ability to read and quote in Latin and Greek formerly served as a means of distinguishing

the gentleman from the common man, such studies better suited a society that recognized rigid class distinctions.”²¹ The rabid egalitarianism of Jacksonian Democrats fought to be rid of anything that smacked of class distinction or privilege; and, because the study of the classics was so often associated, in the minds of the populace, with a ruling class of educated elite, it was made a scapegoat for social stratification and was attacked with increasing regularity.²²

These attacks spilled over into political speeches as well. One such attack is worth quoting. Mike Walsh, a Representative of New York and Irish immigrant, gave a speech on the floor of the House of Representatives in 1854. He announced:

If I am deficient in classical lore, I am pretty well booked up in the rascality of the age in which we live. I would not barter away all the practical knowledge I have received in lumber and shipyards for all the Latin that was ever spoken in ancient Rome. I had rather speak sense in one plain and expressive language, than speak nonsense in fifty.²³

Hostility was shown towards those who used Latin in public speeches to such a degree that the esteemed orator Daniel Webster (who loved to entertain audiences with multiple Latin quotations) gave up the use of Latin phrases when addressing a jury because he knew that it would harm his case.²⁴

By the end of the Civil War, students and parents alike were putting pressure on colleges and universities to switch their focus from liberal education to job training. The danger of holding fast to the classical curriculum was to risk being defined as narrowly elitist.²⁵ More and more students, especially in the western territories and states, wanted training in the skills that would enable them to hit the job market running. Universities

responded to the demands of their students (and to society in general) and moved towards a curriculum that was intended to be vocational. The paradigm for assessing the value of a particular curriculum had changed forever. No longer was an academic program judged on how well it prepared young republicans to be responsible, educated voters. The curricular offerings were now judged in the marketplace – a marketplace that weighed claims of educational merit on the ability to attract clients and patronage. It was a harsh discipline that in its very nature wrought continuing transformations in what was actually defined as education.²⁶ As these transformations took place and curriculum developed, the classical components of study were left out.

Another threat to the classical curriculum came from the booming interest in science and technology. When forced to compete with studies in new technology or the sciences, the classics weren't popular enough to stand.²⁷ As Miles states it, "In the era of the railroad, the steamboat, the telegraph, and the mechanical reaper, science and technology, unlike the classics, appeared to meet the tests of democracy and materialism."²⁸ As the classics were increasingly marginalized by new study programs in the sciences,²⁹ universities found ways around requiring their incoming students to have a basic knowledge of Greek. Harvard, in 1886, decided to accept advanced mathematics and physics as substitutes for the Greek language requirement. Some of the students who found themselves stuck at a university that still required fluency in Greek as a prerequisite for a degree, decided not to take a degree at all, loading up on all of the science courses they could and skipping Greek altogether.³⁰ Even when the study of science did not directly interfere with study of the classics, the classics were less and less

able to stand on their own as the backbone of the curriculum. In the 1880's the University of Denver even included the study of chemistry in their "Classics" program.³¹

Threats to the Classical Curriculum in the American Bar and Law Education

Over three quarters of the body of senators included in this study, studied law in one capacity or another. Therefore, a detailed examination of American law education in the nineteenth century is of paramount importance. Seventy-three percent of those serving before 1850 were lawyers and eighty percent of the senators serving after 1850 began their political career in law. In early America, lawyers were among the most highly educated men in society. For this reason it is no coincidence that a culture of classicism was so prevalent in the early periods of the United States government. The fact that this classical ethos practically vanished from the political world in the late nineteenth century is largely due to the decline of the place of the classics in law education. This decline began during the decades of Jacksonian Democracy.

Contempt for "professionals" (especially for lawyers) is an important aspect of the egalitarian fervor of the 1830's when considering the decline of classical culture in US politics. As the general familiarity with classical literature became less widespread amongst the populace, those who studied, referred to, or quoted from it, were eyed with suspicion by the less educated. The general populace was already viewing lawyers with hostility in the 1830's, and their broad education, which had been dominated by the

classics, only furthered the distrust and distaste that many people had for them. In the words of Robert A. Ferguson, “the egalitarian tendencies of the 1830’s exacerbated hostility by segregating a professional elite. Jacksonian Democrats spoke of subjecting the Bar to popular controls. To protect themselves, lawyers...claimed legitimacy through specific utilitarian skills that lawyers alone could perform.”³² It was only in claiming their specific utility that lawyers were able to keep the Jacksonian sentiment from directly affecting the American Bar and the manner in which aspiring lawyers would be educated. The Bar defended itself against the direct influence of Jacksonian legislators, but it eventually succumbed to the overwhelming anti-classical sentiment in society.

Until the time that law schools appeared in America in 1784, the prospective lawyer could embark upon one of two paths leading to preparation for the Bar exam. These paths usually followed prior instruction in one of the universities, where select classical authors would have become familiar reading. The first of these paths was to serve as an assistant clerk in the office of one of the courts. This job would entail copying, filing, and other “mundane” tasks that were hardly related to arguing a case before a jury.³³ In this case, the education one would receive would depend upon what books he could borrow from the court or those who worked there. The book most often read by a young man in this position was Coke upon Littleton.³⁴ The alternate path followed by young prospective lawyers was to enter into an agreement with one of the leading members of the Bar in order to serve as an apprentice or to study in their office.³⁵ In this case, a more experiential education would be obtained as long as the teacher and practitioner of the law had the time to give instruction. In many instances this was not

the case, and in order to learn students would glean what they could from long hours in the private library with such texts as Coke Upon Littleton and Blackstone. Again, these paths of serving as clerk, apprentice, or student under the members of the Bar were meant to give aspiring lawyers a hands-on experience and would merely be additions to the foundation of classical training that they had already received.³⁶

After 1770, the Bar Association began to bring itself to a higher erudition by establishing very rigid rules with fixed requirements for students desiring admission as lawyers.³⁷ This strengthening and organizing of the Bar paved the way for the coming of the regular law schools and it forced lawyers to spend more time in study, which would naturally bring them to become even more familiar with the classics as part of their improved education.³⁸ Many of the State Bars introduced new standards similar to that of the Suffolk Bar, which declared in 1771 that “consent of the Bar shall not be given to any young gentleman who has not had an education at college [where the classics were a staple of the curriculum] or a liberal education equivalent in the judgment of the Bar.”³⁹ In the years immediately following the Revolution, prospective lawyers were denied admittance to the Bar based on lack of “literary qualifications”⁴⁰ (meaning the classics) or even because they had not yet acquired proficiency in Greek.

The first attempt to introduce the study of law into an actual university curriculum was made by President Ezra Stiles at Yale - though he was unsuccessful in getting the corporation to fund the proposed program.⁴¹ The first successful professorship of law came when Thomas Jefferson appointed George Wythe to the position at the College of William and Mary in 1779.⁴² The law students of William and Mary did engage classics

as part of their regular program, but the lectures in law were almost entirely devoted to Blackstone's Commentaries.⁴³ Over the next thirty-five years other universities followed the practice of William and Mary and established their own professorships of law; these universities include Columbia College, Yale College, and the University of Virginia. Additional universities followed this trend in the years between 1830-1860.⁴⁴ Thus it became the desired and standard practice for students of law to attend one of these universities where, along with the application side of the law, they would receive a solid base of classical learning before seeking acceptance to the Bar.

Curricula at the newly established university law programs offered students a mix of new scholarship and classical literature. The new scholarship came from lectures based sources such as a new edition of Blackstone's Commentaries by Henry St. George Tucker (published 1803) and Coke upon Littleton. The Classics were still a main component of university law programs in the early nineteenth century, although students more frequently complained that this component was just a waste of time. During the era of Jacksonian Democracy, more students and teachers began calling for a law program that would exclude Cicero and Demosthenes, along with the labor of studying the ancient languages, in favor of law commentators that were even more contemporary than Blackstone and Coke.

The criticism aimed at the curriculum based in the classics led to the establishment of private law schools, which were intended to give students a more "utilitarian" education, free from the esoteric confines of the ancient republics. One of the first of these private institutions was the Litchfield School of Law in Connecticut.⁴⁵

Litchfield's curriculum consisted primarily of the lectures given by Judge James Gould (1770-1838), followed by an intense study of the cases given in each lecture. Each weekday the students would compare lecture notes, which were then transcribed to form a compilation of the main points of the lecture. This compilation would then be used to conduct an examination of the authorities cited for each of the rules that had been discussed.⁴⁶ Notes were taken of this intense examination and were then compiled into "books of reference" for later use. Through this detailed and painstaking process, it was believed that students would get practice in the actual case-forming procedure. In addition to the lectures and rigorous study of sources, students were examined every Saturday and were also given ample opportunity for arguing in the "Moot Court," an arena designed for further practical experience.

Other private law schools had similar curricula and daily routine. The classics were noticeably absent from these private schools of law and a prospective lawyer would only have an understanding of the oratorical style of Cicero if they had previously attended a university or college that still incorporated the classical writers as part of its program. Private law schools enjoyed a brief flourishing in the late 1820's and early 1830's before decreasing in popularity as the university-sponsored schools (as opposed to mere branches) of law were established.

The first public "school" of law⁴⁷ which has permanently remained since its founding is Harvard Law School, which was founded in 1819.⁴⁸ Harvard Professor Asahel Stearns (1774-1889) described the curriculum in 1826; it included recitations and examinations on Blackstone's Commentaries together with other more contemporary

texts on the various branches of the law. Students were also expected to participate in the Moot Court and debating clubs before finally submitting a written dissertation to the faculty.⁴⁹ The archives for the Law School at Harvard, from 1828 on, show no classical content whatsoever.⁵⁰ From its inception, the Law School maintained a dedication to preparing young, would-be lawyers to pass the Bar exam and to argue cases in front of a jury; this was a vocational training, for which the rectors did not believe that familiarity with the writings and thought of Cicero or Demosthenes was necessary.

By the close of the 1830's, classical education had been so lowered in the public's esteem that taxpayers were reluctant to support the study of subjects whose utility they questioned.⁵¹ As the image of the lawyer was being dragged through the mud, teaching law through the classical curriculum made the law departments who used it even less popular. The fact was that more and more prospective practitioners of law were turning to the more expedient path of Blackstone. By 1840, the law degree stood apart from the Bachelor of Arts (where a classical education might still be obtained) as students increasingly forsook the educational experience of the university in favor of the career opportunities of the law schools, which would graduate them in two to three years.⁵²

By 1840 educational requirements for admission to the Bar had been lowered in almost every state due to the prevailing trend of anti-elitism in Jacksonian America (in lowering the standard educational requirements, it was thought that the door to practicing law would be opened to a wider audience and not merely to the elite that had access to esoteric study of Latin and Greek writers). When the State Bars lowered their standards, the existing prerequisite to arguing before the higher courts - a broad knowledge of

general (including classical) literature - was dropped.⁵³ The classical curriculum at the major universities suffered a loss in prestige because of this. Fewer students were interested in going through a degree program when they could pass the “lowered bar” on their own by serving as an apprentice and studiously absorbing Blackstone’s Commentaries.⁵⁴ By 1862, the standards for admission to the Bar were so easy to pass that The American Law Review was led to call the Bar examinations across the United States “superficial”; they critically reported that aspiring lawyers needed only to memorize a few law terms in order to pass.⁵⁵ In 1870 the Western Jurist estimated that “a full three-fourths of the annual additions made to the American Bar come from private offices, and have never gone through the course of instruction furnished by a law school.”⁵⁶ The education received by the young men who studied in these private offices excluded the classical authors, but it did provide an applicant to the Bar the tools and information needed to pass the entrance exam. By the 1870’s, Cicero and Demosthenes had been nearly eradicated from the world of law education; all an aspiring lawyer needed was a textbook and the memorization skills to pass the Bar Exam. In the place of Cicero and Demosthenes, now stood Blackstone, Kent, and a host of casebook commentaries.

In the decade of the 1830’s, as the interest in all things classical was waning amongst university students, Judge Blackstone’s book of commentaries on English law was gaining in popularity. First published in the United States in 1787, Blackstone’s book was not simply another source to complement Cicero’s Orations; it was the centerpiece of a new methodology in legal studies. It was not necessarily Blackstone’s

book that posed the direct threat to the continued use of classical authors in law education, but the methodology behind his book was one that dismissed the ancient writers as antiquated and unnecessary.

At the time that the American edition of Blackstone's Commentaries was published in the United States, the majority of US senators had been trained classically; and when these senators entered upon their careers in public service, they employed the training that they had received through reading Cicero and Demosthenes, together with the gamut of classics made available to them. It only followed then, that their understanding of the world of law and politics reflected those ideals that were imparted to them via the classical authors, these being justice opposed to tyranny, courage opposed to cowardice, righteousness opposed to treachery, education opposed to ignorance, patriotism opposed to treason, and modesty opposed to immodesty.⁵⁷ These ideals, along with the belief that the histories of ancient Greece and Rome contained valuable lessons and models for conduct, shaped the lives of the early US senators.

The fact that future senators were immersed in the classics as students is the reason that the political landscape in early America was brimming with classical imagery and motif. The fathers of the new nation used classical values, such as virtue, republicanism, and democracy in order to justify the birth and the formation of the United States.⁵⁸ They were able to use these models because classical ideals were still widely accepted and esteemed. For the lawyer, this training in classical values came either during or before his education in law, and a staple in this education was the writing of Cicero. Cicero had worked intensely on honing the skills of the mind and understanding

before embarking on a public career in law. As one nineteenth-century biographer stated, “he read logic with Diodotus the Stoic, studied the action of Aesop and Roscius – then the stars of the Roman stage – declaimed aloud like Demosthenes in private, made copious notes, practiced translation in order to form a written style, and read hard day and night. He trained severely as an intellectual athlete; and if none of his contemporaries attained such splendid success, perhaps none worked so hard for it.”⁵⁹

It was not only the sharpening of the mind that Cicero sought in preparation for his future career as lawyer and statesman; he sought to acquire wisdom. Before giving himself up to the study of oratory, he withdrew from the public in order to devote himself to philosophy and the contemplative life. Cicero himself defined eloquence as “wisdom speaking fluently.”⁶⁰ In his estimation, the most important skill for a lawyer or a statesman was the ability to speak with eloquence; and eloquence could only be present in the speaker who had wisdom as the fountainhead of his speech. An eighteenth-century student of law would have gleaned this principle from reading Cicero’s treatise on the character of an orator.⁶¹ In Cicero’s words, no one can be an accomplished lawyer without first acquiring “a knowledge of all the great subjects of human study; for a wide knowledge is needed to give a luxuriance and richness to language which, unless the speaker has thoroughly mastered his subject, suffers from what I may perhaps call a puerile vapidness of expression.”⁶² One must also have a knowledge of “all history” – a completeness of education that encompasses all available examples from the experiences of former generations. This completeness of education must be undertaken and wisdom must be acquired so that the orator may speak with authority on those subjects that are

most important: “good and evil, of things to be desired or avoided, honorable or dishonorable, profitable or unprofitable; of virtue, justice, temperance, prudence, magnanimity, liberality, piety, friendship, fidelity, duty and of other virtues and their opposite vices...”⁶³

When a law student in the early nineteenth century read Cicero’s Orations, he was not only presented with a model of oratory and argument that was built on a broad base of wisdom and knowledge, he encountered written treatises that sparkled and were full of brilliant wit. The Orations are full of Cicero’s jovial style in the treatment of serious topics. His wit is full of playful sarcasm that is pointed and sharply critical. His orations flow beautifully and are comedic, even as they offer an intelligent and serious example of oratory and argument for the student of law. Though it was written as a treatise on the character and responsibilities of an orator, students at Princeton employed Cicero’s The Orator as a manual of style.⁶⁴ The study of Cicero offered several benefits to students in that he spoke directly to young lawyers and future politicians on how to argue in public, while at the same time providing an example of how the lawyer and statesman ought to prepare themselves before entering the profession; in addition to this, his manner of argument (especially the different moods that he employed) was such that it could be taken on its own as a manual of style.

Students also read the speeches and letters of the man who had inspired Cicero - the great and most renowned orator of ancient Greece, Demosthenes. Cicero called Demosthenes the “perfect orator who lacked nothing; nothing was more elevated than the sublime, passionate and ornate dignity of his words and thoughts.”⁶⁵ Unlike Cicero,

Demosthenes did not possess great wit but did employ humor in his sharp, biting attacks that had inspired Cicero. According to many of his biographers, Demosthenes was not born a great orator (as a child he even had a stutter) and his greatest example for nineteenth-century law students was perhaps the hard work and exemplary preparation that he put into his writings and speeches.⁶⁶ His style, as one contemporary biographer put it, was varied: Demosthenes' "true greatness is his ability to write in many styles and to vary his style, mixing different features together both to suit the topic and to give variety and vigor to his speeches."⁶⁷ Demosthenes would teach aspiring lawyers how to blend specific facts with innuendoes, sarcasm, and rhetorical questions in order to make their arguments both effective and captivating. The preamble to a nineteenth-century edition of The Orations of Demosthenes calls him "the greatest orator in the world."⁶⁸

As was the case with Cicero, it was not merely the style of Demosthenes that was meant to be instructive; he had a message that cut to the heart of the ideals of the American Revolution. Demosthenes had waged a war of rhetoric against Philip of Macedon and the entire monarchical system. Demosthenes wanted to preserve the inherent virtues of a democratic Athens and he opposed Philip's plan of imperial unity of the Greek and Macedonian states. This battle against overwhelming odds, which he would eventually lose, gave young, aspiring lawyers and statesmen an example of their duty to preserve and protect the Republic – no matter what the cost might be. In the tradition of the ancient republics, the function of orator was not only a right that one earned; it was an obligation – an obligation that applied especially to the intellectual and moral elite.

Despite the examples of oratory that Cicero and Demosthenes appeared to give, in the minds of legal professors like Kent and Story, Cicero and Demosthenes did not specifically address the common law of either England or the United States, whereas Blackstone and Coke did just that. In the gargantuan tome that is the 1832 edition of Blackstone's Commentaries, the editor takes several pages to describe of what the proper education of a young lawyer should consist. In describing this ideal education, he only vaguely mentions the classics – and he does this only to point to their lack of “utility.”⁶⁹

This opinion of the classics was written in 1832 and is indicative of the changing view on the role that the classics should play as a preparation for those entering public service as advocates and politicians. In fact, the editor's comments in the 1832 reprinting only echo the sentiments of Judge Blackstone himself. Blackstone wrote his Commentaries in an attempt to create a theoretically coherent view of English law by using a Roman structure.⁷⁰ In other words, he attempted to explain the common law of England, which is case-based, using the models of civil law, which is substantive law – based on the ontological principles in the “laws of nature.”⁷¹ Blackstone tried to explain how “natural law” really was behind the “case,” or “common” law, system used in England and the United States. He wanted to define the law, rather than to simply describe it. At this time, since common law was based directly on precedent and not principle, it could only be described; law literature could only relate and examine the decisions that had been made and what the ramifications of those decisions were. In his Commentaries, Blackstone listed cases by category and then attempted to explain why they existed by explaining how they had been deduced from the laws of nature.⁷²

Law students must have had a difficult time wading through the work of Sir William Blackstone. The prose of Demosthenes and Cicero are filled with comedic sarcasm and some would even describe their writings as poetic. Blackstone is dry, thick, and physically imposing (over 1,000 pages). Not only are much of the commentary sections printed in miniscule font, the arguments and explanations contained in them are sometimes vague and difficult to understand. Yet, to the nineteenth-century student of law, Blackstone had a “utility” and the classics did not.

In the 1832 edition of the Commentaries, the American editor emphasizes the “practical” and “useful” method of studying law in his comments on Blackstone’s introduction. He launches into a treatise on the most expedient and thorough method of absorbing the principles of law, which is indispensable to the makeup of a lawyer who wishes, not a broad education, but “future success”:

It is a maxim of metaphysics well understood, but not sufficiently regarded, that the faculty of the human mind called *memory*, finds the best auxiliary to the competent discharge of its functions in the association of ideas. The business of *common-placing*, therefore, is not alone to be recommended as a means of amassing extensive information within accessible and convenient limits, but it is still further valuable to the law student, inasmuch as the operation of reading, forming an abstract of what is read, and then recording it, in his own language, supplies a series of associations which will do much towards preventing the escape of the principles from the mind. This then is a species of study which (sic) should be diligently pursued...⁷³

The Editor then gives a description of the preferred method of classifying the points and arguments made by Blackstone in one’s “common-place” book. The editor notes that

much paper will be wasted in this exercise but that it must be done in order to properly prepare for the day that one will be making arguments in a court of law.⁷⁴

It is safe to assume that this proposed method of “common-placing,” which was tedious and time-consuming, is a method that was often used by those who studied with the Commentaries, whether in an institution or in private tutorship. It would seem that anyone who had to choose between the prose of Cicero and the Commentaries of Blackstone, would prefer the former. It would follow, then, that the reason for the eventual domination of the Blackstone approach and the disregard for the Ciceronian, is based solely on a principle of supposed “utility”; the writings of Demosthenes and Cicero were deemed irrelevant, though they must have certainly been more entertaining! Some programs attempted to use both Cicero and Blackstone, such as the College of William and Mary for a short time, but the two authors came to symbolize the battle between the two prevailing theories of law education and their works were rendered mutually exclusive in the classroom.

The ontological difference between the two sides was in their respective methodologies. On the surface it would seem that the difference was simply that Cicero was arguing a Civil Law case in ancient Rome, while Kent and Blackstone were reviewing and commenting on the common laws of England and the United States; and while this distinction is true, the disparity between the classical and contemporary writers runs deeper than the mere disagreement on the relativity and utility of each method.

The Commentaries are based on a methodology that emphasizes the study of specific applications of law rather than emphasizing the ontological truths of “Justice”

and “Civic Virtue” or providing an example of sublime oratory, as Cicero and Demosthenes had done.⁷⁵ In the words of Robert A. Ferguson, “Blackstone supplied a methodology of control and a precise delineation of laws that minimized controversy and ensured national cohesion.”⁷⁶ Whereas Blackstone provided students with precise definitions of the law and strict guidelines to govern each decision, Cicero taught students how to discern the law for themselves by teaching them the spirit that inspired the law. Blackstone emphasized the worth of man-made law and tried to justify it by relating it to natural law; Cicero actually taught the natural law, which was the supposed basis for man-made law.⁷⁷

A young John Adams expressed the Ciceronian ideal of instruction when he said, “labour to get distinct Ideas of Law, Right, Wrong, Justice, Equity. Search for them in your own mind...”⁷⁸ Proponents of the classic methodology argued that Blackstone would not give students “distinct ideas of right and wrong” as much as how existing laws reflected “right” and “wrong.” Ferguson states that by 1850 “the expansive post-Revolutionary lawyer, the courtroom orator who relied on general jurisprudence, belles-lettres, and the classics was an anachronism.”⁷⁹ Those who shared in the philosophy of Blackstone’s Commentaries had, for the most part, replaced the classical method of studying the law. Instead of having to labor over the ultimate principles behind the law, a “Blackstone lawyer” would only need to follow the precise, delineated system of law laid out in one book; in other words, he became a reader of case reports.

The Study

The education received by US senators over a one-hundred-year period is the subject of the present study. Its purpose is to discover the relationship between political culture and the education received by those participating in politics. More pointedly, this study should answer the question of whether or not an increasing percentage of US senators in the nineteenth century served without having previously obtained a “classical” education. The study includes the entire body of senators serving in the years 1790, 1801, 1851, and 1899 as samplings. In order to fill in the gaps of time between these major samplings, the newly elected senators of the Eleventh, Sixteenth, Twenty-first, Twenty-sixth, Thirty-sixth, Forty-first, Forty-sixth, and Fifty-first Congresses were also surveyed. As will be seen in the chart of recorded results, the “newly elected” groups contain a fewer number of senators than the “entire body” groups, but are still useful in the results that they provide because they confirm the trends demonstrated by the full senate groups. The study compiles a record and examination of the education received by a total of 392 elected senators. The “Congressional Biographical Directory” of the United States Congress website,⁸⁰ provided the general biography of each of these senators, with further aid being given by various other biographical and historical sources. The collected curricula for the specific years and universities attended by each senator provided a set of data, which was then examined and defined as either “classical” or “non-classical” based on the criteria explained below.⁸¹

A “classical” curriculum is defined by this study as any curriculum that included not only the study of Latin and Greek, but the reading and “experience” of Latin and Greek authors as well.⁸² For example it is not enough to define the curriculum at a school of law as classical if the study of Greek and Latin was combined with the reading of Blackstone’s Commentaries and not Cicero’s Orations. It has often been noted that the mere recitation of Ancient Greek and Latin for the purposes of teaching grammar did little to affect a student’s makeup and, most often, they did not acquire a grasp of the language at all.⁸³ As Caroline Winterer states in her study on the classical world in early America, a classical education entailed more than simply studying the language – the idea was to saturate the mind so that one could almost actually “become” Greek. Students were encouraged “to be Demosthenes,”⁸⁴ to be immersed in the world of the ancient writers by way of their literature. Those senators who as young men were fortunate or studious enough to actually learn ancient Greek, but who were not made to read the classics, would not have the same proclivity towards using classical imagery in their speeches and writings as would a senator, who as a student, not only learned the ancient languages but immersed himself in the classical writers. On the other hand, it is quite possible for one who has never studied the classical languages at all to receive what we would consider a “classical” education through the reading of Tacitus and Demosthenes in translation. This is possible because it is in the literature of the classical writers, not necessarily in the language, where classical values and motif are imparted.⁸⁵

For this reason, a defined “classical curriculum” needed to have done more than simply combine the study of a modern textbook on law with one of the classical

languages - without the study of the classical writers themselves. If a particular curriculum were to combine both methodologies by requiring the study of both Blackstone and Cicero, it would qualify as a classical curriculum for having contained classical elements, even though it was not exclusively classical.⁸⁶ The University of Virginia provides a good example of this type of curriculum, which in 1825 combined the study of ancient philosophy and history with study of the modern languages.

Unfortunately, the curricula for some of the colleges and universities involved in the education of these particular senators have since disappeared or were left unrecorded. For this reason, secondary works that describe the educational and political norms of nineteenth-century America played a principal role in the process of discerning the characteristics of specific unknown curricula. The important trends and norms reflected in secondary sources gave a certain amount of assurance to the study's educated speculations. For example, it is commonly known that professional standards were lowered significantly during the Jacksonian 1830's and that this in turn affected the educational standards at the universities.⁸⁷ More important for the present study is the fact that beginning in the 1830's, the trend towards excluding classical elements from college curricula gathered momentum and became commonplace by the mid-1840's.

Universities expected less from applicants seeking entrance to their programs and the first prerequisites to go, in the interests of a more "practical science," were knowledge of Latin and Greek.⁸⁸ These facts, based on secondary works, are also supported by the collection of curricula provided by various universities and the archive of college catalogs held at Stanford University. This specific set of data gives the assurance that the

majority of students who entered an academic program anytime after the mid-1840's, were not required to be familiar with the Greek or Latin writers – either before or during their schoolwork (unless they embarked upon the “classical branch” of studies).

The biographies of some of the senators in this study show that they shunned a formal education and instead prepared themselves for passing the Bar exam by studying as an apprentice. However, the type of curriculum that was used in various law apprenticeships is not always clear. In some instances it was possible to locate descriptions of the particular tutor used in a certain case and to discern if he would have taught using a classical approach or not. However, in most of the cases where an education came at the hands of a tutor an informed speculation was made based on general descriptions of nineteenth-century apprenticeships. One such source comes from Cremin's in-depth study of American education. According to Cremin:

The character of apprenticeship to the law was far less structured and standardized during the early years of the nineteenth century than the character of apprenticeship to medicine. The aspiring lawyer entered a law office for a clerkship that was usually ill defined and casually conducted. He read Blackstone's Commentaries...and contemporary statute books. Since he had to be admitted to the bar by a court, it was frequently the length of time served rather than the character of the substance conveyed that was certified by the preceptor...the haphazard enforcement of requirements for admission to the bar in many localities simply confirmed in many instances a haphazard process of apprenticeship.⁸⁹

Based on Cremin's work and other sources, this study classified the majority of apprenticeships as “non-classical” in their education.⁹⁰ Therefore, for the purposes of this

study, a senator who spent time in a typical apprenticeship did not receive a classical education unless they had previously obtained one at a university.

In the 1830's, an increasing number of applicants to the bar applied without having first obtained a university degree of any kind or studying as an apprentice. By 1840, this trend had become prevalent enough as to warrant concern among law professionals and educators. The majority of those applying to the Bar without a degree were young students who were self-taught, using Blackstone's Commentaries. The practice of self-education amongst lawyers was prevalent enough so as to conclude that those senators who do not have any formal education recorded in their biographies, though they did pass the bar exam, did so without having received a classical education - since application to the bar in many states no longer required the knowledge of Latin, Greek, or classical literature.⁹¹ On this basis, those senators practicing law without a university degree fit the "non-classical" label, since it is unlikely that students of the time would have voluntarily studied for the Bar by combing through Demosthenes and Cicero when all that was required could be obtained by reading Blackstone and other modern law commentaries.

Another form of education that invariably leads to some speculation about its content is the education provided by nineteenth-century academies. For the most part, academies in early America were akin to "preparatory schools." Up until the 1840's, most of these academies provided the minimum of a solid grasp of Ancient Greek and Latin as well as some ancient history. In some of the cases, an academy such as Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, offered not only a schooling in the grammar of these

languages; they also provided the students the opportunity to become very familiar with the writings of Cicero, Horace, Demosthenes, and Xenophon. After this period the decline in classical requirements for admission at the university level had moved into the academies and they too stopped offering such a comprehensive education in the ancient languages.

If a curriculum for a particular academy remained elusive (as was the case in the majority of instances) it had to be determined if classical literature was included or not. In most cases, if an individual senator attended an academy before 1850 and then went on to study at a university, the education he received was “classical.” If however, a senator did not continue his studies, but, for example, moved to California to engage in speculation or the cattle trade, the education he received at the academy was almost assuredly “non-classical.” By 1850 the academies were no longer giving what this study would consider a classical education and those senators who attended an academy after 1850 received a “classical” education only in the case that they received it in a university.

Another problem in discerning whether a particular senator received a classical education arises when it is discovered that a senator’s education came from a university that offered two or more “branches” of study,⁹² or used the new elective system. In the cases of these senators, the exact course of studies embarked upon was not often known due to the lack of biographical information available. However, research strongly implies that those senators who studied in a university offering alternatives to classical education (especially in the period following the Civil War) took those alternatives. For instance, unless it is specifically known that a senator had enrolled in the “Ancient Languages”

course of study at Harvard in 1870, it is safely assumed that his education was not “classical” because the other branches of study at Harvard did not include classical literature. After 1860, if a student wanted to study classical literature they would enroll in the classics program – otherwise the ancient writers would be absent from the curriculum. In most cases, the senators enrolling in universities with a “branched” or “elective” style curriculum, studied in a curriculum that required little more than a small token of classical content – usually a bit of Greek or Latin grammar; this is especially the case with the last group of senators in this study – those who served in 1899. In the cases where the specific branch of studies was unknown, biographical sources for each particular senator provide hints as to whether they would have been one to elect the “classical” or “scientific” branches of study. The attempt was made to limit these kinds of educated speculations but they do exist nonetheless.

Findings

- All Senators serving in 1790: 23 of 29 received a classical education. 76%
- All Senators serving in 1801: 32 of 41 received a classical education. 78%
- 11th Congress, elected 1809-1811: 10 of 16 received a classical education. 62%
- 16th Congress, elected 1819-1821: 14 of 20 received a classical education. 70%
- 21st Congress, elected 1829-1831: 13 of 16 received a classical education. 81%
- 26th Congress, elected 1839-1841: 15 of 19 received a classic education. 79%
- All Senators serving in 1851: 44 of 70 received a classical education. 63%
- 36th Congress, elected 1859-1861: 10 of 15 received a classical education. 67%
- 41st Congress, elected 1869-1871: 13 of 29 received a classical education. 45%
- 46th Congress, elected 1879-1881: 4 of 22 received a classical education. 18%
- 51st Congress, elected 1889-1891: 4 of 21 received a classical education. 19%
- All Senators serving in 1899: 19 of 94 received a classical education. 20%

As is shown in the graph above, the percentage of serving senators that had been classically trained dropped from an average of 78% in 1801 to a mere 20% in 1899. The disparity between these two groups of senators is immense, though this should come as no surprise due to the many factors previously discussed that led to the decline of classical education in America during the nineteenth century. Over the course of one hundred years, the percentage of serving US senators that had received a classical education declined greatly and this factor must be considered when examining the disappearance of classicism from the political landscape of the United States in the nineteenth century.

Seventy percent of the senators counted in this survey that served up until the year 1851, received a classical education. Of those senators who served after 1851, only twenty-eight percent received a classical education. This is an important statistic because it highlights the dearth of classical training that existed in the elite political body during the end of the nineteenth century. In the year 1851, sixty-three percent of those serving in the Senate had received a classical education. In the forty-eight years between 1851 and 1899, there was a forty-three percentage-point drop in the number of senators that were classically trained. As the graph illustrates, the declining percentage rate of those classically trained over those forty-eight years corresponds to the growing depreciatory view of the classics in American society.

The First Congress of the United States of America convened in 1789. In 1790, a total of twenty-nine men served as senators in the First Congress; of those twenty-nine, at least twenty-two had received a classical education in a university or college. Sixteen of

the twenty-nine senators in the First Congress were lawyers. Charles Carroll (1737-1832), a colonial native and senator from Maryland, had studied law in France and England following his classical education at the Jesuit's College of Bohemia. He was a delegate to the First Continental Congress and an original signer of the Declaration of Independence. Following his service in the government, Carroll went on to help found the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company. His biography is similar to most of the members of the First Congress in that he was a well-educated lawyer that involved himself in the political life of the colonies, urging them towards independence. He is one of seven members of the First Congress that studied in England following an education in the colonies. Benjamin Hawkins (1754-1818) obtained a classical education at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), where he also acquired a knowledge of French. When the Revolutionary War began, General George Washington beseeched Hawkins to leave Princeton so that he might serve as the General's interpreter. Following the War, Hawkins was involved in relations between the United States and various native tribes, both as a treaty negotiator and as an "Indian" agent. Hawkins is an example of a student who, though he received a "classical education," went on to learn other skills that directly led to his vocation. Hawkins learned Greek and Latin but this did not exclude his learning a modern language, such as French. In the early nineteenth century, especially under the influence of Thomas Jefferson, students could combine the classics with modern language and science. This attitude did not prevail, however, as is seen in the examination of curricula from the late nineteenth century.

The US senators of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries followed one of two roads to service in the government. Typically, they were highly educated lawyers, such as Carroll, who became involved in politics, or else they were mercantilists of some kind that energetically opposed British rule in the Colonies and fueled the grass-roots dissatisfaction with the monarchy. Among those senators of the First Congress that were not classically trained is John Langdon (1741-1819). Langdon's road to office is characteristic of those senators that did not receive a formal education past their childhood years. He attended the local grammar school before heading to sea and setting out upon a career in mercantile pursuits. He became involved in the movement for independence and was eventually a prominent supporter. He was a member of the Continental Congress in 1775 and 1776 and during the Revolutionary War, Langdon oversaw the construction of war ships and he used his entire fortune to help fund an expedition against imperial forces. Langdon is typical of an early US senator in that he amassed a fortune despite not having obtained an extensive education, and was involved in leading the revolution through the use of his material wealth and leadership skills.

Thirty-two of the forty-one senators that served in 1801 were classically trained before taking office, and of those thirty-two, twenty-five were lawyers. James Hillhouse (1754-1832) is a classic example of the US senator from this time period. He, like many of those serving as senator in early America, studied at a prominent university before studying law and using the Revolutionary War to embark upon a career in politics. Hillhouse served in the War and then used his name and reputation to build a career in the government.

The Twenty-sixth Congress (elected 1839-1841) was almost exclusively made up of lawyers. Eighteen of the nineteen senators in this congress studied law and were admitted to the Bar. Before 1820 (the time period when this group of senators was formally educated), the usual path to a career in law began with a classical education at a college or university. This standard path of preparation for admittance to the Bar is responsible for the high percentage of classically trained senators in this Congress. While not all of the lawyers in this group received a classical education, it was the normal practice and nearly eighty-percent of the senators in the Twenty-sixth Congress did obtain an education that was rooted in the classics.

The survey of the Thirty-sixth Congress (elected 1859-1861) shows a moderately high percentage of classically-trained senators when we consider that the vast majority of these men attended their respective law schools and universities in the 1830's (14 of the 15 members of this Congress were lawyers); this was the decade that saw tremendous growth in the use of Blackstone's Commentaries, and it was also the decade of Jacksonian Democracy. Sixty-seven percent of the senators from this Congress received a classical education, which shows that the "egalitarian" effects of Jackson's era did not truly make its impact in the society of those who would be senators until the close of the decade. Both John Hemphill (1803-1862) of Texas and James Grimes (1816-1872) of Iowa studied law in the 1830's but had previously received a classical training in a university. These senators are an example of why the effects of the Jacksonian age did not impact this congress; for at this time, the majority of lawyers were still attending colleges or universities prior to studying law in an office or private law school. Sixty-

seven percent is a surprisingly high portion of classically trained senators for this Congress, seeing as they were elected as late as 1861, and this is due to the fact that the majority of this group of senators was educated in the 1830's.

The enormous drop in percentage of classically trained senators begins with the Forty-first Congress, elected in about 1870. The Forty-first Congress began their service following the tumultuous years of the American Civil War. When we look for the specific period during which this Congress of senators was educated, we find that for those who were actually educated beyond their high school years (twelve out of thirty were not), their schooling took place in a wide range of years. Abijah Gilbert (1806-1881) was at Hamilton College in 1822 and received a strictly classical education. Matthew Carpenter (1824-1881) went a different route, taking to the military instead of the courtroom. He graduated from West Point, which was not classical, in 1843. William Windom (1827-1891) did not study at a university or a college; he studied law either on his own or in the office of a lawyer or clerk and had no classical training at all. In this Congress we begin to see the effects that the private law schools and Sir William Blackstone's book had on law education. The aforementioned Senator Gilbert is an exception here, as most of these senators went through American higher education in the period between 1840 and 1850. By this time the decade of Jacksonian Democracy had caught up with the universities, and many of them were offering at least two courses of study – the Classical and Scientific courses, with the popularity of the classics plummeting.

The largest disparity in percentage between two successive groups of senators classically trained, by this study's standards, is between the Forty-first Congress (elected 1869-1871), with forty-five percent being classically trained, and the Forty-sixth Congress (elected 1879-1881), with only eighteen-percent classically trained. The drop in percentage is almost thirty. This latter group of senators, elected between the years 1879-1881, was educated during the 1850's for the most part. While Nathaniel Hill (1832-1900) graduated from Brown University in 1856, having received a classical education, the path that the majority of senators from this Congress took on their way to the Senate resembles the path of John Logan. Senator Logan (1826-1886) served as a minor officer in the war with Mexico before going on to serve as the clerk for Jackson County's courthouse in 1849. It was in this position that he learned the trade of counselor of law, as he picked up what he could from the judges and lawyers that he came into contact with. He also had access to the court library, which he made extensive use of and was able to glean enough information to pass the "lowered Bar" exam in 1852. The standards for passing most State Bar exams were very low. By this time, the practice of allowing students to elect some or most of their courses was common and this can be seen in the low percentage of senators that obtained a classical education.

The Fifty-first Congress (elected in 1889-1891) maintains a similarly low percentage of classically trained senators. The majority of senators in the Fifty-first, if they attended a university at all, did so in the decade of the stormy 1860's. This was the era of the Civil War and many of the senators from this Congress were young men whose lives had been affected by the war in one way or another. Some of them fought in it and

others escaped to the West in order to avoid it or to seek their own fortunes. A handful were educated in universities. Anthony Higgins (1840-1912) studied in the law schools at Yale and then Harvard, both non-classical in their approach by this time. He was admitted to the bar towards the end of the Civil War, in 1864. William Washburn (1820-1887) studied before the war, in 1854, at Bowdoin. At the time of his enrollment, they still required freshmen to pass competency exams in Latin composition and they had to demonstrate a familiarity with Cicero's Orations, the writings of Sallust, Virgil, and the Greek New Testament – all in their original languages. However, Washburn's experience was uncharacteristic of this group of senators. Most were like William McConnell (1839-1925), who headed out to California in 1860. He was drawn by the opportunities there and was perhaps escaping the escalating tensions between North and South. McConnell engaged in mining, the cattle business, merchandising and banking. He eventually settled in Oregon and represented Oregonians as a senator in the Fifty-first Congress.

Only eighteen of the ninety-four senators who served in 1899 received a classical education. Seventy-three of the senators were lawyers or had studied law at some time. Fifty-six attended a university or major college, yet only eighteen of these fifty-six were trained in a curriculum that was classical. Thirty-eight senators, or forty-percent, did not even attend a university or a major college. This fact reflects the growing interest that young men had in finding an occupation that would begin to pay immediate dividends - they opted out of entering a university in the pursuit of learning a trade.

There are not many commonalities in the biographies of this group of senators. Perhaps the most common thread is that many of them served in the Civil or Mexican Wars. Some finished their education entirely before the Civil War began, went to fight, and then returned to their previous occupations. Samuel Pasco (1834-1917) was the principal of Waukeena Academy, near Monticello; he left the academy to join the Confederate army and then returned to take the school again after the war. Some studied before the war, had their programs interrupted in 1861 and returned to finish upon being discharged from the military. Senator John George Warwick (1830-1892) was permanently crippled during the war and then proceeded to study law on his own before being admitted to the bar and practicing law.

This group of senators had a wide range of occupations; some worked with the railroads, a couple were druggists, and a several raised cattle or were farmers. Most of those who did not attend a university were successful in politics after being successful in their businesses. James Henderson Kyle (1854-1901) prepared for admission to the Bar but decided to go to the Western Theological Seminary in Allegheny instead. He became involved with his community through the church and eventually began a career in politics.

Whereas in the first half of the nineteenth century, only a few men were elected without first having obtained an education beyond high school, forty percent of the members of the Senate in 1899 were not well educated. This means that forty percent of the Senate was elected on merits other than those that come with an extensive education. Hard work, ingenuity and fortune helped to build reputations for this group of senators.

It is not until the examination of the group of senators from 1899 that the study reveals a regional trend. In each group previous to 1899, senators who received a classical education came from every region in the United States, without one region being typically more dominant than any other. The South and New England states are thought to have held onto the classical curriculum longer than the West, but with only one to three senators being represented in each group, this factor did not translate into a trend that runs through the entire study. However, in 1899, when ninety-four men served as senators, the state with a classically educated representative that is most geographically west is Utah. Of the other eighteen senators that received a classical education in 1899, the majority came out of the South, with Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maine also electing classically trained senators. With so many opportunities for improving one's financial situation lying out west, it is no surprise that the senators coming from that region were those who had made small fortunes in enterprises such as cattle, railroads, oil, and mining, rather than being those who attended classics programs in a university. The only surprise in the geographical breakdown of classically trained senators is that it is not until 1899 that the West is so sparsely represented.

Conclusion

As is shown in the results of the study presented above, the education received by the great majority of US senators serving in the late nineteenth century was not classical at all. As Daniel W. Howe has stated, the significance of this fact can be seen in the American political environment of the day. In a culture where oratory had historically been so important, (the early nineteenth century is thought of as the “golden age of oratory” that included the “true Triumvirate of the Republic” – Clay, Calhoun and Webster⁹³) by the mid-nineteenth century the chief articulators of the nation were no longer getting classical training. There is a direct relationship between this fact and the fact that the American political landscape in the nineteenth century slowly evolved from a world that had been founded on the classics to a world that simply ignored them.

Despite the evidence presented here, the case might be made that senators ceased using classical imagery and motifs in their public speeches because society had changed and was no longer receptive to esoteric reference to ancient Athens and Rome; and that this societal distaste was more of a factor than education was in the banishment of the classics from the world of politics. While this point could be made, the direct relationship that exists between education and classical culture in politics should not be

ignored. It is true that the various societal trends outlined in this study were a factor in determining the declining position of the classics, but this factor was not the direct cause. Societal trends were the indirect force behind the direct cause of the metamorphosis of higher education curricula. Whether or not society frowned upon the use of classical imagery; a senator could not utilize a classical education if he had never received one.

What this study ultimately demonstrates is the relationship between popular culture, education, and politics in the nineteenth century. It shows that cultural trends (such as Jacksonian Democracy) tended to have an impact on university curricula, and this in turn affected those that were trained in the universities, which brought about the metamorphosis in political culture. As the curricula in the universities (and especially in law education) began to reflect the tastes of popular culture and adapt themselves to a world that had changed since the days of Madison and Jefferson, would-be senators obtained an education that was deficient in the classics. As it became more acceptable for young men to obtain job skills rather than a familiarity with the classical authors, future statesmen decided to forgo further education and enter a trade where they could make their fortune. If indeed the classics were banished from “the center of political thought to a dusty corner in the ivory tower,”⁹⁴ as Meckler has argued, it was due to the metamorphosis in American higher education, and the change in society’s view of the classical authors.

¹ A broad grouping of attitudes covering the arts, philosophy, education, etc.

² Daniel W. Howe, "Classical Education and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century America," in Intellectual History Newsletter, no. 5 (1983).

³ Michael Meckler, "The Rise of Populism, the Decline of Classical Education, and the Seventeenth Amendment": 7.

⁴ Catalogue of Faculty and Students of Washington College (July, 1826).

⁵ "Laws of Union College" (Schenectady: printed by Riggs & Stevens, 1815).

⁶ Personal letter from Special Collections Assistant Jeremy Dibbell, introducing Union College archives. (August, 2002).

⁷ Saul K. Padover, ed., The Complete Madison: His Basic Writings (New York: Harper & Brothers 1953), 247.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Padover, 248.

¹⁰ Lawrence A. Cremin, American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876 (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 250.

¹¹ Robert A. Ferguson, Law and Letters in American Culture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 28.

¹² Judge Blackstone and his book of commentaries on the laws of England will be thoroughly discussed later in this study.

¹³ Dan R. Frost, Thinking Confederates (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 2.

¹⁴ Frost, 2; Lawrence A. Cremin, American Education: The National Experience (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 110-111, 249.

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- ¹⁵ Jefferson, quoted in Frost, 3.
- ¹⁶ Frost, 3.
- ¹⁷ Frost, 6.
- ¹⁸ Edwin A. Miles, "The Young American Nation and the Classical World," Journal of the History of Ideas 35 (Apr.-Jun., 1974): 266.
- ¹⁹ Frost, 66-68.
- ²⁰ This is also inferred by Michael Meckler in his article "The Rise of Populism, the Decline of Classical Education, and the Seventeenth Amendment."
- ²¹ Miles, 264.
- ²² Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1953), 134.
- ²³ Congressional Globe, 33 Cong., 1 sess., 1231 (May 19, 1854), in Miles, 266.
- ²⁴ Miles, 267.
- ²⁵ Rudolph, 187.
- ²⁶ Cremin, 251.
- ²⁷ Cremin, 364-366.
- ²⁸ Miles, 268.
- ²⁹ Cremin, 406.
- ³⁰ Frederick Rudolph, Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study since 1636 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), 182.
- ³¹ Rudolph, 187.
- ³² Ferguson, 201.

³³ James Willard Hurst, The Growth of American Law: The Law Makers (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1950), 256.

³⁴ Charles Warren, A History of the American Bar (New York: Howard Fertig, 1966), 165, 184-185.

³⁵ Warren, 166.

³⁶ Herbert A. Johnson, "Thomas Jefferson and Legal Education in America" in James Gilreath, ed., Thomas Jefferson and the Education of a Citizen. (Washington: Library of Congress, 1999), 106. Also see Warren, 164-165.

³⁷ Warren, 196.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 197.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 200.

⁴¹ Ibid., 341-342.

⁴² Ibid., 344-345.

⁴³ Ibid., 346.

⁴⁴ Hurst, 257-258. and Warren, 364-365.

⁴⁵ Warren, 360.

⁴⁶ Litchfield Catalogue of Study, quoted in Warren, 360-361.

⁴⁷ In Harvard University archives, the Law School is actually termed "private" in that its academic content was completely separate from the University. But I have chosen to adopt Warren's terminology here for reasons of clarity.

⁴⁸ Warren, 361.