

---

## *J. L. M. Curry*

NO OTHER WHITE architect of Black education is as flamboyant or interesting as Jabez Lamar Monroe Curry. Curry's nearly 80 years on this earth took him from the rural South to Harvard, through the Alabama state legislature, to the United States Congress, onward to the Confederate Congress, and finally into education administration. Along the way, he became an attorney, ordained minister, military officer, Ambassador to Spain, and college professor. An arch segregationist and staunch secessionist, Curry made his mark on the old South as an accomplished orator, defender of slavery, and indefatigable advocate for states' rights.

At a time when the country was being forever transformed, Curry quickly acquiesced to northern hegemony and the new social order. Believing that slavery once contributed mightily to the country's prosperity, Curry adapted easily to the inevitability of northern rule and corporate industrialization. Although a southerner in every sense, Curry, a Harvard graduate, interacted with and was accepted by "Boston brahmins" in the interest of patriotism and national unity. While other postbellum southerners wallowed in self-pity, regional hatred, and a romanticization of the old South, Curry changed and moved on. He readily grasped the new tasks at hand. The republic had to be preserved. His lifelong interest in mass education, combined with an obsession on the "Negro question," allowed for his ascendance to the highest levels of educational and political policy making.

He eventually became the General Agent for the Peabody Fund and sat on the Board of Directors of the Slater Fund, both influential in funding and shaping Negro education. From these important bases, he soon sat on the Board of Directors of both the General Education Board (GEB) and Southern Education Board. During the critical period of the establishment of the system of Black education, Curry was a major voice. A forceful advocate of industrial education for Blacks, he was a significant actor at Capon Springs and an intimate associate of Baldwin, Ogden, and the other major participants in the drama of Black education.

## ORIGINS AND BACKGROUND

J. L. M. Curry was born June 5, 1825, in Lincoln County in the northeastern part of Georgia. The “dark corner,” as it was called, of northeastern Georgia was said to be a lawless and rowdy area where fistfights often arbitrated disputes. His father, William, and mother, Susan Winn, were of English, Scottish, Welch, and French descent. While he was an infant, tragedy struck when his mother and a younger brother both died in 1827. In 1829, William married a widow, Mary Remsen, who subsequently gave birth to one son.

During Jabez’s youth, his father prospered in farming and business. Lincoln County tax records of 1834 indicate that he owned 7,000 acres of land, 42 slaves, and several thousand dollars worth of merchandise stock (Rice, 1949).

William, a man of some schooling, wanted the best education for his children. At age 10, Jabez was sent to the Willington Academy where he was taught by scholars with university degrees. Jabez interacted with great orators and southern men of culture. He later returned to the Double Branches school in Lincoln County. There, during his adolescence, he was tutored by University of Dublin graduate Daniel W. Finn in Latin, Greek, algebra, and geometry.

By his own accounts as well as those of others, Jabez was intelligent and well adjusted. He acknowledged occasionally playing with slave children. Consistent with the culture of the region, Jabez was deeply influenced by religion. He was known to attend many sermons throughout the area.

In 1837, the entire household, including the family, the slaves, and even tutor Daniel Finn, moved to eastern Alabama’s rich land from which American Indians had been removed. On the new land, William operated a farm (with slaves), a store, and the area’s post office.

Although the family had been away from Georgia for some time, members had fond memories of their former home. Thus, Lincoln County seemed attractive for the children’s higher education. William sent sons Jackson and Jabez and stepson David to Franklin College, later the University of Georgia, for further training.

Franklin’s focus on classical education suited the Curry boys just fine. Jabez did very well. Drawn to the literary and debating clubs, he became an accomplished orator. Since Athens, Georgia, was then a hotbed of political and intellectual activity, Jabez heard and experienced firsthand the provocative speakers and issues of the time. His political passions stoked, Jabez took his bachelor of arts degree with honors at 18 years of age.

The next step was Harvard Law School, which proved magical for Jabez. His twin interests, politics and literature, were further stimulated. He regularly heard lectures by Longfellow, Poe, Hawthorne, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and other important literary figures. From the world of politics, he heard the likes of John Quincy Adams, Daniel Webster, and many others, as Whigs, Democrats, Liberals, and Republicans debated the burning concerns of the day.

Of great interest here is that Jabez, purely out of intellectual curiosity, went to several abolitionist meetings. He heard Frederick Douglass, Wendell Phillips, and William Garrison in person. He soon denounced the abolitionists as a "noisy and fanatical faction" (in Rice, 1949, p. 14). He viewed them as a small and isolated phenomenon.

Accounts suggest that Jabez had a broad intellectual curiosity that led him to seek out transcendentalist philosophers and writers, theologians, thespians, and educators. Horace Mann profoundly influenced him, as Curry grew interested in mass education: "Mann's glowing periods, earnest enthusiasm, democratic ideas, fired my mind and heart and ever afterward, I was an enthusiastic consistent advocate of universal education" (in Rice, 1949, p. 15).

The Harvard experience honed and fine-tuned Curry. After receiving a law degree in 1845, he returned to the South committed to involvement in the social, political, and educational life of the region and the nation. Strongly favoring slavery, states' rights, and southern regional interests, he, unlike most southerners, had experienced living in the North and would later adjust and become receptive to a broader national outlook.

The mid-1840s found Curry marrying, dabbling in the family business, and halfheartedly practicing law. Although lucrative, the family plantation did not hold his attention, as it was said that he "preferred books to overseeing Negroes" (in Rice, 1949, p. 25). In 1846, Curry joined one of the many popular volunteer units headed for the War in Mexico. He was promoted to second sergeant, but War Department bureaucracy and misadventures brought him quickly back to Alabama without seeing serious combat activity.

In 1847, Curry was elected to the Alabama state legislature. His term in the Alabama house of representatives found him refining a body of political beliefs. An active legislator, he served on many committees and councils, often assuming leadership positions. He was a staunch Democrat and a member of the "Calhoun group," that is, those who ideologically followed John C. Calhoun and the hard states' rights position.

In 1850, Curry's life changed quite a bit. His father gave him land with slaves in Salt Creek, Alabama. Without giving any reasons, Curry did not seek re-election, gave up the practice of law entirely, and repaired to plantation owner life. In 1852, he sold Salt Creek and purchased his brother's plantation in Talladega County. Talladega tax records indicate that by 1857, Curry owned 25 slaves. By 1863, that figure jumped to 40 slaves, 550 acres of land, \$325 worth of vehicles, and \$300 worth of household furnishings.

From 1850 to 1853, his expanding business holdings and prosperity afforded him more time to write and speak out on the intensifying states' rights issue. His considerable oratorical and intellectual skills quickly attracted attention.

His passion for politics and especially the burning regional issues led him quickly back to politics. He was re-elected to the state legislature in 1853. Over

the next 4 years his interest in the states' rights issue, and politics in general, sharpened. In 1857, 2 years after the deaths of his infant son and his father, Curry was elected to the U.S. Congress from Alabama's seventh district.

Major political turmoil was brewing. Questions surrounding slavery, the terms of admission of new states to the union, and the rights of states were the major issues of the day. Regionalism and partisanship were dividing the country as never before. Curry aligned himself with the pro-slavery states' rights faction.

His unambiguous views and riveting oratory quickly made him a presence in Congress. After Curry's delivery of his maiden speech, a reporter for the *New York Tribune* wrote:

Mr. Curry is evidently a man of talent, a scholar and a thinker. His speech commanded for an hour the full attention of the House, and was really worthy of it in style and manner, if not in matter. Most of the crack Southern orators of the floor have a palpably Africanized style of speaking, and harangue the House very much in the style of an Ashantee or Congo chief addressing a palaver of his sable brethren. Mr. Curry spoke like a white man, with the bearing of a gentleman. This may be accounted for, perhaps, by the fact that he was a graduate of the law school of Harvard College. He is certainly a powerful addition to the Pro-Slavery side of the House. (in Rice, 1949, p. 31)

### FRAMING AN IDEOLOGICAL PLATFORM

At Harvard Law School, Curry studied with respected legal minds of the time, including Joseph Story, Simon Greenleaf, and other luminaries. A recurring theme in his studies was the notion of individual rights. Curry's writings showed evidence that he associated individual rights with liberty, which, for him, did not mean anarchy or freedom without laws. Liberty meant restrained participation in civilization. Hence, his notion of liberty was connected to order and especially law. His ideal civilization was one that combined law with individual rights. He wrote a speech later in life entitled *Liberty and Law* (1900), which capsulized these views:

Men babble of liberty while their limbs are fettered. The drunkard boasts of strength while paralyzed by weakness; of intellect while muttering inanities. Man's true liberty is not to be free from law but under restraint and guidance of the best law. (pp. 1-2)

Conjoined with his views on individual rights was a commitment to property rights. In Curry's time, ownership of property was a measure of substance. The propertied were considered endowed with the responsibility to deliberate issues, vote, and govern in the name of all. The owners of property were, in a sense,

seen to be the builders of civilization, and civilization building was the cornerstone of Curry's world view.

The defense of slavery was of critical significance to Curry. He correctly attributed the region's, and ultimately the nation's, prosperity to a production system that utilized slave labor. Slavery meant prosperity, and prosperity contributed to the advancement of civilization. Slavery and White supremacy were building blocks of the Curry viewpoint. By far the most important element of Curry's political and ideological outlook was states' rights and the secession movement. These issues helped define his early life, as he devoted considerable time to writing and speaking about them. A more expansive look at his views on these political questions may be useful, as they composed his basic ideological viewpoints and foreshadowed his educational outlook.

### On Slavery and States' Rights

Curry's advocacy of states' rights was inextricably connected to his defense of slavery. His extensive writings exalted slavery as the birthright of the South. Slavery was God's labor agreement. It was natural. It was inevitable. It was fully anticipated and protected by the founding fathers, the Constitution, the Supreme Court, mother nature, and all that was holy.

Beyond his organic defense, Curry spoke extensively about the social and economic impact of the "peculiar institution" (Stampp, 1956). Slavery allowed for civilization to evolve in the South. Slavery also was the backbone of the South's prosperity. The rights of a state to maintain this institution were inalienable and must be protected at all costs. Southerners owed allegiance first to their states, not to the federal government.

Draft essays from a book he was preparing on Reverend Richard Fuller, a clergyman he greatly admired, were filled with summative discussions on slavery. He wrote of slavery's justification:

For the Negroes it secured advantages and privileges never elsewhere enjoyed by the race. They came from the Dark Continent, from ignorance, superstition, barbarism, heathenism, slavery, the heritage of the centuries, and acquired a noble language, habits of industry and obedience, and a Divine religion. No one can compare the Negro in Africa and the Negro in the South except to the infinite advantage of the latter. (Curry, n.d., pp. 29–30)

Like many slavocrats, he argued that slavery had a salutary effect on Blacks. He articulated the following commonly held views:

*First* of all, it must be recognized that the Negro, before importation, had, behind him and around him the effects, upon physical, intellectual and moral nature, of thousands of years of ignorance, poverty, equatorial climate, bondage, superstition, pagan-

ism and despotism. In this country, while greatly improved from his native condition, he has been a slave, of a superior class, it is true, and has learned therein the fundamental lessons of modern civilization—"the art of steady work and the language and the religion of the foremost Christian country",—but still he has been a slave, with the repression which that implies and involves, and without the opportunities for development which free institutions and citizenship and equality before the law give to those who enjoy these privileges. The progress of the race since 1865 has been marvelous, and such men as Washington, Price, Lynch, Jones, Corbin, Penn and Bruce demonstrate, beyond question, that the Negro can be educated and receive a high degree of culture and be fitted for stations of honor and usefulness. (Curry, n.d., pp. 39–40; emphasis in original)

Nowhere has the states' rights argument been better articulated than in a 12-volume set of writings entitled *Confederate Military History* (1899) edited by Clement A. Evans. All of the essays were written by "distinguished men of the South," explaining Confederate views. Curry's contribution, entitled "Legal Justification of the South in Secession," along with other essays, provided rationale for the next 100 years of states' rights advocacy. Curry's arguments were embraced by the likes of Senator Theodore Bilbo, Governor George Wallace, "Axhandle" Lester Maddox, and Senator Jesse Helms.

## THE CONFEDERACY AND CIVIL WAR ACTIVITIES

On January 19, 1861, Curry was elected to be a deputy from the state of Alabama to the new Confederate organization. A convention met February 4, 1861, to proclaim the Confederate States of America.

His initial activities included reviewing troops in the field when the Congress was not in session. Beyond offering speeches at churches and other gatherings throughout the South, Curry regularly assessed military strength, troop movements, morale, and leadership. He routinely corresponded with Jefferson Davis and leading generals on military matters.

When Congress was in session, Curry often presided and frequently was instrumental in policy decisions, such as prisoner exchange, relations with foreign nations, and the preparation of important public statements.

Soon Curry would be assigned Confederate Army duty as commissioner of habeas corpus. His task was to investigate charges of disloyalty or treasonous activity within the civilian population. This was no insignificant task, as "disloyalty" was widespread, especially in the northern part of Alabama where Curry had jurisdiction.

Other military assignments for Curry included special aide and staff positions for leading generals, including Joe Wheeler. Achieving the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, Curry eventually commanded units that saw combat. Toward the end

ism and despotism. In this country, while greatly improved from his native condition, he has been a slave, of a superior class, it is true, and has learned therein the fundamental lessons of modern civilization—"the art of steady work and the language and the religion of the foremost Christian country",—but still he has been a slave, with the repression which that implies and involves, and without the opportunities for development which free institutions and citizenship and equality before the law give to those who enjoy these privileges. The progress of the race since 1865 has been marvelous, and such men as Washington, Price, Lynch, Jones, Corbin, Penn and Bruce demonstrate, beyond question, that the Negro can be educated and receive a high degree of culture and be fitted for stations of honor and usefulness. (Curry, n.d., pp. 39–40; emphasis in original)

Nowhere has the states' rights argument been better articulated than in a 12-volume set of writings entitled *Confederate Military History* (1899) edited by Clement A. Evans. All of the essays were written by "distinguished men of the South," explaining Confederate views. Curry's contribution, entitled "Legal Justification of the South in Secession," along with other essays, provided rationale for the next 100 years of states' rights advocacy. Curry's arguments were embraced by the likes of Senator Theodore Bilbo, Governor George Wallace, "Axhandle" Lester Maddox, and Senator Jesse Helms.

## THE CONFEDERACY AND CIVIL WAR ACTIVITIES

On January 19, 1861, Curry was elected to be a deputy from the state of Alabama to the new Confederate organization. A convention met February 4, 1861, to proclaim the Confederate States of America.

His initial activities included reviewing troops in the field when the Congress was not in session. Beyond offering speeches at churches and other gatherings throughout the South, Curry regularly assessed military strength, troop movements, morale, and leadership. He routinely corresponded with Jefferson Davis and leading generals on military matters.

When Congress was in session, Curry often presided and frequently was instrumental in policy decisions, such as prisoner exchange, relations with foreign nations, and the preparation of important public statements.

Soon Curry would be assigned Confederate Army duty as commissioner of habeas corpus. His task was to investigate charges of disloyalty or treasonous activity within the civilian population. This was no insignificant task, as "disloyalty" was widespread, especially in the northern part of Alabama where Curry had jurisdiction.

Other military assignments for Curry included special aide and staff positions for leading generals, including Joe Wheeler. Achieving the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, Curry eventually commanded units that saw combat. Toward the end

of hostilities, Curry took a bullet in his coat, which perforated his folded copy of the *New York Tribune* (Rice, 1949).

### **War's Aftermath: Toward a New Life**

Losing the war, the South had to pay a stiff price. Soldiers and officials were war criminals, property was confiscated without compensation, and martial law was imposed. "Southern civilization" and the "cotton kingdom" would never be the same.

Unrelated to the war, Curry's wife, Ann, died in April 1865, as he was about to see the end of hostilities. Having lost his wife and his beloved South, Curry was placed under arrest May 30, 1865, despite an amnesty agreement issued by President Andrew Johnson. He was charged with engaging in armed rebellion, supplying materials for such rebellion, using and exchanging the illegal currency and bonds of the Confederacy, and other related crimes.

Curry called upon all of his resources. After appealing to acquaintances in high places; talking personally to President Johnson, who had been a Senator from Tennessee; and making a "payment" of \$250, he was pardoned late in 1865. For understandable reasons, Curry began calling on the Lord more and more during this period. Much of his political polemics gave way to uttering Holy Scripture. The ministerial side of Curry asserted itself as he began delivering a whirlwind string of sermons. Shortly after his pardon, he was selected to be President of the Howard Baptist College in Marion, Alabama. He devoted the next year to successfully acquiring ordination. A more challenging task was the rebuilding of Howard's treasury, student body, and reputation. Amidst all these activities, he took a second wife.

Regarding the changes taking place in the new South, Curry wrote in his diary in 1866 that the "radicals" were taking over everything. In his view, the "radicals" were opening the doors for Negro activity. He also noted that Negroes were marching and engaging in public action. The South that Curry cherished was forever dead. While contemporaries ceaselessly lamented its passing, Curry quickly accepted reality. He readied himself for a new social order.

Over the next few years he continued working at Howard College and delivering sermons. Reviving Howard financially proved a most difficult task in an economically depressed environment. After declining several pastoral opportunities, Curry moved his family to Richmond, Virginia, where he accepted a professorship in history and English literature at Richmond College. The end of hostilities, accompanied by a new academic appointment, found Curry reflecting, speaking, and writing anew. The world, and especially his world, was being transformed. Questions surrounding the country's unity, Negro citizenship, mass education, and a host of legal questions were to be given urgent national consideration.



## IDEOLOGY IN THE NEW SOCIAL ORDER

In the second phase of his life, Curry was a man of some means, although he did not possess great wealth. Mending the union was most important to him. His South was lost, but heaven forbid that the entire country be lost to atavism and anger. Two interrelated issues captured his attention: national unity and public education.

Strategies differed on how to achieve national unity. For Curry and the White South, Reconstruction was particularly distasteful. Curry believed it to be an ill-conceived nightmare that must end. For him, there had to be reunification without Reconstruction. His attention turned to mass education and especially Negro education as a strategy to achieve a stable South in the new industrial order. There were many new issues and tasks facing Curry. These issues were, in fact, challenges in which the very life of the resuscitated union was at stake.

Reconstruction found Curry angry at the endeavor, while simultaneously developing new political and educational views. The rabid racist, segregationist, and states' rightist swallowed hard and provided a voice of moderation during a most fragile period.

### Reconstruction Versus Reunification

The enfranchisement of Blacks and their election to public office, disenfranchisement of unrepentant Whites, manumission, martial law, and passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments effectively reordered the South, a reordering that Curry argued vehemently against. Regarding the broad Constitutional and legal revisions, Curry asserted that the national government usurped authority in the South. The North, he wrote, had to acquire a base of support if it was going to govern.

The Negro, still despised by many White southerners, would provide that base. Hence, the Freedman's Bureau, Constitutional amendments, special laws, proclamations, and executive orders were all designed to assemble Black support. However, Black political participation was unacceptable to Curry.

For Curry, these changes represented what he considered the violation of the "public trusts" and the "horrors of Reconstruction," as he believed the doors were opened to kleptocracy. Citing views he agreed with, he wrote, "Duplicity, ignorance, superstition, pauperism, fraud, robbery, venality, were in the ascendant" (Curry, 1895, p. 231).

Curry further argued that the great Caucasian people had been irrevocably divided. They had been, after all, on the way to building a powerful emergent civilization, which was in possible ruin. Poised to become a world power and demonstrate to the world its superiority in government, culture, and character, America had lost its way. The great dream might be forever lost.

Curry created for himself a rationale for reunification rather than Reconstruction. Reconstruction was conceived in irrationality, avarice, and misplaced passion. It was creating unnecessary social and political divisions. The sudden election of Black people to high office in the South was no doubt an irritant to Curry. Although he never articulated one, he demanded a more sane approach that acknowledged the mutual historical dependence of North and South.

Curry entered the Reconstruction years bitter and desperate, and emerged from them with a new nationalist spirit. It is difficult to assert that Curry changed during this period. Perhaps it was a pragmatism that he always possessed, (re)asserting itself. The South he knew was forever dead, but the nation must be saved. This outlook foreshadowed his emergent educational activities that contributed so mightily to national unity.

### FROM POLITICS TO EDUCATION: ON TO PEABODY

With his politics focused, he turned to the greater task facing the country, the education of its people. Progress, prosperity, and political stability depended on the nation's ability to train its people both socially and vocationally. Mass education would serve the country as it edged toward a new international status. Curry never lost sight of his New England experience and the influences of Horace Mann. He was persuaded that mass education was important to social order.

His background served him well for his new tasks. As a former politician, he understood people, power, and leverage. He could get things done. He knew the rural South as well as the effete Ivy League halls of academia. He knew the energies and the pulse of the sometimes rowdy, sometimes genteel, sometimes compassionate, sometimes barbaric White population. He also understood the yearnings and sentiments of Blacks for a better life. Curry had accumulated a wealth of experiences. International travel had made him worldly. The events of the previous decade sobered and seasoned him. He was a patriot committed to the nation's business. He came together with a new breed of businessmen, political people, and educators who all shared his general philosophical and political world outlooks.

### George Peabody and the Birth of the First Educational Foundation

George Peabody has been the subject of extensive research. Hundreds of monographs, articles, government documents, and pamphlets have examined his life, business endeavors, and philanthropic activities. Additionally, the Peabody Fund and its organs, the *Peabody Reflector* and the *Peabody Bulletin*, have published extensively on this man, sometimes called "the father of modern philanthropy." He had a pivotal role in Black education, as well as enjoyed a relationship with Curry.

The Peabody clan immigrated to America in the mid-1600s, settling in the area around Rowley, Massachusetts. George was born into a large family on February 18, 1795, and his childhood was taken up with school and work. By the time he was 11, the family could no longer pay for his education. He took a full-time job at Proctor's General Emporium, learning the skills of bookkeeping and store management. The teenage years found George learning merchandising, finance, and storekeeping. Most important, he learned the dynamics of credit and how to profit from it.

George enlisted in an artillery unit and served in the War of 1812. Seeing little actual combat, he was, however, stationed at Fort Warburton, Baltimore, with Francis Scott Key, composer of "The Star Spangled Banner" (Parker, 1956).

Family debt, combined with ill and irresponsible siblings, forced George to take on unwelcome financial burdens. His first significant business venture found him partnered with Elisha Riggs. Together, they successfully bought and sold consignments of goods from northern merchants connected to England. The passing years found Peabody expanding from local merchant to world trader. England became crucial to his enterprise, as he profitably marketed cotton, woolens, linen, and dry goods there. Although headquartered in Baltimore and shipping out of New York, Peabody was spending increasing time in London. He finally relocated to London in 1837.

The recession of the mid-1830s threatened the banking system and credit availability. The firm of William and James Brown, Brown Brothers, was a major source of credit in England. Affected by the monetary crisis, Brown Brothers nearly went out of business. The firm, rescued by Peabody, would later join him to dominate the financing of trans-Atlantic commerce. Brown Brothers has been a major force in international financing ever since.

Peabody was in the right place at the right time. The demand for tradable commodities was nearly insatiable on both sides of the Atlantic. Trans-Atlantic trade was booming in the 1840s and 1850s. Beyond the trade and sale of dry goods, Peabody was the first person to sell U.S. bonds in Europe. Those bond sales helped finance the building of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canals. Those sales also helped finance the federal government's military and commercial expansion into the western frontier. Additionally, Peabody-brokered bonds helped finance the Mexican War and the laying of the first trans-Atlantic cable (Parker, 1956). As Peabody's businesses flourished, he quickly joined the ranks of the world's wealthiest men.

In 1851, he organized a major trade and commodities exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London. Visited by 6 million people, the "Great Exhibition" is now observed as the first World's Fair.

Firmly ensconced in London, Peabody became almost a tourist attraction (Parker, 1956). Friends, businessmen, journalists, scholars, and robber barons visited him. It was during this time that he befriended the likes of Cornelius

Vanderbilt, journalist Horace Greeley, Colonel John C. Fremont, and the famous John Pierpont, or J. P., Morgan. In addition, dukes, duchesses, and a variety of royalty called on this man, who was regarded as a financial potentate.

Thoroughly committed to "gift giving," Peabody decided to set up a string of "Institutes" that would receive and administer his philanthropic gifts for education. He wanted to fund the "Lyceum" in many areas so that people could acquire knowledge. A half dozen or so of these institutions were established in major population centers in England.

By the mid-1850s, Peabody had entered into a relationship that elevated him into the stratosphere of money and power. He joined forces with fellow Massachusetts financiers and merchandisers Junius and his son J. P. Morgan. Committed to keeping their European businesses American, they became the first modern international finance capitalists or imperialists. This union captured a significant chunk of the world's wealth.

Withstanding cyclical crises in the uncertain and ever-changing world economy of the late 1850s and early 1860s, Peabody, the Morgans, and their associates always seemed to summon the resources to avoid financial catastrophe. As the Civil War approached, a seasoned Peabody increasingly turned his attention to philanthropy and education.

He was forever grateful to the people of London, his adopted home, where he grew so prosperous. Franklin Parker, a biographer, believes it was Peabody's desire to assist those communities, that nurtured him. This, in part, accounts for his philanthropic rationale. But scholar Merle Curti (1956) discusses a complex set of reasons for Peabody's gift giving:

Several factors render Peabody's philanthropies remarkable. Unlike many donors, he does not seem to have been motivated by religious considerations. Nor is there any evidence that a sense of guilt figured in his decisions to give a considerable part of his fortune to philanthropy while he was living. His critics insisted that the vain desire for self-glorification was at the root of his benefactions. Such a motive was indeed present, but it was not the only one. Peabody never married and thus had no immediate heirs to whom to bequeath his wealth. . . . Two considerations seem to have been most influential in his philanthropies. One was a deep devotion to the communities in which he was reared or in which he made his money. The other was secular version of the Puritan doctrine of the stewardship of riches—his desire, in the simplest terms, to be useful to mankind. Having himself been deprived of opportunities for a formal education, he was eager to help others in a similar situation not merely to achieve vocational training but to open the doors to cultural self-improvement. (pp. ix-x)

Interested in assisting the "Ragged Schools," schools for the very poor, Peabody soon learned of their many problems. Trained teachers refused to work there and even parents did not want their children to attend, instead encouraging

them to work to bring in wages. Thus, housing for the poor became a target for Peabody. Although more interested in education (Parker, 1956), by 1859 the Peabody Donation Fund was making substantial gifts to establish clean, livable housing in London.

The emergence and expansion of Peabody's organized philanthropy coincided with the outbreak of the Civil War in the United States. Looking to repatriate to the United States, he was distressed at the outbreak of hostilities. As a businessman, Peabody opposed the war. Dismissing ideological or political considerations, he felt that the war was bad for business. He believed that all disputes could be peacefully negotiated so that commerce could proceed uninterrupted.

During the Civil War, Peabody's philanthropic activities in England intensified. In 1862, his colossal gift of 500,000 pounds for housing in London was for "relieving the poor and needy of this great city, and to promote their comfort and happiness" (in Parker, 1956, p. 126). That gift was responsible for housing 14,600 people over the next 20 years (Parker, 1956).

In the middle of the war, Peabody journeyed to the United States with plans to retire from business activities but expand his philanthropic giving. Harvard, Yale, and other universities with a science orientation, attractive to Peabody, benefited. Harvard professor and "scientific" racist Louis Agassiz, described in Chapter 2, received \$140,000 in 1867 from Peabody to expand his research.

It was during the 1866 trip to the United States that Peabody's rationale for his Fund would be established. Southern leaders, especially former South Carolina governor William Aiken, graphically explained the South's devastation to Peabody. They convinced him that the unity and progress of the country required a viable South. They argued that an illiterate, angry, financially devastated South would not serve commerce or progress. Black and White children required education. Peabody was soon convinced that industrial education was desirable, especially for Blacks.

The George Peabody Educational Fund's founding letter was drafted February 7, 1867. Targeted explicitly for the South and especially for Negroes, Peabody's first gift was \$1,000,000 in 1867, followed by a second \$1,000,000. Shortly after the second gift, Peabody died, on November 4, 1869 at age 74, never really seeing the impact of his Fund. While his money helped change forever the financing of Black education, Peabody himself was not really an architect of Black education. Those who administered and guided the Fund, however, certainly were.

In 1869, Robert C. Winthrop, Charles P. McIlvaine, Hamilton Fish, and Barnas Sears constituted the brain trust that had advised Peabody. With no blueprint, this group became important as they worked through the rationale and possible recipients for disbursements. Politically minded businessmen and educators, they charted the course, established the objectives, and framed the language for the new philanthropic thrust into Black education. They soon attracted Curry to their endeavor. The Fund's outreach activities greatly influenced Curry, but it was

he who emerged as its leader, providing social and political ideology as well as charisma.

### **Early Peabody Fund Activities**

Barnas Sears, president of Brown University, emerged as a leading voice of the initial Peabody brain trust. Within a few years, Sears assumed the position of General Agent, a kind of CEO, for the Fund. Fund leaders deliberated and outlined policies and programs on mass education, industrial education for Blacks, funding, teacher training, curriculum, and other issues. They established several important objectives and policies. As noted, their earliest activities occurred during Reconstruction. Most southern states had primitive or no elementary schools. Favoring mass education, the Peabody management supported separate schools for the races.

Eventually, the flagship operation for the Peabody Fund came to be the normal school in Nashville, Tennessee. Having received significant funding in the late 1870s, the school came to be known as the George Peabody College for Teachers.

Under Sears's leadership, the Fund supported southern education in the broadest terms. Almost all the southern states benefited from this largesse. Part of the Peabody management approach was to lobby individual states to appropriate more funds for education.

Early Peabody activities assisted Negro education. The Peabody trustees supported the "wards of the nation" idea put forward after the Civil War by a variety of politicians and nation builders. It posited that the newly freed slaves should have a special temporary legal status. "Ward" status suggested semicitizenship. The "ward" argument could be utilized both to ask for financial support and to deny participation.

Sears and the trustees energetically supported industrial education for Blacks. Regular gifts were made to Hampton, while other moneys were given to programs at Fisk, Atlanta University, and a scattering of normal schools.

The death of Barnas Sears in 1880 caused great concern at the Fund. As the first organization of its type, its course was uncharted. The Fund's trustees realized that their task was to be a lengthy one, since Peabody had believed the Fund should exist for a minimum of 30 years. The choosing of the next General Agent was crucial.

### **Curry and Peabody**

Negro education as a political strategy to establish an orderly South was widely supported within the venues of economic and political power. The educational philanthropies became action arms of that power (Arno, 1980). The Peabody

endeavor attracted great attention. The list of candidates for the Fund's General Agent position read like a who's who of nationally recognized educators, university presidents, business people, and political figures. Nominees included Henry Barnard and Presidents Johnston of Louisiana State University, Seelye of Auburn, Angell of Michigan, and Lincoln of Brown, and a host of respected national leaders.

Curry's southern roots and his previous close relationship with Sears helped him win the appointment. The Peabody Fund, aimed at the South, felt that it could use a southerner to carry it through. The third phase of Curry's life, that of educational architect and theoretician, began to unfold. His early commitments were to both mass education and Hampton-style Negro education. In short order, Curry became a vocal advocate for state support of education, a supporter of normal schools, and a financial backer of Negro education.

He quickly emerged as a philosophical and ideological force. He declared that education was part of the natural right of man. Education would help mold men in God's image. Education was an important component of civilization building. Here is how biographer Rice (1949) characterized Curry's views during the early Peabody period: "He marshaled facts to prove education essential to prosperity, and argued that only the educated laborer could produce products that could sustain competition on the world markets. He argued that poverty was the inevitable result of ignorance" (p. 107).

Curry pointed out that democracy had triumphed in the United States. The patriotic and pragmatic Curry urged acceptance of this fact and of the fact that Negroes were citizens. He made clear his belief that the states could ill afford not to educate the Negroes. He challenged them to support Negro education. He derided those who spent time bemoaning the past instead of starting from where they were, accepting things they could not change, and building for the future. He warned of the dangers of illiterate voters and quoted for his listeners the illiteracy figures of their states. He scorned those who feared that the education of the laboring classes would lift them above the station they were meant to occupy.

### **J. L. M. CURRY: SOUTHERN EDUCATOR, RACIAL EDUCATOR**

Curry's writings and activities over the next few years catapulted him to new prominence. He wrote and spoke out on education and curriculum within the sociopolitical and economic context. He offered theories of schooling that would serve Whites, Blacks, the South, and the entire nation. Under the banner of mass education, Curry helped solidify a system of segregated schools that guaranteed decades of differentiated education for Black Americans. This lifelong segregationist was a major theoretician in the plan of separate but unequal.

## Rationale for Negro Education

While Curry supported mass education from the standpoint of liberty, nation building, morality, and industrialization, his views on educating Blacks were different. Political expediency was at the heart of this endeavor. The proper positioning of Blacks in the South and in the labor market was important to national progress. Blacks would have a great impact on the wage system, civil order or disorder, and, ultimately, the nation's prosperity. For Curry, just as the slave system was prosperous, so too would a new system without slavery have to be made prosperous.

First, Curry understood that Black Americans were inextricably woven into the country's social, economic, and political life. Blacks would occupy America's basement. Curry also understood that society's lowest levels could pull everyone down. He spoke and wrote often of this paradox: "We are tethered to the lowest stratum of society, and if we do not lift it up, it will drag us down to the nethermost hell of poverty and degradation" (Curry, 1900, pp. 8–9).

Second, Curry was enamored, perhaps even obsessed, with the rule of law. If the country was to survive, it had to be bound by covenant. The Thirteenth and Fourteenth amendments granted citizenship and suffrage to Blacks, and those laws had to be honored regardless of perspective. Curry himself despised both amendments. In his speech *Citizenship and Education* (1884), he called the Fourteenth Amendment the "blunder of the centuries," believing that the "Negro question" could have been solved without dramatic constitutional and legislative change.

Finally, Curry repeatedly advanced the notion of education for citizenship. He presented a series of lectures in the early to mid-1880s that offered a primer on political socialization. In those discussions he talked of avoiding perils that might occur in the American version of democracy. Education, he believed, promoted citizenship.

## Education and the Negro Question

The civic-minded Curry never lost sight of the notion that educating Blacks after the Civil War was, in some respects, high-risk politics. A program of minimalism backed the rhetoric of liberty, equality, and self-actualization for the Negro. The Negro must be semieducated for semicitizenship. Black Americans would be junior partners in industrial America.

During the Peabody years, Curry became ever more convinced of the role of education in southern Black life. He never tired of trying to persuade recalcitrant Whites that this was the path. In a speech to the crusty Alabama legislature, he said:

I have said the Negro problem was dark; but you may dip your brush in the colors of Erebus and make it blacker if you can. You may convert dangers into perils and speculations into facts, and pile Pelion upon Ossa, and I might not differ from you.



When you have represented the present and the future in the most forbidding colors, I then assert with confidence that ignorance is no remedy for the situation, promises no relief, and only aggravates the evil. (in Rice, 1949, p. 149)

Curry agonized over the "Negro problem." His notes and diaries indicate that after returning from his mission to Spain, he began a manuscript on the issue but scrapped it, finding the project difficult and depressing (Rice, 1949). Among his concerns was the demographic presence of Blacks. Concentrated in the South, they could form a solid power bloc that could overshadow potentially fractured Whites.

Knowing the White South intimately, Curry was concerned for its unity. One can only speculate whether his Civil War experiences of divided loyalties played a role in his fears. He even went so far as to project widespread miscegenation as a possibility. He wrote that miscegenation in the South would create "an inert, degraded population" and that the southern United States would look like Central America (Rice, 1949, p. 157).

The ultimate apocalypse for Curry was Negro dominance. Whites should never allow Blacks to evolve to that political posture. A solid Negro vote, he argued, could "emasculate" the White South. Divine law, in his view, dictated White rule.

### **Expanding Views on Negro Education: Joining Slater**

During the decade of the 1880s, Curry came to be viewed as knowledgeable on the politics of the Negro question and Negro education. He advanced ideological positions that joined White racial superiority to the advancement of Negro education. It was to be the compromise around which northern industrialists and southern moderates could unite. Southern White racial extremists could only romanticize about an earlier time. Curry was making policy that forged race relations for the next century.

In 1891, Curry was chosen to succeed Atticus G. Haygood, Methodist minister and president of Emory College, as a trustee of the John F. Slater Fund. He was immediately made Chair of the Educational Committee, which gave him the same duties as General Agent (Curry, 1901). The Slater Fund became the second, after Peabody, of the large educational philanthropic foundations. Established in 1882 by John Fox Slater of Norwich, Connecticut, its governing board was chaired by Rutherford B. Hayes. Unlike Peabody, Slater money was to be used for Blacks exclusively. The stipulation accompanying the initial \$1 million gift read that grants were for:

[t]he uplifting of the lately emancipated population of the Southern States, and their posterity, by conferring on them the blessings of Christian education . . . for their own sake . . . and . . . for the safety of our common country, in which they have been invested with equal political rights. (Curry, 1901, p. 1)

The ten Slater trustees, led by Morris K. Jessup, Daniel Coit Gilman, and William Slater, had been deeply involved in defining Negro education. Curry fit right in and quickly joined their deliberations. Several concepts advanced by Curry and the Slater board became important fixtures for a generation of White architects of Black education to embrace and embellish.

First, Slater Fund leaders agreed that Negro education was to be "Christian education." They wanted Blacks to be "good men and good citizens" (Curry, 1901, p. 1). They wanted Blacks to develop duty toward God in the context of Holy Scripture. They wanted obedient and reverent people who could not be drawn to crime or insolence. Second, they wanted Slater schools to train good teachers. They had been appalled at the quality of teaching in Negro schools. The entire effort, they believed, could succeed only if teachers cultivated new leaders for the race. The third and most important component of the project was to advance industrial training as a curriculum and an ideology. Curry played no small role in helping to refine, package, and fund industrial education for Blacks.

### **Commitment to Industrial Training**

John Slater was a forceful advocate of industrial training for Blacks. The commitment of his Fund to this type of education offered a model for others to follow. The denial of intellectual or liberal education for Blacks was now a fait accompli. Here is how Curry, author of the Slater Report, assessed the Fund's position in the influential and oft-cited report of 1901:

That industrial training simultaneously with mental and moral instruction should be taught in aided institutions, as making a more self-reliant and self-supporting population and furnishing some of the conditions of the best intellectual and moral discipline of the colored people, especially of those who were to be teachers and guides of the people. (p. 2)

Curry continued to build upon the industrial training tradition during his leadership at both Peabody and Slater. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, Curry provided both ideological and financial justification. He argued that this was the best course of action for the Negro. It must be so because all the White administrators say so: "The concurrent opinion of all connected with industrial work is most favorable as to its benefits" (Curry, 1901, pp. 4-5).

Curry and his Fund colleagues knew full well that their prescriptions for Black education differed from what was conventionally accepted as liberal education for the world of business, manufacturing, and finance. Curry (1901) wrote:

The accepted methods of education in their general scope are of doubtful application to Negroes. Some need the best intellectual training that they may become leaders of the industrial, social, intellectual, and religious life of the race, but, as things now

are, the great mass need to be fitted for domestic and mechanical and agricultural occupations which will produce the means of living and ensure self-respect and comfortable self-support. (p. 5)

The Curry-led group paid special homage to Hampton and Tuskegee as embodiments of their paradigm. They explicitly allocated dollars for Black colleges and programs that adhered to this model. Again, here is Curry's (1901) policy:

The policy has been persistently adhered to, of supplementing, or rather coordinating, academic with manual and industrial training, and the reports from the schools are uniform and emphatic in ascribing the origin and success of industrial departments to the timely and efficient aid rendered by this fund. (p. 4)

### **J. L. M. Curry: Ruminations**

Not only was J. L. M. Curry a man for his time, but some also might consider him a man for these times. He provided a nineteenth-century exemplar for some of today's figures. Black Americans look with great curiosity at the hard-bitten segregationists of yesteryear who now proclaim their undying love for the Black race. The George Wallace of 1998 was a far cry from the George Wallace of 1958. America's rapidly changing political environment creates fleeting political allegiances.

The contemporary corporate-industrial society responds best to profit. No cultural, racial, or gender mountains are too high. Yesterday's enemies are today's friends. There are no permanent associations, only permanent interests. Economic and political expediency are inextricably connected. Such is the legacy of J. L. M. Curry.