

# How to Write a History Textbook: The Willard–Willson Debate over History Education in the Common School Era

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*The essay reinterprets the 1845–1847 pamphlet war between Emma Willard and Marcus Willson, authors of popular history schoolbooks. Willson publicly attacked the accuracy and literary quality of history schoolbooks by eight leading authors, with particular attention to Willard's, just as he was publishing his first school history. Willard and Willson practiced different kinds of history authorship that reflected their different backgrounds, intellectual milieus, and professional circumstances. This essay questions conventional readings of the debate and argues that their subsequent exchange over plagiarism, style, and sourcing illuminated important issues in the purposes of history education, the challenges of growing markets, and new theories of historiography. The debate showed that schoolbooks were not simply derivative “guardians of tradition,” but that they could be portals for new disciplinary theories in an age without a robust professional research infrastructure to test and filter them.*

Between 1845 and 1847, Emma Hart Willard (1787–1870) and Marcus Willson (1813–1905), each an author of common school histories of the United States, engaged in a furious pamphlet controversy, dubbed “the war of histories” in the trade press, after Willson publicly criticized Willard and seven other leading history text authors for sloppy writing, misdated events, factual errors, and poor organization. Willard, the only one to respond, counterattacked with assertions that Willson had plagiarized her works, misstated her purposes, lacked the moral authority or scholarly reputation to be an educator, and arrogated to himself the supreme authority to judge another author's style or determine the truth or falsehood of accounts that were still matters of dispute among respectable historians. True to form, the conflict descended into personal insults and gender-baiting, but it

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does not appear to have had much impact on their careers and therefore could be taken as a tempest in a teapot. It has attracted the attention of subsequent historians of education due to Willard's fame as a public intellectual, pioneer in history and geography education, and advocate of female education, plus the fact that Willson's detailed critique of a group of writers by name was the first of its kind. It was also a rare public argument over how to "compile" a history textbook for children just as the common school reform movement peaked before the Civil War.

Willson's criticism came in the form of a report commissioned by the New Jersey Society of Teachers and Friends of Education at the same time that he was preparing his own competing text in American history. The conflict of interest inherent in writing a review of one's rivals without disclosing plans for bringing a new text to market cast a shadow over Willson's criticisms that darkened further when, a few months after the 1845 report appeared, his new text emerged and cited the review as proof of the book's "superior accuracy" over the competition. Eighteen months later, his New York publisher raised the stakes even further, reprinting the review in a promotional pamphlet for Willson's new text and distributing two thousand copies to school districts and booksellers across the country, in direct competition with Willard's popular histories. This behavior exposed Willson to charges of self-dealing and deception that continue to shape modern treatments of the debate, which tend to dismiss his arguments as special pleading by an ambitious rival out to disparage the competition. In these accounts, Willard's defense of her methods, literary property, and academic integrity play a starring role, scripted with the scorching pen of an experienced advocate and scholar.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>M[arcus] Willson, "A Critical Review of American Common School Histories," *Biblical Repository and Classical Review* 59 (July 1845), 517–39. The origin of the report is discussed in detail later in this essay. The only extant full-length biography of Willard simply asserts that Willson's claims were "groundless." See Alma Lutz, *Emma Willard, Daughter of Democracy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1929), 229. Murry R. Nelson echoed this account in "Emma Willard: Pioneer in Social Studies Education," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 15, no. 4 (Fall 1987), 253. Nelson accuses Willson of "jealousy." Other accounts range from mildly to severely critical of Willson. For example, see Thalia M. Mulvihill, "Community in Emma Willard's Educational Thought, 1787–1870" (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 1995), 102–27; Thalia M. Mulvihill, "Emma Hart Willard," in *Historical Dictionary of Women's Education in the United States*, ed. Linda Eisenmann (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 465–67; and Jonathan Tucker Boyd, "The Holy Hieroglyph: Providence and Historical Consciousness in George Bancroft's Historiography" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1999), 221–29. The most complete account is Barry Joyce, *The First U.S. History Textbooks: Constructing and Disseminating the American Tale in the Nineteenth Century* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 119–22.

Later scholars' deference to Willard is understandable, given both her record of accomplishment and Willson's apparent misconduct. Coverage of this debate, however, has suffered not only from a dearth of information about Willson (he has no biographer and his papers do not appear to have survived, while Willard's are available and the foundation of a rich literature) but also a tendency to let the clash of personalities and material interests overshadow a debate about historical method in an increasingly commercialized market for school histories. Their debate about matters of style and accuracy that today are settled in-house before publication revealed what might be termed the "compiler's dilemma"—the schoolbook author's ambiguous position as amateur and professional in the conflicted no-man's land between scholarship and commerce—in an era short on rigorous scholarship and long on popular demand for simple, reliable truths in children's classrooms. Their debate not only revealed disagreements over best practices in history education, it also underlined the transition in the 1840s from a genteel Romantic tradition in education and history to a market-oriented, empiricist, and entrepreneurial ethos that scholars tend to date later, during or after the Civil War. Willard and Willson were not carbon copies of the other textbook authors targeted in his critique; their contributions to a genre often pigeonholed by many scholars as a virtually interchangeable set of nationalist nostrums were unique, as their debate and subsequent careers would reveal.

What did publishers, authors, teachers, and the public expect a history schoolbook to say and accomplish? Did accuracy matter, how could it be verified, and did it establish trust in an account? Could a pattern of minor errors still convey a larger and more important truth? How was a compilation for schoolchildren and families different from a scholarly history? Willson's critique of Willard was not just a ham-handed lunge at a rival in order to win business for his own wares (school Readers, not history books, would be the foundation of Willson's substantial fortune). It was a novice's brash critique of a genre of history writing that was already crowded with look-alikes in need of clearer standards and an adjusted sense of purpose. The duel was not itself a turning point in the story of history education; it was instead a mile marker in the secularization and professionalization of the craft, illustrating a shift from "compilation" to "synthesis" as textbook compilers like Willson and Willard adapted to the mass markets and political (especially sectional) pressures that determined sales.<sup>2</sup> In short,

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<sup>2</sup>Joseph Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation: Conflicts over American History Textbooks from the Civil War to the Present* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 33–49; and Margaret Nash, "Contested Identities: Nationalism, Regionalism, and Patriotism in Early American Textbooks," *History of Education Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (Nov. 2009), 427–28.

Willson was more than an ambitious rival and the debate was a sign of things to come.

The controversy occurred at a pivotal moment in nineteenth-century historiography, amid literary turmoil over defining originality in scholarship. A broad reinvention of historical method was underway by the 1840s, away from both Enlightenment and, later, Romantic notions of history as a literary art toward Victorian emphases on science, racial determinism, empiricism, historicism, and deeper criticism of sources. Willard and Willson both believed that history is a “science,” but this term was undergoing significant change under the impact of German and French historiography and philosophy in the 1830s and 1840s. German idealism’s and French positivism’s enthrone-ment of scientific method and their corresponding skepticism of biblical chronology and divine direction of human affairs challenged the providential and millennial pivot of schoolbook historiography at the center of Willard’s historical vision, offering Willson an alternative framework for understanding the past.<sup>3</sup>

The quarrel was also a rare public clash between the authors of history schoolbooks, intensified by the rising stakes of a growing market. Occasional disputes over plagiarism and authorship in history had burst onto the literary scene after the enactment of copyright legislation in the 1790s, but none of these delved into the process of text writing and sourcing with the passion and depth of the Willard–Willson feud over school “compends.”<sup>4</sup> Examined against a changing backdrop of common school reform and innovations in mass marketing and publishing, the controversy reveals a transition from the amateur literary

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<sup>3</sup>The otherwise rich literature on American historiography in this period rarely includes schoolbook histories, probably on the assumption that “compilers” echoed existing, rather than pursued original, interpretations. Michael Kraus and Davis D. Joyce, *The Writing of American History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 92–152; Dorothy Ross, “Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America,” *American Historical Review* 89, no. 4 (Oct. 1984), 909–28; Daniel Woolf, *A Global History of History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 360–74; Henry A. Pochmann, *German Culture in America: Philosophical and Literary Influences, 1600–1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), 66–79, 85–152, 192–206; and George H. Nadel, “Philosophy of History before Historicism,” *History and Theory* 3, no. 3 (Jan. 1964), 291–315. George Callcott discusses school texts in his *History in the United States, 1800–1860: Its Practice and Purpose* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 215–25. On Willard, see Nina Baym, “Between Enlightenment and Victorian: Toward a Narrative of American Women Writers Writing History,” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1991), 22–41.

<sup>4</sup>On contemporary conflicts over originality, see Eileen K. Cheng, *The Plain and Noble Garb of Truth: Nationalism and Impartiality in American Historical Writing, 1784–1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 104–52; and Callcott, *History in the United States*, 134–38.

enterprises of early national schoolbook writers to the more market-oriented, sophisticated profession of history text authorship and publishing before the Civil War.

The career paths of these two authors defined different mindsets that influenced their books and their dispute. They were literally from different genders and generations and came of age during different epochs in the early American republic. Willard (fifty-eight) was twenty-six years older than Willson (thirty-two) when he critiqued her work in 1845. Her most significant publications and achievements as an author, pedagogue, reformer, and institution builder already adorned her remarkable résumé, while Willson's reputation was "yet to be made," as Willard dryly observed.<sup>5</sup> Born in 1787, she was a child of the Revolutionary era and the late Enlightenment, raised in a time, historian Anne Firor Scott reminds us, of "active institution building" and redefining of women's position in the young republic.<sup>6</sup> Determined from an early age to mitigate the disparities in male and female education, she combined pioneering scholarship in geography and history education with institution building in female education through her famous Troy Female Seminary (established 1821). As she wrote in 1833, the graduates of her school were to exemplify the "well educated female bringing all her faculties into exercise in the performance of the appropriate duties of her sex, as mistress of a household, as a wife and mother." Her life's goal was "to prepare the rising generation of women for these important duties, and to bring forward teachers to aid me in this."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Emma Willard, *Answer to Marcius Willson's Reply* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1847), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Anne Firor Scott, "What, Then, Is the American: This New Woman?" *Journal of American History* 65, no. 3 (Dec. 1978), 680. See also Anne Firor Scott, "The Ever Widening Circle: The Diffusion of Feminist Values from the Troy Female Seminary 1822–1872," *History of Education Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1979), 3–25; Henry Fowler, "Educational Services of Mrs. Emma Willard," in *The American Journal of Education*, vol. 6, ed. Henry Barnard (New York: F. C. Brownell, 1859), 125–68; John Lord, *The Life of Emma Willard* (New York: D. Appleton, 1873); Nina Baym, "Women and the Republic: Emma Willard's Rhetoric of History," *American Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (March 1991), 1–23; and Lutz, *Emma Willard*.

<sup>7</sup> Emma Willard, preface to *Progressive Education, Commencing with the Infant*, by Albertine Adrienne Necker de Saussure, trans. Emma Willard and A. L. Phelps (Boston: William D. Ticknor, 1835), 9–10. See also Emma Willard, "What to Teach," *Godey's Lady's Book* 45 (Sept. 1852), 295; Emma Willard, "Places of Education," *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 6, no. 9 (Sept. 1833), 385; Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780–1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 106–7; and Nina Baym, "At Home with History: History Books and Women's Sphere before the Civil War," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 101 (Oct. 1991), 289–90.

Willard's pioneering publications applied her teaching philosophy to curriculum, with characteristic attention to detail. Her pedagogy mixed new with familiar concepts about the way children learn, and by itself did not attract significant controversy among educators.<sup>8</sup> But she infused her geographies and histories with innovative visuals—"progressive" maps and graphic organizers—intended to stimulate students to draft their own maps as mnemonic devices associated with dates and events, a kind of primitive constructivism.<sup>9</sup>

Dedicated to "religion, virtue, and human rights,"<sup>10</sup> Willard's historical works departed little from the romantic historiographical mainstream of the early American republic, and over their long publishing history they displayed little evidence of substantial philosophical development. Their deeply religious tone, patriotic celebration of American exceptionalism, and concern with producing steady republican citizens were familiar themes to readers of early national schoolbooks. We have little evidence that she took the opportunity afforded by extensive travel or through her otherwise wide reading in history to incorporate the ideas and findings of European historians who were already influencing the authors (like George Bancroft) she relied on for her compends. It is remarkable that an author so well versed in new ideas of geography and education displayed so little interest in

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<sup>8</sup>Associating past events with chronological or thematic divisions of the subject was already evident in schoolbooks when Willard applied the concept to geography. See Joyce, *First U.S. History Textbooks*, 69–71. For useful overviews of the period's pedagogical trends, see Anne-Lise Halvorsen, *A History of Elementary Social Studies: Romance and Reality* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 1–20; and Joyce, *First U.S. History Textbooks*, 69–71. On visuals and geography education, see "Method of Making Maps," in Emma Willard, *Ancient Geography, as Connected with Chronology, and Preparatory to the Study of Ancient History* (Hartford, CT: Oliver D. Cooke, 1822), 57–58. Her most comprehensive statement of this pedagogy is in Emma Willard, *Guide to the Temple of Time* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1849), 11–18.

<sup>9</sup>Willard, *Ancient Geography*; Emma Willard, *History of the United States, or, Republic of America* (Philadelphia: White, Gallaher & White, 1828), probably her most famous work, which she distilled into her *Abridgement of the History of the United States* (New York: White, Gallaher & White, 1831); and Emma Willard, *A System of Universal History, in Perspective* (Hartford, CT: J. F. Huntington, 1835). Joyce, *First U.S. History Textbooks*, 72–80; Susan Schulten, "Emma Willard and the Graphic Foundations of American History," *Journal of Historical Geography* 33, no. 3 (July 2007), 542–64; Daniel H. Calhoun, "Eyes for the Jacksonian World: William C. Woodbridge and Emma Willard," *Journal of the Early Republic* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1984), 1–26; Susan Schulten, *Mapping the Nation: History and Cartography in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 27–28; and Kim Tolley, *The Science Education of American Girls: A Historical Perspective* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002), 13–34, supercede recent accounts that ignore Willard's contributions in this field. Willard was the only geography educator to attempt to bring the inductive method from geography into history instruction.

<sup>10</sup>Willard, *A System of Universal History*, iii.

emergent historiography, but the reason is not far to seek. The secularism of positivist and historicist intellectuals ran counter to her religious convictions, which were not open to question. “I will not reinvestigate the evidences of Christianity,” she upbraided a querulous Robert Owen in 1831. “I will never change my belief.”<sup>11</sup> Yet two significant exceptions distinguished her histories from the seven others on Willson’s hit list: first, their emphasis on the status of women as “the main test of civilizations,”<sup>12</sup> and second, their linkage to the classroom. Like other antebellum female authors of history, Willard brought women into the American story wherever she could, even as she highlighted the heroic achievements and spectacular failures in politics, commerce, warfare, and philosophy of men “who are to history, as cities are to geography, its luminous points.”<sup>13</sup> Here were two significant themes that united Willard’s American and world histories: the rise of Christianity, which paralleled progress in women’s social condition, and the United States as the culmination of these developments so long as its racial and political order remained intact. Willard also stood out in this group as a lifelong teacher who specifically connected her works to “plans of teaching” at a school of her making, detailed them in her schoolbooks, promoted them in essays for magazines and educational journals, and toured the country to carry them out.<sup>14</sup>

Willson, by contrast, was a newcomer to the classroom, a novice writer, and relatively unschooled as a historian before he wrote his report. Born in 1813 in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, Willson was barely six years old when Willard unveiled her ambitious *Plan for Improvement of Female Education*, her first *Geography* appeared when he was eleven, her famous *Republic of America* when he was fifteen, three years before he enrolled as a young scholar at Canandaigua Academy, in Ontario County, New York. The Willsons had established a family farm at Allen’s Hill in that county, where Marcius grew up and attended local schools in Geneseo. In 1835, when Willard’s first edition of her *Universal History* appeared, Willson was a junior at Union College in Schenectady, New York. In sum, like Willard and most history compilers of the day, Willson had not formally studied history before he decided to write it.

<sup>11</sup>Lutz, *Emma Willard*, 116.

<sup>12</sup>Emma Willard, *Journal and Letters, from France and Great-Britain* (Troy, NY: N. Tuttle, 1833), 316–17.

<sup>13</sup>On history and geography, see Willard, *Guide to the Temple of Time*, 13. For further discussion about women writers of history, see Nina Baym, *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790–1860* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), esp. 214–39.

<sup>14</sup>Emma Willard, *An Appeal to the Public, Especially Those Concerned in Education* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1847), 10.

His first publication in the field came in 1843, when he copyrighted *A Comprehensive Chart of American History*, which was later incorporated into his first history texts.<sup>15</sup> Willson also lacked Willard's deep experience in the classroom. Whereas, by 1845, Willard had been working in educational institutions for over thirty-five years, Willson's prior teaching experience had consisted of six-and-a-half years at various small academies in upstate New York and New Jersey.<sup>16</sup>

This capsule reprise of the authors' careers suggests that in March 1845 the match appears to have been quite uneven. In accusing eight established history schoolbook authors of defective work, Willson took great risks and, later scholars have concluded, suffered a tongue-lashing in return. No one since seems to have asked why he did this except to make room for a new text. But why did he think the country needed another American history schoolbook in the first place?

One possible explanation, and it must be circumstantial given the absence so far of Willson's private correspondence, is that, as a group, the existing schoolbook histories constituted an ideological echo chamber and, if one is to believe contemporary opinion, were seriously deficient in literary reputation and historical accuracy.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the market would welcome a new voice, and if so, then Willson's critique was not just of Willard but of all eight authors. The histories Willard, the Goodrich brothers, Salma Hale, John Frost, William Grimshaw, Jesse Olney, and Noah Webster wrote in the 1820s—all critiqued in Willson's review—were unmistakably alike in treating history education as instruction in moral conscience and civic virtue.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, these authors,

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<sup>15</sup> Marcus Willson, *A Comprehensive Chart of American History* (New York: George Endicott, 1843); and "Willson's Chart of American History," *New York Evening Post*, Sept. 16, 1843, 2. At Union College, Willson received his A.B. in 1836 and an A.M. three years later. See Andrew Van Vranken Raymond, *Union University: Its History, Influence, Characteristics and Equipment*, vol. 2 (New York: Lewis Publishing, 1907), 525–28. Union College's curriculum did not include American history while Willson was there. See Wayne Somers, "Curriculum," in *The Encyclopedia of Union College History*, ed. Wayne Somers (Schenectady, NY: Union College Press, 2003), 200–201.

<sup>16</sup> "Poughkeepsie Collegiate School," *The Rural Repository Devoted to Polite Literature* 16, no. 18 (Feb. 15, 1840), 137; and Wilson Farrand, *A Brief History of the Newark Academy, 1774-1792-1916* (Newark, NJ: Baker Printing, 1916), 17.

<sup>17</sup> The pejorative "mere compend" was a common expression in the critical literature. See, for example, Sarah J. Hale, "Editor's Table. Course of Reading for Young Ladies," *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* 34 (Nov. 1847), 269.

<sup>18</sup> All of the works he reviewed were first published prior to 1832. The probable editions of the eight authors included J[esse] Olney, *A History of the United States, on a New Plan* (New Haven: Durrie & Peck, 1842); William Grimshaw, *History of the United States* (Philadelphia: Grigg & Elliot, 1841); Salma Hale, *History of the United States* (Cooperstown, NY: H. & E. Phinney, 1842); John Frost, *The Pictorial History of the United States of America* (Philadelphia: B. Walker, 1844); Samuel Griswold



although competing in regional markets, rarely advertised their books before the 1840s, and unlike other historians who quarreled openly, never disparaged each other's works in public or specifically characterized themselves as "rivals." Although not interchangeable, and even considering Willard's unique contributions, their works displayed many similarities in organization, selection of events, style, and narrative development that offered an opportunity for a more comprehensive national history sanitized of the local and religious biases of their earlier editions. In an expanding market, they were an inviting target.<sup>19</sup> And perhaps Willson assumed that the relative disparity between his and Willard's gender could compensate for the huge gap between his thin record and Willard's remarkable résumé.

But if Willson was not to challenge these works' common master narrative, and if the available sources for a school history were limited, how could he get his intellectual footing in this market? Like any budding author, he researched his competitors to develop a strategy, an opportunity that arose with the New Jersey educational society commission in 1844 to review them.<sup>20</sup> He labored over the document during the winter, consulting at least forty separate published primary

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Goodrich, *Pictorial History of the United States* (Philadelphia: Sorin & Ball, Samuel Agnew, 1844); Charles A. Goodrich, *A History of the United States of America* (Boston: Jenks & Palmer, 1843); Noah Webster, *History of the United States* (Columbus, OH: I. N. Whiting, 1841); Emma Willard, *History of the United States, or, Republic of America* (Philadelphia: A. S. Barnes, 1843); and Emma Willard, *Abridged History of the United States, or, Republic of America* (Philadelphia: A. S. Barnes, 1844).

<sup>19</sup>Substantial literature exists on common school texts and reform, for example, see Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 75–103; Joyce, *First U.S. History Textbooks*; Alfred Goldberg, "School Histories of the Middle Period," in *Historiography and Urbanization, Essays in American History in Honor of W. Stull Holt*, ed. Eric F. Goldman (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1941), 171–88; and Boyd, "Holy Hieroglyph." On the generational shift among compilers, see Michael V. Belok, *Forming the American Minds: Early School-Books & Their Compilers* (Moti Katra, Agra-U.P., India: Satish Book Enterprise, 1973), 245. The clashing regional biases Nash found in geographies and readers published before 1820 coexisted with larger themes of civic virtue and providential destiny that were the backbone of early history schoolbooks. See Nash, "Contested Identities."

<sup>20</sup>Local press reports on the Society's meetings do not support Willard's claims that Willson and his publisher manipulated the Society and manufactured the controversy in order to oust Willard. The Society was already surveying geographies and spellers and officially declared its impartiality concerning specific authors. For example, see *Newark Daily Advertiser*, Jan. 6, 1845, 2, and March 7, 1845, 2; "Correspondence of the Newark Sentinel," *Sentinel of Freedom* 48 (Dec. 10, 1844), 2; "To the Public. Improved System of Teaching Geography," *District School Journal of the State of New York* 5, no. 2 (May 1844), 61; and Editorial Correspondence, From the New York Globe, *The Teacher's Advocate and Journal of Education* 2, no. 41 (June 25, 1847), 482–83; and Lana Jo Whicker, "The New Jersey Dissent: A Websterian

and secondary sources in addition to the history texts he decided to review. Given the absence of citations to help trace sources in the vast majority of school histories, this was a mammoth task.<sup>21</sup> That this research served the dual purpose of judging his rivals and informing his upcoming text was hardly controversial or deceptive in itself. But even though his Newark listeners knew that he was an instructor at nearby Newark Academy, his failure to disclose his publishing plans or his qualifications as a reviewer of school histories in his presentation or in the report's later published forms could, and did, raise suspicions about the impartiality and integrity of his report.

Willson fired the opening shots of the "war of histories" on Friday afternoon, March 7, 1845, in a presentation of his *Report on Common School Histories* to a meeting of the New Jersey Society of Teachers and Friends of Education in the lecture room of the First Presbyterian Church of Newark, New Jersey. According to the local press, this "full and apparently impartial review of some of the most popular American Histories now in use," demonstrated that "they are in several respects unpardonably defective."<sup>22</sup> At the conclusion of the presentation, the group voted unanimously for its publication.<sup>23</sup> Six weeks later, Willson surfaced, along with other authors, during the new textbook showcase at the April meeting of the New York County and District School Superintendents in Syracuse, where Willard was being feted for her progressive stance on female education and women's broader role in overseeing schools, to announce his upcoming American history text as a corrective to current volumes on the market.<sup>24</sup> In July, the first twenty-three pages of the report appeared as "A Critical Review of American Common School Histories by M. Willson" in the *Biblical Repository and Classical Review*, a little-known periodical devoted to religious and literary commentary.<sup>25</sup>

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Controversy in the Society of Teachers and Friends of Education in 1843–1844" (master's thesis, Indiana State University, 1989).

<sup>21</sup>The list of authorities in the first edition of Willard's *Republic of America* was a brief exception.

<sup>22</sup>*Newark Daily Advertiser*, March 7, 1845, 2.

<sup>23</sup>*Newark Daily Advertiser*, March 7, 1845, 2.

<sup>24</sup>"State Convention of County and Town Superintendents," *District School Journal of the State of New York* 6, no. 3 (June 1845), [52]. Willard discussed Willson's Syracuse presentation in *Answer to Marcius Willson's Reply*, 4–5 and *An Appeal to the Public*, 19–20. Emma Willard, "Address of Mrs. Emma Willard," *District School Journal of the State of New York* 6, no. 6 (Sept. 1845), 116; and Margaret R. Meyer, "Emma Willard and the New York State Teachers' Institutes of 1845," *Journal of Educational Research* 44, no. 9 (May 1951), 695–701.

<sup>25</sup>Willson, "A Critical Review of American Common School Histories."

Willson's critique adopted a tone of royal omniscience that mixed meticulous research with pompous pedantry, amply displaying the author's immaturity as a historian. He arraigned recent editions of the eight most popular school histories along four criteria: Arrangement, Anachronisms, Accuracy, and Literary Merits. With unwitting irony, he admitted that "the task that we have undertaken is, of itself, a delicate one; and the more so, from the circumstance, that the reviewer exposes himself to become the reviewed."<sup>26</sup> Although no author escaped unscathed, Willard took the brunt of Willson's censure; both her *Republic of America* and its 1844 school edition received withering criticism for the majority of "more than TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY ERRORS[emphasis in the original]" he claimed to have uncovered.<sup>27</sup>

After a brief and unsophisticated section on the works' thematic organization, followed by a bland acknowledgement that Willard and Samuel Goodrich had filled a gap by including maps in their texts, Willson hit his stride in a long lecture on "anachronisms" that focused entirely on the texts' failure to render pre-Revolution dates consistently in New as opposed to Old Style, a problem for any historian working in American colonial history.<sup>28</sup> Much of this discussion concentrated on the misdating of events not by school histories but by their common sources: works by George Bancroft, Abiel Holmes, Jeremy Belknap, William Trumbull, and many others. The implication was clear: text authors who carelessly incorporated those sources were perpetuating errors that confused teachers and students.<sup>29</sup>

Willson then fact-checked ten "errors, whether of ignorance or of carelessness, into which we believe they have fallen," pledging to "quote from all our prominent school histories indiscriminately."<sup>30</sup> He examined dates, locations, or events in colonial history found in all of the histories under review, pausing to detail two found in Willard's, by noting mismatches between the schoolbooks and their sources. Willson's use of authorities was uneven; in most cases, he cited original authors (most frequently Bancroft) and page numbers, in others he breezily waved the reader to unnamed "authorities of repute" or "all modern writers" concerning "well-

<sup>26</sup>Willson, "Critical Review," 517–18.

<sup>27</sup>Willson, "Critical Review," 532–33. Because the original manuscript is lost, we cannot check Willson's totals. I count 115 errors of dates and facts discussed in the review's published versions, distributed roughly: Willard and Hale (23 each); C. Goodrich (17); Olney (15); Frost (13); S. Goodrich and Grimshaw (10 each); Webster (4); literary "errors" (46) were almost entirely attributed to Willard.

<sup>28</sup>Willson, "Critical Review," 518–20.

<sup>29</sup>Willson, "Critical Review," 520–27.

<sup>30</sup>Willson, "Critical Review," 528.

known” facts.<sup>31</sup> An “error,” in Willson’s mind, was defined by departure from a source. He did not accuse anyone of fabricating history, nor did he suggest they conduct original research; their sin was inconsistency with the common sources compilers used to construct their schoolbook accounts and a failure to correct subsequent editions on the basis of new accounts. The distinction was vital.

Turning to literary technique, Willson singled out Willard’s school history in six dense pages of stylistic denunciation—street language, substitution of nominative “who” for the accusative “whom,” poor syntax, questionable word choices, abuses of “neither/nor, either/or,” dangling modifiers, and other writing sins—checking them off with a victorious air of condescension and faux astonishment at the contrast between the press’s effusive praise of her books’ literary quality and the trail of mistakes he claimed to uncover.<sup>32</sup> Willson’s acute focus on Willard in this portion of his pamphlet is the most important evidence we have that she was his ultimate target, even though he later claimed that this was because her works had far more errors than the others.<sup>33</sup> Another consideration is the greater time required to research, compile, and detail errors of eight authors instead of reviewing just Willard’s. Regardless, singling her out for literary faults left the clear impression that her books were highest on his list of targets.

Nowhere did Willson’s syllabus of errors challenge the providential, patriotic themes in any of these works. Nor did the essay weigh the authors’ arguments within a larger historiographical or educational context. Acting more like a proofreader than a reviewer, he targeted the failures of both publishers and authors. His critique also assumed that a pattern of mistakes corrupted a story by departing from true accounts derived from “original” sources. We have no direct evidence that Willson was familiar with the source-driven criticism underlying German historiography in the dawning age of Leopold von Ranke, but his emphasis on precision in sourcing suggests something like it at work, even though at no point did he suggest that these “errors” significantly altered any author’s larger version of the American pageant, including Willard’s focus on women in history.<sup>34</sup> Little wonder that in

<sup>31</sup> Willson, “Critical Review,” 527, 528, 529, 532.

<sup>32</sup> Willson, “Critical Review,” 534–39.

<sup>33</sup> Willson, *A Reply to Mrs. Willard’s “Appeal,”* (New York: M. H. Newman, 1847), 28.

<sup>34</sup> German empiricism was already influencing American historiography, mostly in emphasizing source criticism; the philosophical bases of historicism took longer to seep in. See Jürgen Herbst, *The German Historical School in American Scholarship: A Study in the Transfer of Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), 99–106. The English translation of Leopold Ranke’s seminal *The Ecclesiastical and Political History*

her first reply to him Willard asked why he had said “nothing” of “the diffusive glow of patriotic, moral, and religious feeling which pervades” her histories while he focused instead on minor errors of dates, grammar, and style.<sup>35</sup>

Despite its caustic tone, the report caused barely a ripple in educational circles. Willard later claimed she didn’t know about it even after hearing Willson—“to me in every way a total stranger”—make a “great pretence” of concern in Syracuse over dates in school history texts and pursue “preposterous” criticisms of “the school histories of the country” under a “false standard of his own making.”<sup>36</sup> Preposterous or not, as we have noted, three months after Willson’s appearance in Syracuse, the extract appeared in the *Biblical Repository* and a full version, according to Willson, circulated as a pamphlet in New York City.<sup>37</sup> To Willson’s way of thinking, the absence of any reference to his upcoming book proved the review was impartial. That, however, is not how Willard read it, especially when in September, Caleb Bartlett, a small publisher and book dealer in New York City, issued Willson’s *History of the United States for the Use of Schools*. In its Introduction, Willson the author cited his own review as proof of his book’s “superior accuracy,” with special attention to “a uniformity in the system of dates ... being given throughout in New Style.”<sup>38</sup> The book’s preface also highlighted its unique “chart” of American history, along with various maps and commentary sprinkled throughout the text.<sup>39</sup> This suspicious sequence of events cast a shadow on Willson’s impartiality that would follow him throughout the ensuing controversy. Sometime “later that summer,” Willard recalled, she received copies of Willson’s criticism and his text and set to work on a reply.<sup>40</sup>

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*of the Popes of Rome during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Sarah Austin (London: J. Murray, 1840) was published in Philadelphia in 1841.

<sup>35</sup>X. Y. [Emma Willard], “A Reply to Mr. Wilson’s Review of Common School Histories,” *Biblical Repository and Classical Review* 60 (Oct. 1845), 765. In *Appeal to the Public*, 6, Willard admitted authorship of this essay.

<sup>36</sup>Willard, *Answer to Marcius Willson’s Reply*, 5; and Willard, *Appeal to the Public*, 19–20.

<sup>37</sup>The pamphlet version of the first report, mentioned by Willson, has not been found; see Willson, *A Reply to Mrs. Willard’s “Appeal,”* 8.

<sup>38</sup>Marcius Willson, *History of the United States for the Use of Schools* (New York: C. Bartlett, 1845), 12.

<sup>39</sup>On the appearance of Willson’s *History*, see “Literary,” *New York Illustrated Magazine of Literature and Art* 1, no. 20 (1845), 320. On Bartlett, see “Booksellers in New York One Hundred Years Ago,” *Publishers’ Weekly* 64, no. 13 (Sept. 26, 1903), 600–601.

<sup>40</sup>Willard, *Answer to Marcius Willson’s Reply*, 5.

But why reply? Why not follow the example of the other seven authors, ignore this young, obscure critic, silently correct any genuine errors, and get on with her work? Her surviving papers are silent on the matter. She wisely demurred on her friends' advice to sue for literary theft, perhaps because recent high-profile cases of plagiarism had raised, but not resolved, the problem of originality, fair use, and copying.<sup>41</sup> Maybe such cautionary thoughts explain the restrained nature of her reply in the October issue of the *Biblical Repository*, under the pseudonym "X. Y." in order to "avoid controversy." Striking a theme, she pointed to the publication of a new history "by a gentleman, who, being about to publish one himself, very naturally seeks to destroy public confidence in his rivals, and that the most strenuously where the most annoyance is apprehended." Much of this short essay was an extended quotation from an anonymous male "friend" (a maneuver to avoid legal repercussions, lend male authority to her defense, and avoid a direct and public female challenge to a male), who attacked Willson's motives and accused him of imitation, if not outright piracy. Further concealing herself, and presumably her gender, in the pseudonymous persona of a historian, she cited authorities to support her version of historical events, asserted that Willson misinterpreted her abridged history's organizational structure, and cited Webster's dictionary to refute his nitpicking about grammar, usage, and style. Many of the historical "errors" he identified concerned matters still unsettled by historians, she said. As to dates, "it matters as little whether the day kept in honor of the Pilgrims' landing, is or is not the actual anniversary, as it does whether Christmas, which is celebrated by so great a part of Christendom, is or is not the real anniversary of our Lord's nativity. If the events, with their consequences, be duly and gratefully apprehended, that is all which is essential." Modern chronographers and historians, she wrote, considered the exact dating of long-distant events a "matter of small importance."<sup>42</sup>

Willson did not immediately answer. Instead, over the next sixteen months, the two authors busied themselves with writing and promotional pursuits, deepening their collaboration with publishers who were becoming increasingly aggressive in the schoolbook trade. The

<sup>41</sup> Most notably, *Folsom v. Marsh*, 9 F. Cas. 342 (C.C.D. Mass. 1841).

<sup>42</sup> X. Y. [Emma Willard], "A Reply to Mr. Wilson's Review." After the appearance of this reply, ads for her large history stressed the "originality" of the book's organization but said nothing about the originality of its interpretation or sources. See A. S. Barnes & Co., "Willard's History of the United States," advertisement, *The Teacher's Advocate* 1, no. 27 (March 11, 1846), 431, Lucy F. Townsend and Barbara Wiley, eds., *Papers of Emma Hart Willard, 1787–1870* (Bethesda, MD: UPA Collection from LexisNexis, 2005), reel 12, frames 243–44 (hereafter cited as Willard Papers).

market changed as the emerging district system inserted committees into the process of selecting texts for parents to buy; these leaders became the targets of persistent marketing by publishers who plied them for adoptions and endorsements. Publishers resorted to disparaging the competition with implied comparisons asserting that the latest edition was the “best” available.<sup>43</sup> The center of gravity for educational publishing shifted from Boston—“the scepter has departed from Judah,” Samuel Goodrich lamented in 1856—to New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Cincinnati (where Willard and Willson battled for adoption).<sup>44</sup> To the authors who first published in the 1820s, the mid-1840s was different from a genteel era in which such texts were the basis of a livelihood in children’s literature. Now authors and their publishers criticized their rivals openly, vigorously fought for new markets, and redefined their audience as having more specific instructional needs. Reputations would rely more upon the penetration of new markets and impressive sales figures than upon the accolades of a circle of common school reformers. A discourse of professional practice that redefined conceptions of children’s learning styles germinated in the normal school movement, new teacher institutes, and new educational periodicals.<sup>45</sup> The marriage of stereotyping technology and the steam press in publishing by the 1840s, which enabled faster and more accurate duplication of texts in cheaper editions, transformed the publishing business.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the day’s headlines heightened public interest in—and exerted pressure on

<sup>43</sup> Willard, *Appeal to the Public*, 1; Willson, *A Reply to Mrs. Willard’s “Appeal,”* 30; Mark H. Newman & Co., “To Teachers and Others,” advertisement, *Teacher’s Advocate and Journal of Education* 3, no. 3 (Oct. 15, 1847), 45, Willard Papers, reel 12, frames 247–48; and A. S. Barnes & Co., “Mrs. Willard’s School History [and] Mrs. Willard’s Histories for Schools,” advertisement, *Teacher’s Advocate and Journal of Education* 3, no. 9 (Jan. 7, 1848), 45, Willard Papers, reel 12, frames 249–52.

<sup>44</sup> S. G. Goodrich, *Recollections of a Lifetime*, vol. 2 (New York: Miller, Orton, & Mulligan, 1856), 254–55; and Walter Sutton, *The Western Book Trade: Cincinnati as a Nineteenth Century Publishing and Book-Trade Center* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press for the Ohio Historical Society, 1961), 166–89.

<sup>45</sup> Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education, the National Experience, 1783–1876* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 172–85; Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 104–36; Jürgen Herbst, *And Sadly Teach: Teacher Education and Professionalization in American Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 30–89; Sheldon Emmor Davis, *Educational Periodicals During the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919), 75–82; Donald H. Parkerson and Jo Ann Parkerson, *The Emergence of the Common School in the U.S. Countryside* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998); and Mindy Spearman, “Teachers’ Lyceums in Early Nineteenth-Century America,” *American Educational History Journal* 36, no. 1 (2009), 207–18.

<sup>46</sup> John William Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Creation of an Industry, 1630–1865* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1972), 257–62.

textbook publishers to address—the historical background of sectional conflict, territorial expansion, and a brewing controversy with Mexico over Texas.<sup>47</sup> The compiling of schoolbooks now required more than scissors, paste, and a bookshelf of first-generation historical literature; compilers had to blend entrepreneurship with scholarship that would be attentive to “contemporary history,” new audiences, and changing intellectual currents. The stakes had gone up, for after all the minds of the nation’s youth—and the profits of publishers and authors—were at risk.<sup>48</sup>

Willard’s publisher, Alfred S. Barnes, studied his competitors, sensed these trends, and built his shop into a formidable supplier of schoolbooks, while Willard left New York in March 1846 for a long tour of the southwestern states to meet with former pupils, proselytize the cause of female education, and promote her books, which she continued to write and publish.<sup>49</sup> Her contemporary admirer and biographer, John Lord, describes the mid-1840s as a period of contentment after her successful divorce of a second, abusive husband, physician Christopher Yates, and the publication of her landmark *Temple of Time*, also in 1846. Meanwhile, she denounced Willson to school superintendents as a “book-thief” who “falsely aspersed” and “pirated” her abridged history.<sup>50</sup>

In early 1847, buoyed by intelligence that teachers in New York City were “all well pleased with” her books and “exceedingly anxious to throw out everything else, and use [Willard’s] Histories, *exclusively* [emphasis in original],”<sup>51</sup> Barnes retitled *Mrs. Willard’s School Histories* as *Mrs. Willard’s Series of School Histories and Charts*, including recently revised editions of her *Republic of America*, the *Abridged History of the United States*, *System of Universal History in Perspective*, her *American Chronographer*, and the *Temple of Time* issued as a two-by-three-foot wall chart. Along with her existing atlases, geographies, and chronographers, this library of social studies works for all grade levels made Willard a formidable market force.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup>Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 241–69; and Tebbel, *History of Book Publishing*, 294–99.

<sup>48</sup>Michael T. Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 12–28.

<sup>49</sup>Tebbel, *History of Book Publishing*, 294–99.

<sup>50</sup>On Lord’s assessment of Willard’s “tranquil” life at this time, her trip, and her criticism of Willson, see Lord, *Life of Emma Willard*, 218–224, 226, 222, respectively.

<sup>51</sup>A. S. Barnes to Emma Willard, Feb. 2, 1847, Willard Papers, reel 3, frames 179–83; and A. S. Barnes to Emma Willard, Jan. 18, 1847, Willard Papers, reel 3, frames 174–79.

<sup>52</sup>A. S. Barnes & Co., “Mrs. Willard’s School Histories,” advertisement, *New York Evangelist* 17, no. 38 (Sept. 17, 1846), 152; and Barnes advertisement in inside front



Her nemesis was also busy. Just after he published the “Critical Review,” Willson returned to Allen’s Hill to work on graded school editions of his history that, by early 1847, were bearing profitable results. At six-hundred-plus pages, his new *American History* (1847) was the cornerstone of his other histories of the country. He had left Bartlett for Mark H. Newman & Co., of New York City, which had just partnered with Henry Ivison of Auburn, New York, a specialist in the schoolbook trade. Ivison and Newman then issued Willson’s Historical Series that included his new *American History*, a “juvenile” edition for primary schools, his *History of the United States for Schools*, a *Comprehensive Chart of American History* “on rollers” and an associated guide, with a universal history text in progress.<sup>53</sup>

The marketing blitz for Willson’s package poked a hornet’s nest over in Troy when, early in 1847, Newman issued a pamphlet with Willson’s New Jersey “Critical Review” carefully retitled as a *Report on American Histories*, including a full-page explanation of the report’s provenance and an appendix of eight *more* pages detailing dozens more “errors” in common school history texts, all framed by back- and front-page ads for Willson’s texts.<sup>54</sup> That effort, with a slew of supporting advertisements in the commercial and educational press, raised the stakes just after Willard had returned from her tour and Barnes had rejuvenated his New York publishing house. None of her other competitors had mounted such an aggressive campaign of criticisms, distributed en masse to school districts and booksellers in the Northeast and Midwest, which threatened to blunt the commercial success of Willard’s thirty-year campaign to reform history and geography education. At this point, Willson’s focus on Willard’s “errors” amplified the threat from this new rival and gave the matter of their different genders even greater salience. Did Willson choose Willard as his primary

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cover of Willard, *Answer to Marcius Willson’s Reply*. On bundling “libraries” of texts, see Robert S. Freeman, “Harper & Brothers’ Family and School District Libraries, 1830–1846,” in *Libraries to the People: Histories of Outreach*, ed. Robert S. Freeman and David M. Hovde (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003), 26–49.

<sup>53</sup>Mark H. Newman & Co., “Willson’s Historical Series,” advertisement, *The Literary World* 12 (April 24, 1847), 285. On Newman and Ivison, see Tebbel, *History of Book Publishing*, 333–36; J. C. Derby, *Fifty Years Among Authors, Books and Publishers* (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1884), 53; and “Henry Ivison Retires,” *New York Times*, Jan. 11, 1882, 8.

<sup>54</sup>Marcius Willson, *Report on American Histories* (New York: Mark H. Newman, 1847); Mark H. Newman & Co., “The Best Book on American History,” advertisement, *New-York Commercial Advertiser*, April 3, 1847, 2; and Mark H. Newman & Co., “Willson’s Historical Series,” advertisement, *New-York Spectator*, May 22, 1847, 1. In the *Literary World*, Newman’s ads claimed sales of “fourteen thousand” copies and relayed false reports that the New Jersey educational society had endorsed Willson’s history. See Mark H. Newman & Co., advertisement, April 24, 1847.

target because he thought she was easy pickings, the weakest among the eight authors, who, as a woman, could not or would not defend herself against a male author? Modern observers can reasonably infer from both his language and the attention to her work in the initial report, as well as his later claim that her books were less popular than those of Hale and Goodrich, that the answer was yes.<sup>55</sup> By criticizing subjective matters like style and obsessing over technical issues like the accuracy of dates, Willson established terms of the debate that placed her on the defensive as a female author of history schoolbooks. If, as Willard deeply believed, men and women were of equal intellectual and educational potential, if not of social position or responsibility, then she could engage him over such scholastic minutiae. This strategy, however, risked losing the interest or sympathy of an audience unlikely to judge the accuracy of such technical facts. And if, as she also deeply believed, the “weaker sex” did operate at significant disadvantages in public confrontations with men, she risked appearing to be a desperate and emotional woman using her sex as a shield against detailed allegations of shoddy work. Either way, she must have immediately recognized the larger blow to her credibility. As we shall see, however, the unpredictable dynamic of an unfolding public pamphlet war would shape the nature and effectiveness of both authors’ approach to the controversy and complicates our understanding of what really occurred between them.

At the very least, Willard and Barnes needed a new sales strategy: they would have to compete with other schoolbooks instead of just promote their own product. Ads for Willard’s histories began to detail their originality and particularly stressed accuracy, impartiality on political and sectional issues, as well as the mistakes and falsifications of Willson’s report.<sup>56</sup> The previous debate between Willson and Willard now resumed against a backdrop of more intense competition between them under dynamic market conditions.

Willard’s response came in an *Appeal Against Wrong and Injury* published in April 1847, to which Willson offered a *Reply* at the end of May, followed by her final *Answer to Willson’s Reply* in August.<sup>57</sup> If

<sup>55</sup> Willson, *A Reply to Mrs Willard’s “Appeal,”* 28.

<sup>56</sup> Willard, *Guide to the Temple of Time*, 13. Barnes sought the moral high ground: “Neither the author nor publishers have attempted the introduction of these works, by disparaging the works of others,” the firm announced. “Let the pretended errors in ‘School Histories,’ be carefully examined, before any work is introduced by setting forth the faults of its competitors.” A. S. Barnes & Co., “Mrs. Willard’s Histories for Schools,” advertisement, *New-York Commercial Advertiser*, Sept. 14, 1847, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Willard, *Appeal to the Public*; Willson, *A Reply to Mrs. Willard’s “Appeal”*; Willard, *Answer to Marcius Willson’s Reply*; and A. S. Barnes & Co., “The Answer to Mr Willson’s Reply; to the Friends of Correct Education and Truth! A Card,” advertisement,

Willson really thought that Willard—a prominent female historian with a reputation to protect, a vocal public advocate for female education, and a woman who had publicly challenged and divorced an abusive husband—would meekly submit or remain silent to published criticism by a male competitor, her replies quickly disabused him of any such assumptions. Her pamphlets unlimbered the literary heavy artillery of an accomplished advocate and veteran scholar, suffusing her counterattack with tones of outraged virtue, scholarly condescension, and unrelenting sarcasm. Foremost among her charges was that Willson was immoral, a pirate who manipulated a scholarly society into screening his attack upon a female competitor while he plagiarized her works and stole her hard-earned audience. The conflict of interest between Willson the “reviewer” and Willson the author of a rival text was Exhibit A in a case from which she never wavered. In her mind, this was a conflict between virtue and self-interest.<sup>58</sup>

Disdaining any intent to write “for the mere purpose of getting money,” Willard touted her books as a public service, not a business, and thundered:

No child shall become imbued with the spirit of my American history who will not hereafter be a patriot; no youth shall give his heart and his head to my teaching, in my Universal History, who will not, if the grace of God adds that blessing for which I prayed as I wrote, become a Christian—armed against the most powerful arguments, of infidelity especially those of Gibbon, its ablest champion.<sup>59</sup>

And for the first time in the debate, Willard openly challenged her accusers as male conspirators trying to undermine a woman’s honest and thoroughly professional work. She reminded readers that she

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*The Teacher’s Advocate and Journal of Education* 2, no. 47 (Aug. 6, 1847), Willard Papers, reel 12, frames 245–246. Where the pamphlets lacked dates I have estimated publication dates from internal evidence and press reports. Mark H. Newman & Co., “Render Therefore Unto Caesar the Things Which Are Caesars,” advertisement, *The Teacher’s Advocate and Journal of Education* 2, no. 41 (June 25, 1847), Willard Papers, reel 12, frames 434–35; M[arcus Willson], “Willard’s History of the United States—Inaccurate or Perverted!” *Sunday Dispatch*, [1847], Willard Papers, reel 12, frames 436–437; A. S. Barnes & Co., “Literary Dishonesty,” advertisement, *New York Tribune*, June 1847, accused Willson of “literary trespass” but disavowed the charge two months later. See A. S. Barnes & Co., “The Answer to Mr. Willson’s Reply; To the Friends of Correct Education and of Truth! A Card.”

<sup>58</sup>Willard, *Appeal to the Public*, 15–16. A. S. Barnes & Co., “Mrs. Willard’s School History.” The justness of his criticisms, Willson retorted, were independent of his motives or publishing plans; Willson, *A Reply to Mrs. Willard’s “Appeal,”* 3. Contra Barnes and Willard, Willson wasn’t an officer or “Secretary” of the Society, a position held in Dec. 1844 by R. L. Cooke, *Newark Daily Advertiser*, Jan. 6, 1845, 2.

<sup>59</sup>Willard, *Answer to Marcus Willson’s Reply*, 4.

was a member “of the weaker sex” who, with “but few means of benefiting themselves or others, compared with males,” now demanded that “when men go so far as to confederate against a woman,” they should do so with higher motives than “avarice, and weapons other than defamation.”<sup>60</sup> This conspiracy rendered Willson “unfit ... to give moral impressions to the young,” a “greedy adventurer, backed by his publisher” who sought to steal her scholarship “and then slander me for my reward.”<sup>61</sup> These accusations reflected the pent-up fury of an author burned by American compilers and British plagiarists who were copying her maps and ideas in geography education without giving her credit.<sup>62</sup> Willson’s immorality marked him as an intruder among the genteel guardians of America’s providential story for the young.

Perhaps even more important was the fact that Willson’s attack offered a golden opportunity to issue a spirited defense of history by, for, and about, women. As a female historian, she was the tip of the spear; as historian Nina Baym concludes, women history writers believed they were “at work for women, for the nation, for God. To write and publish history, from their own point of view, put them in the historical vanguard.”<sup>63</sup> In that light, we can understand why Willson’s focus on Willard in particular, and on what later observers have regarded as trivia,<sup>64</sup> prompted such a fierce response, for if unanswered, the attack might intimidate women from following her example. Willson’s criticism might also, of course, undermine her market share and siphon off customers who now concluded that a school history written by a woman was unreliable. We have no direct evidence of Willson’s calculations in this episode and must remember that Willard was already competing successfully with perhaps a dozen male authors. One more rival might make a difference if he landed blows against the accuracy of her work. But the market itself was already changing, as women continued to enter the teaching profession, where they communicated with publishers’ agents and influenced textbook adoptions. No one could predict how readers of the pamphlets or this new, larger market of textbook consumers would react. If Willson was aware of the growing influence of women in the teaching profession, was this attack upon Willard’s credibility likely to succeed or

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<sup>60</sup>Willard, *Appeal to the Public*, 5.

<sup>61</sup>Willard, *Appeal to the Public*, 4, 10.

<sup>62</sup>Willard lamented the use of her works without credit. See Willard, *Guide to the Temple of Time*, 12n and her preface to William Channing Woodbridge, *System of Modern Geography* (Hartford, CT: Belknap & Hamersley, 1847).

<sup>63</sup>Baym, *American Women Writers*, 239.

<sup>64</sup>Boyd, “Holy Hieroglyph,” 221–29.

backfire? Willard dealt with that question through her rallying cry that any member of the “weaker sex” ought to doubt charges of inaccuracy hurled by men who abuse customary positions of authority by plagiarizing women’s work. Would Willard then follow up this preliminary foray onto the contested grounds of gender to strengthen the case for women as producers and consumers of history?

In any case, what could be the remedy? His book was out, and it was selling. Was he now to withdraw fourteen thousand copies from the market and then write a different book? Or was he to credit her in future editions even if, as she had charged, they already were poor counterfeits? The only way to sustain a legal claim of piracy was to demonstrate that significant elements of his works were direct copies of hers. Without specifically threatening litigation, she floated a potential case on two central points: his uncredited use of “progressive maps” that were very much like hers, and his copying of her “style” or “plan,” which in those days referred to the arrangement, composition, language, and structure of her books. Willard’s counterattack was a fight over originality and the crediting of sources in a profession known for rampant copying without attribution. The ensuing debate revealed the dilemma facing compilers in an age of emerging markets with more segmented audiences, changing educational theory, and a diversifying base of sources for writing history for the public.<sup>65</sup>

Their quarrel about style soon moved beyond the specific “parallelisms” she had first enumerated of sentences, phrases, and terms found in both authors’ books, the frequent copying of which, she said, entered “the regions of abuse.”<sup>66</sup> These were mostly common usages, Willson replied, that could be traced to sources both authors had used. The writings of authorities close to the events they chronicled had, in effect, become a collective heritage, a kind of primary source, Willson claimed, “handed down through so many writers, that they may be considered as actually *stereotyped* in American history,” available for anyone to use.<sup>67</sup>

History deals mainly with events; and as it is not the province of the historian to create facts, but to relate those already existing, so fidelity often

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<sup>65</sup>The authors’ extensive exchanges over “errors” of fact (such as the discovery of Newfoundland and the settling of the Carolinas) in Willard’s histories resolved little of substance besides demonstrating the relative scarcity of reliable sources and hence are not discussed here.

<sup>66</sup>Willard, *Answer to Marcius Willson’s Reply*, 13; and Joyce, *First U.S. History Textbooks*, 120.

<sup>67</sup>Willson, *A Reply to Mrs. Willard’s “Appeal,”* 21–22. See also Mark H. Newman & Co., “To the Public,” advertisement, *Teacher’s Advocate and Journal of Education* 2, no. 41 (June 25, 1847), Willard Papers, reel 12, frames 434–35.

requires that he should state them in the very language in which he finds them recorded, either by the actors themselves, or by those early writers who had the best opportunities of verifying their truth. . . . In truth, the narrative part of Bancroft's History is mainly a condensation of the materials found in some hundreds of the works of earlier writers. And is this plagiarism? On the contrary, is any other position than that of a gleaner of facts already recorded, a tenable one for an historian to assume?<sup>68</sup>

This assertion, which later scholars have mocked as an admission of guilt and an amateurish grasp of historical method,<sup>69</sup> mirrored the complicated relationship between the state of historical literature and the circumstances surrounding schoolbook writing in the middle of the nineteenth century—and it may help explain why none of the others Willson targeted replied to him.

Willard's rejoinder to Willson's argument that everyone copies from the same sources was to separate herself from the pack and, in a remarkable passage, to reveal the process of composition and selection by a history text author. Her seminal *Republic of America* (1828) had been compiled in the usual way—by female assistants under her editorial supervision using the “standard authors of American history” she listed in the book.<sup>70</sup> Its coverage of the recent past (“worthy to hold a place in the catalogue of our country's literature”) was “original history, made out from public documents, from memoirs of individuals,” some of whom she spoke with and who endorsed and authenticated her work, “and from the knowledge acquired by the author in living through those spirit-stirring times.”<sup>71</sup> In light of the appearance of the first volume of Bancroft's master history in 1834, Willard's history and its abridgment, she now told Willson, had been entirely rewritten in editions that lacked references to authorities. The new versions' distinctive style could be neither mistaken for that of her sources nor confused with anyone else's. Novices like Willson might believe that “all history is made by collections of small plagiarisms, and all of course

<sup>68</sup>Willson, *A Reply to Mrs. Willard's "Appeal,"* 23–24.

<sup>69</sup>Joyce, *First U.S. History Textbooks*, 121; and Boyd, “Holy Hieroglyph,” 221–29.

<sup>70</sup>Emma Willard, *History of the United States, or, Republic of America* (Philadelphia: A. S. Barnes, and Co., 1828), i, v, describes her method. Other compilers used similar assembly-line methods. See Goodrich, *Recollections*, 287–88; “Frost, John,” in *The Twentieth Century Biographical Dictionary of Notable Americans*, vol. 4, ed. Rossiter Johnson (Boston: The Biographical Society, 1904).

<sup>71</sup>Willard, *Appeal to the Public*, 28. Willard frequently cited the approval of historical celebrities like her friend the Marquis de Lafayette as proof of the accuracy of her accounts. For example, see “Advertisement” in Willard, *History of the United States, or, Republic of America* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1856), ii; and Emma Willard to Lyman C. Draper, Nov. 10, 1855, Lyman Draper Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

much alike,” she stated, but the true historian composes with “a style of his own. Although he may derive his materials from others, yet he melts them down, as it were, in the furnace of his own mind, and throws out his sentences from his own peculiar internal moulds.”<sup>72</sup> Bancroft’s writing was “ample and discursive,—dealing in splendid circumlocutions,” making him

a difficult writer to condense. In taking facts from him, I was often obliged to refer to other writers to know precisely what was his meaning. Had I not put words together in a style essentially different from his, I could not have made a history where so much matter is contained in so small a compass as is in my Republic. It is an evidence that Mr. Willson took my work as authority, that he copied me in my condensed style, rather than Mr. Bancroft in his extended one.<sup>73</sup>

This “condensed” style was “simple, brief, and direct”; anyone adopting it was, in her view, plagiarizing it. Her problem was that she, too, was a compiler who copied from her sources without attribution, a point reinforced by her criticism of Willson’s pedantic citing of books that practically no one without access to “Harvard’s library” would be able to check.<sup>74</sup> Why cite authorities that so few Americans could consult, she asked, except as “a trick a man plays upon the public to get himself a reputation for learning”?<sup>75</sup> But in the absence of citations to the experts upon whom she had relied for “facts,” how was a reader to distinguish her voice from theirs in her books, “original history” from her compilation, all without corresponding knowledge of the “ample and discursive style” of her sources?

The other leg of Willard’s case concerned Willson’s use of “maps changing with the face of the country,” which pirated a “method of illustration” she had pioneered in her school history.<sup>76</sup> Willson’s maps mimicked her “plan to make geography subservient to history” and were so badly done that they “discredited” the originals, she

<sup>72</sup> Willard, *Answer to Marcius Willson’s Reply*, 13.

<sup>73</sup> Willard, *Answer to Marcius Willson’s Reply*, 14.

<sup>74</sup> Despite suggesting in her 1835 *Universal History* that future editions might list the “original writers” she drew from, none ever appeared. See Emma Willard, *A System of Universal History, in Perspective* (Hartford, CT: F. J. Huntington, 1835), iv. On the other hand, the first edition of her *Republic of America* included a select list of thirty-five authorities. See Emma Willard, *History of the United States, or, Republic of America* (New York: White, Gallaher & White, 1828), 7. The 1831 edition listed fifty-three, which disappeared from the 1843 and 1846 editions and were never in the abridged versions. See Emma Willard, *History of the United States, or, Republic of America* (Philadelphia: A. S. Barnes, 1831), xliii–xliv.

<sup>75</sup> Willard, *Answer to Marcius Willson’s Reply*, 18.

<sup>76</sup> Willard, *Appeal to the Public*, 13–14.

argued.<sup>77</sup> But it was questionable whether a poor copy was a copy, and while Willard's abridged history contained over a dozen such maps, Willson opted for only three of his own without crediting her, plus dozens of smaller maps scattered through the work to illustrate events in the text. Willard criticized these as anachronistic, unnecessary, and poorly drawn, but they were not copies of hers and suggested a different strategy: to rely more on numerous small maps to illustrate discrete *events* as opposed to synoptic maps that traced the country's sweeping spatial expansion.<sup>78</sup>

Ultimately, Willard rested her map argument on asserting ownership of an idea—"progressive" maps in textbooks about any subject—that she had introduced into school histories. For this, she believed she deserved credit and more, for, as she noted, "the laborer is worthy of his hire."<sup>79</sup> She never articulated the consequences of this claim, that is, whether she owned the rights to derivatives, improvements, or applications of this idea in any other work but her own, a claim of moral right or creative interest in the work unrecognized in American copyright law until 1988.<sup>80</sup> But Willard always believed that her innovations in education had marked turning points in the evolution of pedagogy.<sup>81</sup> Willson argued that his were original "charts" different from her "maps," that she could not claim ownership of an idea and thereby prevent others from developing and improving it, and that his comprehensive chart of American history was a unique and creative effort to combine perspective, chronology, and place in one illustration.<sup>82</sup> As her case unfolded in public, it became clear that it could not succeed under current copyright law. And the more she protested, the more Willson hyped the "superior accuracy" of his work over hers. All she had left was outrage.

Willard and Willson were grappling with the compiler's dilemma: in an age that lacked a corpus of original research and a system of

<sup>77</sup> Willard, *Appeal to the Public*, 25–26.

<sup>78</sup> Willard, *Appeal to the Public*, 25. See also A. S. Barnes & Co., "Mrs. Willard's and Mr. Willson's History of the United States and Mrs. Willard's Appeal to the Public," advertisement, *Literary World* 1, no. 19 (June 12, 1847), 433. On maps, see Schulten, "Emma Willard and the Graphic Foundations of American History," 564.

<sup>79</sup> Willard, *Appeal to the Public*, 10.

<sup>80</sup> Ilhyung Lee, "Toward an American Moral Rights in Copyright," *Washington & Lee Law Review* 58 (2001), 795–854.

<sup>81</sup> See Emma Willard, preface to Woodbridge, *System of Modern Geography*, xx.

<sup>82</sup> Willson, *A Reply to Mrs. Willard's "Appeal,"* 13. Barry Joyce judges his chart inferior to Willard's progressive maps. See Joyce, *First U.S. History Textbooks*, 80. For a different assessment, see Daniel Rosenberg, Anthony Grafton, and Princeton Architectural Staff, *Cartographies of Time* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013), 169–71.



professionally operated archives, the materials at hand for writing “compend” of American history comprised flawed accounts by dilettantes and amateurs, partisan memoirs, and scattered fragments of data.<sup>83</sup> At the time of the debate, only Bancroft’s grand narrative of American history up through the late colonial period and Holmes’s annalistic chronology provided anything approaching an authoritative framework of the subject.<sup>84</sup> As historian Barry Joyce has pointed out, history education was still heritage education, the transfer of a cultural heritage through a literature where legend shaped method.<sup>85</sup>

“Compiling” for the school market was becoming a euphemism for “synthesizing” the works of others, which Willson regarded as a distinct intellectual activity: the creation of a derivative work that improved upon prior works through a new organization, plan, information, and style, which was consistent with literary tradition and early American copyright law.<sup>86</sup> In addition, Willson was describing the work of the compiler of a book for students and not for the advanced specialist. As a compiler, Willson said in 1854, he “laboriously gathered and analyzed the results of the researches of others, and reconstructed them with some degree of unity of plan, and for a good purpose, into these forms of our own,” conducting original research where sources conflict.<sup>87</sup> It was good marketing for Newman to advertise that Willson was “unwilling to take any thing on trust, has pushed his inquiries into every explored and unexplored region; has drawn his facts from original sources, and they may be relied on as correct in the numerous instances in which he differs from his contemporaries.”<sup>88</sup> The debate had thus forced these authors to discuss the fundamentals of writing history for learners: that writing about the past—any past—always meant writing from sources, deciding what sources to use, which ones to trust, and how to interpret those sources to audiences in a way that could be trusted.

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<sup>83</sup>Joyce, *First U.S. History Textbooks*, 114–19.

<sup>84</sup>Schulten, “Emma Willard and the Graphic Foundations of American History,” 547; and Cheng, *Plain and Noble Garb*, 10. A grand narrative that departed significantly from the Bancroft tradition appeared two years after the Willard–Willson fracas. See Richard Hildreth, *The History of the United States of America* (New York: Harper, 1849).

<sup>85</sup>Joyce, *First U.S. History Textbooks*.

<sup>86</sup>Pamela Samuelson, “The Quest for a Sound Conception of Copyright’s Derivative Work Right,” *Georgetown Law Journal* 101 (2013), 1505–9; and Geoffrey E. Buerger, “The Owl and the Plagiarist: Academic Misrepresentation in Contemporary Education” (PhD diss., Dalhousie University, 2002), 7–18.

<sup>87</sup>Marcus Willson, *Outlines of History*, University Edition (New York: Ivison & Phinney, 1854), iv.

<sup>88</sup>Newman & Co., “Willson’s Historical Series,” May 22, 1847.

In all of this smoke and fury over how to write and source a history textbook, by the end of the exchange any initial assumptions by both authors about the connection between gender and scholarship were challenged and eventually set aside. As noted earlier, there is no manuscript evidence of the authors' motives, calculations, or conclusions about this episode; indeed, given the fiery language and general circumstances of the confrontation, this absence is striking (especially in Willard's surviving correspondence and diaries, which are almost totally silent on it). Willard raised the stakes in her *Appeal* by pointing out woman's disadvantaged position relative to men in earning a livelihood. But after Willson replied that an "authoress's" claim to be an "injured woman" should not shield her from just criticism in a literary dispute and the press upbraided both for unseemly behavior, this theme faded from view.<sup>89</sup> Having landed their blows, the debaters moved on. Neither said that gender determined or even influenced one's fitness to write history for children, nor did their publishers take up the matter in the many ads they bought to defend their clients. Willard's most persistent argument rested not only upon Willson's lack of scholarly credentials, his clear conflict of interest, and what she claimed was his piracy of her work, it also called upon her earned rank as a scholar and educator, backed by the accolades of the famous statesmen and historians she knew and cited, and endorsed by thousands of educational administrators and teachers who had purchased and were using her books. This finding is consistent with recent literature attesting to the relatively greater influence of social and economic status over gender in antebellum public—especially educational and intellectual—discourse.<sup>90</sup>

The Willard–Willson debate trailed off in late 1847, with no clear resolution or noticeable effect on the sales of their books or the status of their reputations.<sup>91</sup> The authors' careers continued to diverge. Until her death in 1870, Willard's works, especially the revised edition of her *Universal History*, continued her emphasis on civic virtue, women's influence on events, and Christian piety with a force and impact that none of her textbook competitors could match.<sup>92</sup> Responding to the

<sup>89</sup>Willson, *A Reply to Mrs. Willard's "Appeal,"* 11; and "The War of Histories," *New York Evangelist* 18 no. 25 (June 24, 1847), 100.

<sup>90</sup>Nash, *Women's Education*, esp. 78–82; and Jo Anne Preston, "Domestic Ideology, School Reformers, and Female Teachers: Schoolteaching Becomes Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century New England," *New England Quarterly* 66 no. 4 (Dec. 1993), 531–51.

<sup>91</sup>Willard's pamphlets had cost Barnes \$800, but his subsequent accounts blame larger economic conditions for variations in sales. A. S. Barnes to Emma Willard, Jan. 24, 1848, Willard Papers, reel 3, frames 242–45.

<sup>92</sup>Willard, *History of the United States* (1843), 232. Although, as Nina Baym details, many antebellum female authors emphasized women's role in history, Willard did so

unfolding sectional drama in revisions and supplements to her texts after the Mexican War, she joined the antebellum chorus of pleas for sectional compromise.

Willson rode the wave of common school reform that Willard had helped to start, but in a very different direction. After an interlude as principal of his alma mater, Canandaigua Academy, from 1849 to 1853, he left teaching for a lucrative career as an entrepreneur in the market for school supplies and teachers, and as a controversial best-selling author of school texts on reading, pedagogy, geography, drawing, and math, which he penned at his country estate in Vineland, New Jersey, until his death in 1905 at age 92.<sup>93</sup>

Willard's and Willson's schoolbooks were parts of a genre of popular writing that was filio-pietistic, nationalist, and didactic. These books used common tropes, literary devices, symbols, and illustrations that were consistent with both reigning theories of childhood education and the conditions facing any compiler who created derivative works from a narrow range of available secondary sources. But these similarities tend to obscure significant substantive differences of method and philosophy that the "war of histories" had revealed. Both Willard and Willson introduced distinctive elements into their works. We have already noted women's history and "progressive maps" in Willard's case. Significantly, Willson caught the breezes of new academic theories of racial determinism, object teaching, empiricism, and historicist thinking that were emerging from the great universities of Prussia, England, and France.<sup>94</sup> His *American History* (1846), inserted a section on the "philosophy of history"—a phrase never uttered in Willard's histories—as a preview of his forthcoming universal history, which relegated the old school belief in history as "philosophy teaching by example" to a place in elementary instruction while reserving the dissemination of useful knowledge to the "advanced

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consistently in fearless and lively prose for mixed-gender school-age audiences throughout her publishing career. See Baym, *American Women Writers*, 217–38; and Emma Willard, *Universal History in Perspective* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1856), v, 101n, 127n, 163–64, 199–200, 226–27, 498, 525–26.

<sup>93</sup>M. Willson, "Teachers Agency and Exchange, For Providing Teachers with Schools, and Schools with Teachers," broadside (New York: Ivison & Phinney, Jan. 1, 1858); G. S. Woodman & Company, "Amer. Educational Bureau," advertisement, *New York Times*, May 14, 1862, 3; and "Vineland's Noted Author at Ninety," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 9, 1903, 3.

<sup>94</sup>Willson became a devotee of Herbert Spencer and of object pedagogy, the subject of several manuals he coauthored. See, for example, Marcius Willson, "Educational Tendencies of the Age," *The Educational Bulletin* 1, no. 7 (Feb. 1861), 1; and Marcius Willson, *A Manual of Information and Suggestions for Object Lessons* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1863).

student.<sup>95</sup> Willson's more speculative approach departed significantly from Willard and the other seven authors. It rejected a "mere narrative of ancient dynasties and wars, which should throw no light upon the character and circumstances of the people, would furnish no valuable information to reward the student's toil," in favor of a story where the

entire social relations of a people might thus be developed, their manners, customs and opinions, their ignorance and their knowledge, their virtues and their vices; and the national progress would be traced far more clearly in those silently operating causes, than in the spectacle of the merely outward changes produced by them. Indeed, a mere narrative of the ordinary events of history can be justly regarded as of utility, only so far as it furnishes the basis on which a more noble superstructure, the 'philosophy of history,' is to be reared.<sup>96</sup>

Willson was moving beyond his earlier assertion that history "deals mainly with events." His later work also departed from late Enlightenment ideas, expressed in early geographies and chronographers like Willard's, that chronology framed the past in accordance with the design of Nature's God and that describing the course of events was the business of the historian.<sup>97</sup> His universal history text, *Outlines of History* (1854), applied this conclusion to the interpretation of Western civilization and marked his greatest divergence from Willard. Drawing upon dozens of sources and amply footnoted, it ignored the position of women in history beyond their serving, with children, as helpless victims of an unbroken stream of rapine and pillage that defined the "barbarism" of ancient and medieval life. But its 244-page addendum, the *Philosophy of History* for college students and home use, expanded on the themes outlined in his *American History* and provided an intellectual and cultural history of Western civilization to illustrate principles of progress, democracy, religion, and virtue as the overarching themes of the past. Willson's *Outlines* was the final history he would write for a school audience, but he continued to expound on the theory of history in promotional newsletters he issued through his publishers late in the decade.<sup>98</sup> "History is a science," Willson

<sup>95</sup> Marcus Willson, *American History* (New York: Ivison, Blakeman, & Phinney, 1846), 107–9.

<sup>96</sup> Willson, *American History*, 107–9.

<sup>97</sup> Contrast with Woodbridge, *System of Modern Geography*, 353, wherein "the character of nations" is due more to "the influence of moral causes—government, religion, and the state of society" than to "the peculiarities of the race to which they belong." See also Tolley, *Science Education*, 25–27. On history as descriptive, see Willard's remarks, *Ancient Geography*, vi.

<sup>98</sup> Willson critiqued biblical chronology while harmonizing the "new science" of geology with the story of creation. See Willson, *Outlines of History*, esp. 601–25.

observed in 1858, that “requires us to regard both the motive powers of History—the diverse principles which underlie human conduct on the one hand, and some great end and object of History on the other.”<sup>99</sup> Fidelity to authoritative accounts, he continued, enabled the compiler to synthesize the work of technical specialists into an accessible history where Willson’s hazy Hegelianism could displace the stories of great men with “the moving powers of national life—the principles that underlie all history ... something inherent in the race, and which lives after individual motives, and acts, and their consequences, are forgotten.”<sup>100</sup> Race and geography shaped civilization and stimulated “the self-impelling spirit of *Progress*,... [that] has given energy to British character, and spread Anglo-Saxon institutions over the Western and Southern hemispheres; and it promises to subjugate the world to the sway of the industries of civilized life.”<sup>101</sup> Such un-Willardian observations sublimated individual heroics to the unseen forces of environment and race. Together they constituted a crude blend of new and old determinist and racist ideas culled from Willson’s unsystematic reading and were offered gingerly to the public in the heat of the debate in intellectual circles over the racial origins of humankind.<sup>102</sup> But they also reflected the secular trend in his and the larger intellectual environment and especially his growing interest in the natural sciences, which became the theme of his next, most profitable, and controversial enterprise, Harper’s School and Family Series of Readers.<sup>103</sup>

Willson bowed to the market and gave lip service to the hand of providence in American exceptionalism that had structured Willard’s histories, while he overlaid a sweeping metahistorical “philosophy of history” across the standard narrative, treating history education as a scientific enterprise of both student inquiry and comprehension of overarching principles of progress, democracy, and enlightenment in

<sup>99</sup>Marcus Willson, “History as a Science. No. 1,” *School and Home Journal of Literature, Science, and Education* 1, no. 1 (Sept. 1858), 2.

<sup>100</sup>Willson, “History as a Science. No. 1,” 2.

<sup>101</sup>Marcus Willson, “History as a Science. No. 2,” *School and Home Journal of Literature, Science, and Education* 1, no. 2 (Oct. 1858), 19.

<sup>102</sup>See Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); William Stanton, *The Leopard’s Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815–59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); and George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 49–96.

<sup>103</sup>The best-selling series, contracted in 1859, attracted severe criticism, both from educators opposed to content-based literacy instruction and from one of the nation’s leading natural scientists, who called Willson a “charlatan” and campaigned behind the scenes against its adoption. See S. S. Haldeman, *Notes on Willson’s Readers* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1864).

the social and cultural history of civilization. Presented not as a research methodology but as an aid to learning for the nonspecialist reader, Willson's first stab at a "philosophy of history" tried to connect grand ideas to events, less sophisticated but in some ways prefiguring the later works of popular historians like Arnold Toynbee and Will Durant.<sup>104</sup>

Ultimately, Emma Willard and Marcius Willson represented branches of a common school movement that was more diverse and unsettled than some scholarly accounts portray.<sup>105</sup> Although they both operated within their time's ideological mainstream and sought the preservation of a national cultural heritage, their debate revealed significant differences in emphasis and purposes in history education. Willard's books and her promotion of female education were a product of the early republic's postrevolutionary project of nurturing civic virtue and stable institutions. Willson, on the other hand, was a man of markets, an independent author unconnected with any institution but his publishers, seeking to bridge the worlds of scholarship and mass readership, an autodidact dedicated to what he later called his core "educational principles" of spreading "useful knowledge to the masses."<sup>106</sup> Profit was patriotic; his works offered the usual pieties about the virtues of republicanism and Christianity, but with a softer sectarian edge attentive to the increasingly diverse student population in the nation's schools, mirroring the growing secularization of education and the sciences in educational discourse by mid-century. As a businessman and fierce competitor, he tested and improved upon his rivals' products, serving as mediator between the specialist and the general reader, leaving it to a discerning consumer to establish its worth.

Willard wrote history to save the republic; Willson wrote history to help students discover it. Such objectives, the authors believed, could be the foundation of a livelihood earned through publication of school histories in a mass market that exerted significant pressures

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<sup>104</sup>For American historians' balancing act on the tension between philosophy and empiricism in the writing of history, see Herbst, *German Historical School*, 53–71, 101–4. On philosophy and history, see the opening chapters of Will Durant, *Our Oriental Heritage* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1935).

<sup>105</sup>One departure to this literature is Edward Cromwell McInnis, "History's Purpose in Antebellum Textbooks," *American Educational History Journal* 39, no. 1–2 (Jan. 2012), 129–30.

<sup>106</sup>Draft letter, in Marcius Willson, Manuscript Notebook, 1865, Gottesman Libraries, Teachers College Archives, Columbia University, New York; and Examiner [Marcius Willson] "Reading as a Branch of Common School Education," *The Illinois Teacher: Devoted to Education, Science, and Free Schools* 10, no. 12 (Dec. 1864), 444. Willson's manuscript notebook contains a draft of the "Examiner" essay.

on writers of history. The two authors' professional lives intersected through the compiler's dilemma, as they struggled with squaring the mechanical task of creating derivative works with the intellectual demands of blending knowledge, sourcing, marketing, and audience. We remember Willard for her indefatigable promotion of new pedagogies and female education. We tend to remember Willson, if at all, for the dodgy tactics he used to launch his career at the expense of a famous author and reformer, but we also do well to notice whence that ambition came, what it produced, and where it led.