

PREFACE

Michael D. Aeschliman*

The TASIS Foundation is the ultimate guarantor of the *ethos* and long-term aims of the TASIS schools and programs and has outlined those aims and that *ethos* in a document entitled “The TASIS Paideia,” using a classical Greek word that means education or culture. After several years of informal and formal discussion, the members of the TASIS Foundation Board decided to promote an American Civic Literacy requirement for all graduating TASIS seniors.

The American civic tradition is itself the product of 2500 years of Western and world civilization, with Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and Christian strands, but more particularly of European developments deeply rooted in medieval republicanism (Switzerland and Italy) and English legal and political institutions.⁽¹⁾ It is our hope that TASIS history and literature courses, and the Senior Humanities requirement, acquaint all TASIS students with some of these sources and their enduring products.

However, there has been a widespread, growing fear among those responsible for liberal-arts education and civic literacy, at all educational levels, that the Western nations are doing a poor or inadequate job of conveying the ennobling “inheritance of intellectual, social, moral, religious and artistic wisdom of generations and centuries” (“TASIS Paideia”). As our schools and programs are increasingly multi-ethnic, we are eager to convey a distillation of “the best that has been thought and said and done in the world” (Matthew Arnold) to as many of our graduates as possible, in addition to the normal, indispensable efforts of our teachers in their separate course offerings.

The following brief volume of selections from the first one-hundred years of American history, political deliberation, and statesmanship (1776-1865) is meant to be a basic minimum common to the TASIS schools, and of course it is by no means exhaustive. American history and government teachers will wish to add numerous documents in their own academic courses, from earlier, concurrent, and later periods, whether the earlier “Mayflower Compact” (1620), Paine’s **Common Sense** (1776), the feminist Seneca Falls Declaration (1848), or Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham City Jail” (1963).⁽²⁾ They are also free to contextualize and to critique the required documents: the points of view of the teachers are not mandated and are subject only to the normal review of Department Chairs and other relevant school administrators. The documents serve no narrow partisan political agenda, but provide a valuable set of words, concepts, and themes for ethical and civic discussion and debate.

TASIS has always been American in the sense that the USA has been a nation of immigrants and refugees, a multi-ethnic, “big-tent” nation “dedicated to the proposition that all men” — and, implicitly and eventually, all women — “are created equal” (Lincoln at Gettysburg, quoting the 1776 Declaration). The founder of the TASIS schools, Mrs. Mary Crist Fleming (1910-2009), was famous

for her courtesy and cosmopolitanism and her generous, welcoming spirit, and insisted that these attributes characterize all the schools and programs (“TASIS Paideia,” Section 1). She was herself an immigrant to Switzerland, a multi-ethnic republic where she made her home for fifty years. Alexander Hamilton, printed in this volume, with Madison the greatest intellectual among the American “founding fathers,” was a poor West Indian orphan and immigrant teen-ager who came to the American colonies on a scholarship. (Unlike most of the Virginia founders, he was also a resolute anti-racist.) Lincoln was raised in humiliating poverty. In his great Seventh Debate with Douglas (1858), printed in this volume, Lincoln pointedly mentioned the multi-ethnic, non-discriminatory character and aims of the American republic when he referred to “Hans and Baptiste and Patrick,” i.e., German, French, and Irish immigrants. The development of Lincoln’s own racial views and policies make him, of course, one of the great statesmen in the history of the world.

We have re-printed for TASIS seniors only a selection of highlights from the first century of the history of the republic. National educational standards in Britain and state educational standards in the different American states (e.g., the MCAS in Massachusetts) have grown increasingly prescriptive in trying to identify such historical and literary components as essential points of orientation for young people in K-12 schools, confronted by, and frequently overwhelmed by, a trivial, and sometimes toxic, commercialized entertainment culture employing vast and unprecedented audio-visual resources. In contrast to this anarchy and disorientation, there is the opposite extreme of tyranny and fanaticism in much of the world. Between these extremes, the “golden mean” of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude (the classical virtues mentioned in the “TASIS Paideia”) is still embattled.

The English statesman John Morley once argued that there would never come a time when human beings would not benefit from reading the writings of Edmund Burke (1727-1797), the Anglo-Irish parliamentary statesman who was a chief influence on, and advocate of, the American colonists in their struggle against the misguided policies of the British ministries under King George III that led to the War of Independence. The same can truly be said for the writings reprinted in this anthology – they are not only great historical documents, but great works of moral reasoning and civic literature.

* Ph.D., Columbia University
Curriculum Advisor and Board member, TASIS Foundation
Member, TASIS England Board Academic Committee
Chair, TASIS Board Academic Committee
Professor of Anglophone Culture, University of Italian Switzerland
Professor Emeritus of Education, Boston University

1. See, e.g., Russell Kirk, **The Roots of American Order** (1974)
2. On King’s “Letter,” see my own “Enduring Documents and Public Documents: Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham City Jail” After Forty Years”, **Journal of Education** (Boston), Vol. 186, No. 1 (2005), pp.29-46.