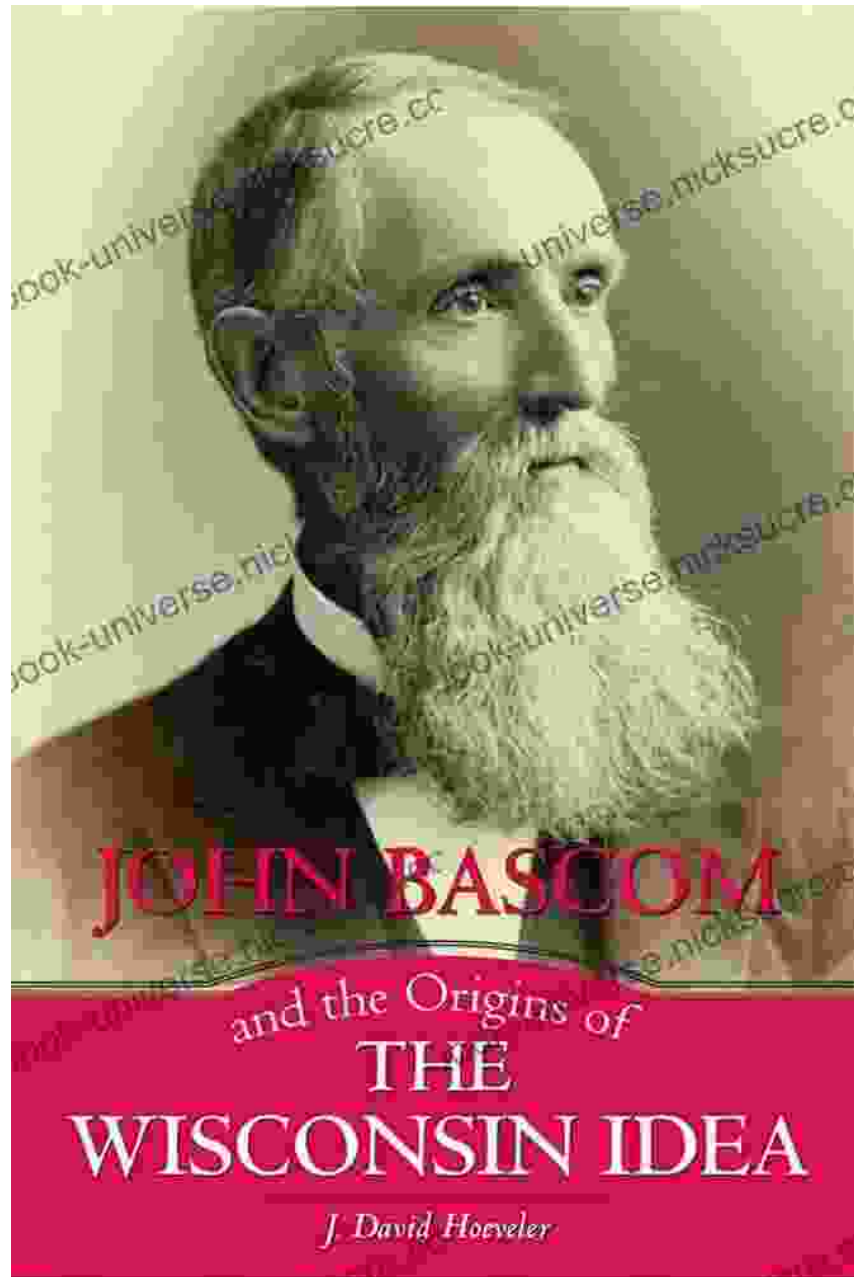
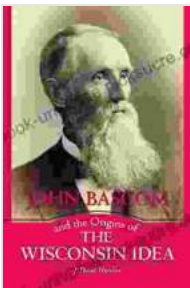


# John Bascom and the Origins of the Wisconsin Idea: A Legacy of Progressive Education and Public Service



The Wisconsin Idea is a unique approach to higher education that emphasizes the practical application of knowledge to address the needs of

society. This philosophy, which has been a cornerstone of the University of Wisconsin-Madison for over a century, traces its roots to the visionary leadership of John Bascom, who served as the university's president from 1874 to 1887. This article explores Bascom's life, his contributions to the development of the Wisconsin Idea, and the enduring legacy of his educational philosophy.



## John Bascom and the Origins of the Wisconsin Idea

by J. David Hoeveler

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English  
File size : 2150 KB  
Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 248 pages



### Early Life and Education

John Bascom was born in 1827 in Massachusetts. He was a bright and ambitious young man who exhibited a passion for learning from an early age. After graduating from Williams College in 1849, Bascom pursued graduate studies at Andover Theological Seminary. However, his interests soon shifted towards philosophy and ethics, and he ultimately earned a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Heidelberg in Germany in 1859.

### Academic Career

Upon his return to the United States, Bascom embarked on a distinguished academic career. He taught at Williams College and the University of Chicago before accepting the presidency of the University of Wisconsin in 1874. As president, Bascom played a pivotal role in shaping the university's educational mission and curriculum. He believed that the university had a responsibility to serve the people of Wisconsin by providing them with practical, accessible, and affordable education.

## **The Wisconsin Idea**

Under Bascom's leadership, the University of Wisconsin underwent a transformation. He implemented a series of reforms that aimed to bridge the gap between the university and the wider community. This included the establishment of the College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, which provided students with hands-on training in agriculture, engineering, and other practical fields. Bascom also encouraged faculty to engage in research that directly addressed the challenges facing Wisconsin's citizens.

Out of this innovative approach emerged what would become known as the Wisconsin Idea. This philosophy emphasized the practical application of knowledge to solve pressing societal problems. Bascom believed that the university should not only be a center of learning but also an engine for social progress. He famously declared, "What the people need the university shall seek, and what the university finds the people shall have."

## **Public Service**

Bascom's commitment to public service extended beyond the university campus. He served on numerous state and national boards and commissions, including the Wisconsin State Board of Education and the National Education Association. He also played a key role in the

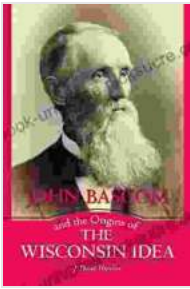
development of Wisconsin's public library system. Bascom believed that education was essential for a democratic society, and he tirelessly advocated for policies that would make higher education accessible to all citizens.

## **Legacy**

John Bascom's legacy continues to shape the University of Wisconsin-Madison and higher education institutions around the world. The Wisconsin Idea remains a guiding principle for the university, and it inspires faculty and students to engage with the community and address contemporary challenges. Bascom's emphasis on practical education, public service, and the importance of knowledge in addressing societal problems has had a profound impact on generations of students and scholars.

In recognition of his contributions, the University of Wisconsin-Madison has established the John Bascom Professorship, which is awarded to faculty members who exemplify the principles of the Wisconsin Idea. The university also maintains the John Bascom Archives, which houses his personal papers and other historical materials related to his life and work.

John Bascom was a transformative figure in American higher education. His vision of a university that serves the public good laid the foundation for the Wisconsin Idea, which has become a model for universities worldwide. Bascom's legacy is a testament to the power of education to drive social progress and create a more just and equitable society. As the University of Wisconsin-Madison continues to grapple with the challenges of the 21st century, the Wisconsin Idea remains an enduring source of inspiration and a reminder of the university's commitment to public service.

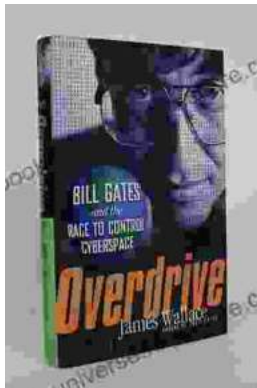


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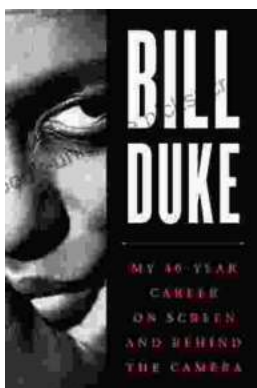
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