The Portrayal of the Woman’s Suffrage Movement in High School History Textbooks

Michelle A. DeVries
Western Michigan University, shelled@sbcglobal.net

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses

Part of the Political History Commons, Politics and Social Change Commons, Social History Commons, and the Women's History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses/5156

This Masters Thesis-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.
THE PORTRAYAL OF THE WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

by

Michelle DeVries

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts History Western Michigan University June 2020

Thesis Committee:

Wilson Warren, Ph.D., Chair
Sally Hadden, Ph.D.
Mitch Kachun, Ph.D.
Copyright by
Michelle DeVries
2020
THE PORTRAYAL OF THE WOMAN’S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

Michelle DeVries, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 2020

The narrative of the woman’s suffrage movement in high school history textbooks varies from textbook to textbook and over time. Textbooks include different information, people, events, and interpretations of events. They employ different word choices and pictures. By using comparative analyzation of numerous popular high school textbooks, the pressure exerted by external economic, social, and political forces on the historical narrative can be seen. Studying the historical narrative in this way trains students to be discerning learners of history and equips them not only to recognize the bias in any historical narrative, but also to be able to analyze how historical narratives display biases.
# Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 1  
Thesis ............................................................................................................................................................ 2  
Periodization and Format ............................................................................................................................. 5  
Textbooks’ Importance .................................................................................................................................. 6  
The Textbook Market....................................................................................................................................... 7  
1920s and 30s Introduction to External Pressures ..................................................................................... 10  
1920s and 30s Textbook Excerpts (Negative) ............................................................................................ 12  
1920s and 30s Female Agency (Negative) .................................................................................................. 15  
1920s and 30s Introduction to Positive Textbooks .................................................................................... 16  
1920s and 30s Textbook Excerpts (Positive) .............................................................................................. 17  
1920s and 30s Coverage, Placement, and Tone (Positive) ....................................................................... 19  
1920s and 30s Female Agency (Positive) ................................................................................................... 20  
1920s and 30s Textbook Trends and Biases ............................................................................................... 20  
1940s and 50s Introduction of External Pressures ..................................................................................... 24  
1940s and 50s Textbook Excerpts ............................................................................................................... 27  
1940s and 50s Coverage, Placement and Tone ......................................................................................... 31  
1940s and 50s Female Agency ..................................................................................................................... 35  
1940s and 50s Textbook Trends and Biases ............................................................................................... 37  
1960s and 70s Introduction to External Pressures ..................................................................................... 38  
1960s and 70s Textbook Excerpts ............................................................................................................... 40  
1960s and 70s Coverage, Placement, and Tone ....................................................................................... 42  
1960s and 70s Female Agency .................................................................................................................... 45  
1960s and 70s Textbook Trends and Biases ............................................................................................... 45  
1980s and 90s Introduction to External Pressures ..................................................................................... 46  
1980s and 90s Textbook Excerpts ............................................................................................................... 50  
1980s and 90s Coverage, Placement and Tone ....................................................................................... 53  
1980s and 90s Female Agency .................................................................................................................... 55  
1980s and 90s Textbook Trends and Biases ............................................................................................... 56
Table of Contents---Continued

2000s Introduction to External Pressures ................................................................. 57
2000s Textbook Excerpts ......................................................................................... 58
2000s Coverage, Placement, and Tone .................................................................. 61
2000s Female Agency ............................................................................................. 63
2000s Textbook Trends and Biases ....................................................................... 64
Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 66
Appendix .............................................................................................................. 72
Bibliography .......................................................................................................... 73
  Textbook Bibliography ......................................................................................... 73
  Trends in Women’s History Bibliography ............................................................. 76
  Textbook Analysis Bibliography ......................................................................... 77
Introduction

The idea that the historical narrative presented in high school history textbooks is an unbiased recounting of the facts is becoming obsolete. While the idea of a biased historical narrative has been supported by education scholars and academic historians for many years, it has recently become more widely accepted by non-professionals. One way this is happening is through history textbooks, themselves an example of the historical narrative being influenced by outside circumstances. For example, Howard Zinn’s popular textbook, *A People’s History of the United States*,\(^1\) challenges the facts-only historical narrative,\(^2\) and provides an alternative historical narrative for history students.

Yet, while non-professional historians have come to see bias in some historical narratives (particularly those that do not agree with their own political and cultural beliefs), they are often unable to analyze sources for subtle biases or to see the way in which their own beliefs may be influencing the narrative. The term bias can have negative connotations, however in this paper the use of the word bias is meant to indicate the various external pressures that influenced the construction and interpretation of the woman’s suffrage narratives. As such it represents a non-negative use of the word bias. Acknowledging that the historical narrative is biased is different than being able to comprehensively analyze a source for multiple sources of biases and to be able to recognize the way external political and cultural worldviews influence the current historical narrative.

---


Thesis

This thesis advances two arguments. First, it provides concrete evidence demonstrating that historical narratives are subjectively influenced by external political and cultural pressures. Providing a concrete example of how textbooks’ portrayed the woman’s suffrage movement in different ways as a result of political and cultural external pressures, this thesis demonstrates the way in which the historical narrative is always influenced by external events that are so large that it is often only possible to see the correlation in hindsight. The subtle (or sometimes not so subtle) inclusion or exclusion of people or events, the choice of wording, and the way these are presented all are affected by external political and social pressures.

Due to changing external pressures, each successive generation discovered and sought to correct previous biases (perceived or real) in the portrayal of the historical narrative. However, new biases were generated by the new pervading external pressures in the new narrative. Sometimes these new biases were the result of an overcorrection of a previous problem. For example, when women first began to be included more frequently in high school history textbooks, women were given their own space so that they would not be overpowered by their male counterparts. However, this inadvertently placed them outside the national narrative. Therefore, later historical narratives attempted to reinsert women into the main historical narration. Sometimes these problems were the result of a change in thinking due to new external influences. For example, authors of textbooks published in the mid-1900s argued that the militancy of the woman’s suffrage movement hurt their overall cause. However, later authors argued the opposite, crediting the militancy of the woman’s suffrage movement with its final push for success. Some aspects of the portrayal of the woman’s suffrage movement
become more positive in tone towards the woman’s suffrage movement only to deteriorate into more condescending tones in later decades. For example, the coverage of the woman’s suffrage movement had its highest volume of textbook prose in the 1920s and 30s. None of the following decades gave as much detail about the movement. Political and social forces always influence even the most unbiased historical narrative.

Analyzing external pressures on textbook authors often exposes opposing or contradictory thinking. The tension between using textbooks as a tool for teaching appropriate character and citizenship to students and the use of textbooks as a litmus test of public opinion demonstrate two different pressures on textbook authors. As Edgar Bruce Wesley argues in his article “Let’s Abolish History Courses” both historians and the public support the study of history to promote “good citizenship.” However, public opinion is disjointed, factious, and inconsistent. Therefor textbook authors are forced to simultaneously promote good citizenship and somehow incorporate multiple popular public opinions all on a budget. The result is a bland narrative that often fails to engage students.

Second, this study argues that informed citizens need to develop the ability to analyze historical narratives for deeper understanding of the events surrounding their writing and publishing. While debate raged in the United States Senate’s 2019-2020 impeachment trial of President Donald Trump, the two opposing sides attempted to write their own versions of history. Both sides claimed that the facts were on their side. During this time when both real and “fake” news are so prevalent, teaching students to think critically and to carefully analyze

---

the sources around them is imperative. This study provides an example of how historical sources should be analyzed. Students and other readers of history should be educated and critical consumers of the narrative they are reading, and cognizant of current external influences that are influencing the current historical narrative.

The biases in history textbooks rarely involved untrue information, but by including different facts, wordings, and emphases the narratives can vary greatly. Decisions about what or who to include or exclude, what images to utilize, what words to use, general tone, where to place the information, and how much information should be included in high school history textbooks are all factors in creating the narrative. Sometimes these biases are intentional, designed to teach a certain American ideal, but even with the most objective telling external pressures still affect the narrative. Students need to learn to analyze sources for the way biases influence the historical narrative.

By teaching that history is an interpretation of facts, younger generations are more apt to view history critically rather than as iron clad truth. By critically studying high school history textbooks, the external influences and pressures on the historical narrative become evident and students begin to learn to analyze the sources of their information, whether it be a YouTube video or their history textbook. The portrayal of the woman’s suffrage movement in high school history textbooks provides a focused microcosm of this process.

External economic pressures also influence the historical narrative. As the history of the United States continues to expand both in time and people being included, textbooks’ space becomes an increasingly substantial problem. History textbooks are already large and
unwieldy, so decisions about what to include and exclude become important. Costs and profits are consistent considerations for textbook publishers. Since profit margins dictate the inclusion of only what is deemed the most important, analyzing how much coverage the woman’s suffrage movement received in each textbook is indicative of other dominate external pressures. The issues that are considered most important and in some cases the least controversial will make it into the textbooks.

**Periodization and Format**

This thesis will examine the changes in the portrayal of the woman’s suffrage movement in selected high school history textbooks from 1920, the year the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, through the early 2000s. This analysis is conveyed in twenty-year time blocks. (See Appendix A) This periodization works well because it allows time for trends to make their way into mainstream textbooks. High schools often update their textbooks every decade, and major changes are often only seen over longer time periods. For example, several textbooks published in both the 1920s and 30s are identical. Frederick Paxson’s textbook published in 1928⁴ and in 1937⁵ were exactly the same. David Muzzey’s textbooks from the 1930s⁶ and 1940s⁷ were also identical. This is one reason why studying the textbooks from the 1920s and 30s together makes sense. Another is that although textbooks during the Great Depression continued to do moderately well, there was a tightening of resources that may have encouraged a reprinting of textbooks instead of creating new ones.⁸ However, this trend

---

remained true even with textbooks published in later decades. Textbooks published by John D. Hicks in the 1940s\(^9\) and 1950s\(^10\) were also identical. One decade does not provide enough change to study external trends and pressures.

Within each time period this thesis will examine how external political, economic and cultural influences created changes in textbooks in the following areas: coverage and placement of the topic, general tone, female agency, and general textbook trends. This thesis will also examine some of the perpetual problems that history textbooks have faced in the past and continue to struggle with today. Lastly, this paper will analyze how this information should be used in the future and the impact it has had on our national narrative, as well as possible future trends.

**Textbooks’ Importance**

Textbooks have the opportunity to influence millions of young Americans each year. This power has only continued to expand. In the 1920s there were roughly 2.2 million high school students,\(^{11}\) and by 1935 there were around 6 million.\(^{12}\) Therefore, due to their increasingly expansive role, textbooks have been plagued with controversy. One example of this occurred in the 1930s with an intense debate over Harold Rugg’s *History of American Civilization, Economic and Social*. In this textbook Rugg attempted to engage students in analytical thinking by stressing errors and debunking perfection myths surround American heroes. Opponents of Rugg’s textbook fought against what they considered to be Rugg’s anti-

---

\(^12\) Nash, *History On Trial*, 43.
nationalistic view. Due to the controversy, many schools stopped using Rugg’s textbook.\textsuperscript{13} Other textbook authors took note of this, and American textbooks since that time have tended to adopt a pervasive bland narrative.

**The Textbook Market**

This thesis will examine textbooks widely used between the 1920s and 2000s. Using mainstream and widely adopted textbooks offers a better sampling of the national attitudes surrounding and influencing history textbooks. In the decades following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment until the mid-1900s, textbooks were written by individual historians, not teams of writers. Popular authors such as Charles and Mary Beard and David Saville Muzzey had multiple editions and publications of their textbooks distributed. Muzzey sold millions of his textbook entitled *An American History*.\textsuperscript{14} Books such as *The History of the Book* give information regarding what textbooks were in circulation and textbook trends.\textsuperscript{15} In addition, referencing the bibliographies of other textbook analyses gives insight into influential and prominent textbooks. Often these textbooks, such as those written by David Muzzey,\textsuperscript{16} will also show up at the center of controversies over the portrayal of history, giving an indication that the people at the time considered them influential.

After WWII history textbook production shifted away from individual authors towards major publishing companies and teams of writers. “More than seventy-five firms charged after

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{13} Nash, *History On Trial*, 43.
\item\textsuperscript{14} Nash, *History On Trial*, 27.
\item\textsuperscript{16} Congressional Records, 1\textsuperscript{st} Session, 7\textsuperscript{th} Cong., Vol. LXIX, Feb. 24- March 13 1928, https://books.google.com/books?id=Jufc10V5tE4C&pg=PA3699&lpg=PA3699&dq=Muzzey+textbook+scandal&source=bl&ots=hxeWQdtWdp&sig=ACfU3U3Odq8IfaJWWJ3tzrd31CQrp6TxsW&hl=en&sa
\end{footnotes}
the textbook trade, generating ‘a wider choice of comparatively inexpensive products.’”17
Locating popular textbooks for study is more certain after this, as these companies produced lists of textbooks they published. In addition, the number of publishing firms drastically dwindled. “By 1988 ten publishers controlled 70 percent of the American textbook business; two years later, the so called ‘Big Three’- Macmillan, Harcourt, and Simon & Shuster- owned nearly half of it.”18 According to Bookscouter.com there are currently five major publishing companies: Cengage Learning, Houghton Mifflin, McGraw Hill, Pearson Education, and Scholastic.19 Several of these, such as Houghton Mifflin, were already operating in the 1940s.20 Each of these companies has undergone multiple mergers and a few have developed subsidiary education companies as well. In 1998 more than a quarter of the American trade was controlled by Pearson PLC after it bought Simon and Schuster’s educational division.21 Using textbooks published by major publishing companies in this analysis insures the popularity and a wide base of readers. The control of the textbook market by only a few large firms makes the locating of mainstream books relatively simple.

Not only were the number of publishing companies consolidating in the mid- to late 1900s, but states were also narrowing the textbooks that they approved. Starting in the 1970s officials from both Texas and California developed textbook adoption lists for all of the schools in their states. Texas textbook purchases account for roughly 10-12% of the total textbook

20 John Hicks, The American Nation.
market in the US, which was about 5 million public school children in 2014.\textsuperscript{22} Texas and California together control roughly twenty percent of the entire textbook market.\textsuperscript{23} This gave the officials from Texas and California significant influence on publishers. The social and political climates in these two states heavily influenced the history narrative. For example, “Between 1975 and 1986 at least a quarter of the changes in American basal reading texts stemmed directly from a Texas or California mandate.”\textsuperscript{24}

Other states often used these textbooks as well since they were marketed heavily by powerhouse publishers. The lists of approved textbooks from these states provide concrete and substantive proof about which textbooks would be considered mainstream.\textsuperscript{25} In some cases, subtle changes to the textbooks were made by the publishers in order to be able to market the otherwise identical textbook to buyers outside of these states. Using textbooks from all major textbook companies provides a balanced and accurate review of information on woman’s suffrage.

Around the turn of the twenty-first century textbook markets shifted again with the increasing use of online resources. In addition, after 2011 Texas began to allow schools to buy textbooks both on and off the approved board list. The ability to choose from a wider variety of textbooks diluted the control and influence of the few previously approved textbooks.\textsuperscript{26} The combination of numerous educational online resources and greater freedom for individual

\begin{footnotes}
\item[23] Nord, History of the Book, 309.
\item[25] Repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/25727
\item[26] Cannon, “Texas Approves Disputed Textbooks for Schools.”
\end{footnotes}
schools to choose their own textbooks is again changing the textbook world. While these large educational companies still produce textbooks and online resources, many other entrepreneurs are able to economically produce material and online content for teacher and student use.\textsuperscript{27} Sites like Teachers Pay Teachers\textsuperscript{28} allow idea sharing between large numbers of educators, each influencing history with their own particular perspectives. The popularity of individual project based learning, such as National History Day projects, and the variety of online sources readily available is again leading to a less unified history narrative, less dominated by a couple of major publishing companies.

1920s and 30s Introduction to External Pressures
The 1920s and 30s were characterized by several influential historical events, such as the end of the Industrial Revolution, which saw record numbers of women entering the workforce, especially factories; the Roaring 20s, which saw women becoming more independent and increasingly challenging gender norms in politics and social life; multiple reforms; including the introduction of prohibition, often led by women; and the Stock Market Crash and the Great Depression. The teaching of history was also experiencing a change. Previously, high schools taught history for four year but this was increasingly replaced with civics classes with only one history survey class remaining.\textsuperscript{29} The textbook that was used for this single class became increasingly important. In addition, the 1930s witnessed the rise of a

\textsuperscript{27} Bookscouters, “The Biggest Educational Publishers.”
\textsuperscript{28} https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/
\textsuperscript{29} Nash, \textit{History On Trial}, 37.
new more pragmatic history, one that incorporated multiple perspectives. These changes influenced the woman’s suffrage narrative by adding variety to the narrative.

The textbooks published immediately following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment were written by individual historians, and therefore there is a lot of variety in the amount of coverage, in the wording, and in tone. Charles Carpenter wrote in his book, *History of American Schoolbooks*, “For a long time [during the 1920s and 1930s] civic texts were in most cases penned by history compilers.” Textbooks in the 1920s and 30s reflected the individual perspectives of their authors.

In the two decades following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment the narrative of the woman’s suffrage movement enjoyed a relatively significant amount of coverage. Since the movement had recently occurred and achieved a major success, it occupied a prominent place in history textbook authors’ minds. Politicians and government officials were eager to embrace the new electorate. In addition, the women involved in the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment were politically active during the 1920s and 30s and their prominence and success kept the woman’s suffrage movement in the minds of historian authors. Some of these activists, such as Mary Beard, helped to write history textbooks.

Despite the new electorate, a majority of the textbooks published in the 1920s and 30s, such as those written by Frederick Paxson and John H. Latane, portray a generally negative

---

narrative of the woman’s suffrage movement. This is an accurate representation of the attitudes of some Americans towards the quickly changing gender roles led by the push for female suffrage. However, there were also textbooks written with substantial positive coverage. These two distinct veins reflect the two more extreme, public positions on the woman’s suffrage movement and reflect the dichotomy of feelings about the woman’s suffrage movement.³⁵

1920s and 30s Textbook Excerpts (Negative)

Below are the entire passages pertaining to the woman’s suffrage movement written by Paxson and Latane, representing the negative side of the spectrum.

_A Recent History of the United States_: Frederic Paxson: 1928 & 1937

The movement for woman’s suffrage _attained success_ late in 1920. Like prohibition, _it had been adopted_ in the Western States and was sweeping toward the East. The demand for sex equality that Lucretia Mott and Susan B. Anthony voiced in the middle of the century gained its first victories in the frontier States where the qualification for the franchise had been systematically _lowered_ since the first migrations. Anna Howard Shaw, who inherited the leadership of Miss Anthony, died within a few days of the amendment by Congress, in 1919, but lived long enough to see _her measure approved_ by the responsible leaders of all parties and started toward a sure success. For months, _during the crisis of the war, a group of militant women picketed the White_
House and cast what discredit they could upon the President for his failure to procure the immediate suffrage they demanded. The ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment took only a year, and in the spring of 1920 there was a scramble among the leaders of both parties to make it possible for women to vote in the presidential election. The amendment was proclaimed in August, 1920, each party claiming credit for the act.\(^\text{36}\)

Militancy as a means of advancing reform movements grew more frequent after its adoption by the advocates of the woman suffrage in England in 1906. In this movement in proved to be a successful means of advertising and attracting attention where earlier and more restrained appeals were unavailing. In the United States the suffrage movement did not become militant until 1917, when a faction of the woman’s party adopted the English methods in part. During the Democratic Convention at St. Louis in 1916, advocates of woman suffrage in costume and in silence lined the streets leading to the auditorium. Leaders of both parties accepted the principle of woman suffrage before the election day.\(^\text{37}\)

*A History of the United States: John Latane: 1921*

The appearance of these new institutions of democracy [referring to expanded popular control of voting] was due to a deep-seated distrust on the part of the people of State legislatures, party organizations, and city councils.

\(^{36}\) Paxson, *Recent History of the United States*, 617.

The cause of woman suffrage made great headway during this period and became a subject of national agitation. Women were given the vote first by Wyoming in 1890, then by Colorado in 1893, by Utah and Idaho in 1896, by Washington in 1910 and within the next four years by California, Arizona, Kansas, Oregon, Illinois, Nevada, and Montana.\textsuperscript{38}

\textbf{1920s and 30s Coverage, Placement and Tone (Negative)}

None of these textbooks, nor others written in similar fashion, included any pictures, quotes, or charts about the woman’s suffrage movement. Textbooks published during the 1920s and 1930s contained mostly text for all subjects. However, there were scattered charts and pictures included on other topics. In addition, coverage was brief, just one to two paragraphs. In the textbook \textit{The Recent History of the United States} written by Frederic L. Paxson and published in 1928, World War One, Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations spanned over 150 pages and three chapters. Prohibition was covered in four pages, but the entire woman’s suffrage movement was covered in two paragraphs. These paragraphs were included with other recent amendments or general expansion of voting rights, giving no indication of the monumental significance of the Nineteenth Amendment.\textsuperscript{39}

Besides the brief coverage and placement of the topic, these textbooks had a decidedly negative tone. In Paxson’s textbook he wrote about the bar for suffrage being “lowered”\textsuperscript{40} instead of the franchise being expanded or using another neutral or positive word. Paxson

\textsuperscript{38} Latane, \textit{A History of the United States}, 545.
\textsuperscript{39} Paxson, \textit{A Recent History}, 555-588.
\textsuperscript{40} Paxson, \textit{A Recent History}, 617.
negatively wrote, “For months, during the crisis of the war, a group of militant women picketed the White House and cast what discredit they could upon the president for his failure to procure the immediate suffrage they demanded.” He characterized these militant women as casting discredit on the president during a war simply because they were impatient for their rights. This was very much the picture of an innocent president unfairly ambushed by overzealous women who thought more about themselves than the needs of their country. This wording conveyed a strong feeling and argument against the woman’s suffrage movement prior to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. Some people thought that the suffragists should postpone their fight for the vote until World War One was over. Paxson’s word choices reflected his personal bias about this aspect of the woman’s suffrage movement. His textbook did not take into account the years that women had already worked for suffrage or the massive contributions women had made to the war effort. In addition, he wrote about the suffragists as “advertising for attention” and being “in costume.” This was a condescending and cynical portrayal of the woman’s suffrage movement, because Paxson overlooked the inherent right and equality that women were fighting for and depicted the movement in negative language. This was one of the negative attitudes the female suffragists had to deal with during their struggle for the vote.

1920s and 30s Female Agency (Negative)
In addition, textbooks produced during the 1920s and 30s that followed this line of negative narration generally denied women any agency. They used phrases such as “women

---

41 Paxson, A Recent History, 617.
42 Paxson, A Recent History, 459.
were given the vote,” 43 “the suffrage movement attained success,” 44 and “The ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment took only a year, and in the spring of 1920 there was a scramble among the leaders of both parties to make it possible for women to vote in the presidential election.” All of these word choices took away the role women played in earning their own right to vote, and negated nearly eighty years of women working diligently to pass the Nineteenth Amendment. There was no mention of the specific details of the woman’s suffrage movement, the speeches, pamphlets, newspapers, campaigns, parades, and pickets organized by the women. Nor was there mention of the intelligence needed to educate and convince other men and women of the need and right of women to vote.

Textbooks written along this line of thought during the 19th century provided a negatively skewed characterization of women who did not and therefore should not speak or give their opinion publically. Indeed it was sometimes believed that women did not aspire to any rights or political roles outside of their homes. 45 Although by the 1920s these views were being challenged and gradually replaced (as is indicated in other textbooks), remnants of this way of characterizing women clearly still remained.

1920s and 30s Introduction to Positive Textbooks
Other textbooks written during the 1920s and 30s contained a decidedly different view of the woman’s suffrage movement and its importance, representing the dichotomy of thought prevalent during the 1920s and 30s when what was acceptable for women was being challenged by the woman’s suffrage movement. Principally among these positive textbooks are

43 Latane, History of the United States, 545.
44 Paxson, A Recent History, 617.
45 Ruth Miller Elson, Guardians of Tradition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 305.
the *History of the American People* written by Beard and Bagley in 1920,\(^4\) *History of the United States* written by Beard and Beard in 1935,\(^4\)\(^7\) and multiple textbooks written by David Saville Muzzey.\(^4\)\(^8\)

Their coverage of the woman’s suffrage movement all included multiple pages in every text. *History of the American People* included eight pages of text about the woman’s suffrage movement in two different sections, along with multiple graphs, pictures and charts.\(^4\)\(^9\) The following section contains several excerpts from these positive textbooks.

**1920s and 30s Textbook Excerpts (Positive)**

*The History of the American People*: Beard and Bagley: 1920

The new movement [woman’s suffrage] gained steadily in numbers and in strength. It won the support of the ablest women in the country; including Margaret Fuller, a well-known journalist, and Lucy Stone, of Oberlin, the first woman college graduate in the United States.\(^5\)\(^0\)

Many earnest and thoughtful women resented these discriminations, and leaders among them began to ask: Why should we not have the right to control our own property and wages? Why should we not have opportunities to obtain even the highest education possible?\(^5\)\(^1\)

---


\(^4\)\(^9\) Beard and Bagley, *History of the American People*, 335-337, 582-58

\(^5\)\(^0\) Beard and Bagley, *The History of the American People*, 336.

\(^5\)\(^1\) Beard and Bagley, *The History of the American People*, 335.
In this campaign [for the right to vote in individual states], women speakers traveled day and night over miles of wild prairie and spoke in depots, barns, mills, churches, and schoolhouses.... While making these great gains suffragists were defeated in several eastern states, Ohio, Michigan, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts.52

_The American People_: David Saville Muzzey: 1933

They [women] resented being classed politically with children, idiots, and criminals in the denial of the vote.53

_A History of Our Country_: David Saville Muzzey: 1937

The final victory for a national woman-suffrage amendment which had been proposed by Susan B. Anthony as early as 1869, was due to the steady campaign waged in the states.54

_Beginner’s History of the United States_: James Woodburn: 1927

For more than fifty years Susan B. Anthony stood by her convictions and never faltered in the cause. She was arrested, tried, and fined for voting in New York in the election of 1872. She was far more intelligent than most voters; she owned property and paid taxes, and she wanted the people to see how unjust

---

52 Beard and Bagley, _The History of the American People_, 583.
53 Muzzey, _The American People_, 563.
the law was. She was not afraid to stand up for her rights in the face of the majority.  

1920s and 30s Coverage, Placement, and Tone (Positive)

The woman’s suffrage movement in these textbooks is located with other reforms occurring during this same time period, many of which were being led by women, such as Jane Addams. This placement in itself lent credence to the movement because it acknowledged that woman’s suffrage was an area that needed change. In addition, coverage of the movement ranged between two and six pages, far more information than the single paragraph included in the more negative textbooks. For example, David Muzzey’s A History of Our Country (1937), included the woman’s suffrage movement in two separate sections of his textbook. He included one section, roughly a page long, on the women’s fight to achieve equal employment with men and the role the right to vote played in this struggle. He also indicated that the notion that “women’s place is in the home” was outdated during this time, and women wanted equal rights with men. This idea was becoming culturally acceptable as women left their homes in record numbers to work at jobs outside the domestic sphere. Muzzey and other authors closely connected women’s rights to gainful employment and their abilities as workers to their success in achieving the vote.

The tone Muzzey, the Beards, and Bagley used was also positive, listing the capabilities of these women and using terms of respect to describe them. They described these women as “thoughtful,” “earnest,” and “able.” The description of Susan B. Anthony standing up for her

---

56Muzzey, A History of our Country, 470.
rights provided a completely different and positive character teacher for students than the one
of women who did not speak up in public. The leaders’ accomplishments were also listed. This
historical narrative was definitely written by someone who respected what the suffragists stood
for and had accomplished.

1920s and 30s Female Agency (Positive)

In addition, these textbooks gave women agency. They described in part the sheer
magnitude of work that the women suffragists undertook, some of the strategies they used,
and the types of activities they engaged in. Their movement was described in positive terms,
and they were given credit for the work they did. The authors wrote about “a steady campaign
waged,” how women “traveled day and night” and how they “spoke in depots, barns, mills,
etc.”57 This record showed that they had earned the right to vote, not that the right was given
them. The amount of time it took and the various struggles they encountered were also
delineated. While the words describing these women were action words, the pictures were
not. They all included the women in ladylike and sedentary poses. The use of women in active
poses in textbook photographs would not begin until the 1940s.

1920s and 30s Textbook Trends and Biases

While these textbooks provided a more accurate portrayal of some aspects of the
woman’s suffrage movement, they along with the more negative textbooks included some early
but persistent biases. All textbooks published during the 1920s and 30s wrote only about the
major leaders of the movement. Some only included one leader, normally Susan B. Anthony.

57 Beard and Bagley, *The History of the American People*, 583.
There was little or no mention of the common women involved in this struggle. History from the bottom up had not yet come into play.

Additionally, none of the textbooks mentioned the strident controversies and arguments between the women within the suffrage movement. The breakup of the woman’s suffrage movement into two groups (namely the American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Woman Suffrage league), the controversy surrounding whether to go for the national or state by state suffrage, and the strategy disagreements with the more militant branch of the woman’s suffrage movement were all completely missing from the narrative. Instead, the woman’s suffrage movement was portrayed as a solidly unified group that only faced opposition from the outside. This outside opposition was muted. There was no mention of the anti-suffrage movement led by other women.

The portrayal of cohesion stemmed in part from the political climate of the time and the opinion of the role that textbooks should fill. During the 1920s and 1930s one goal of textbooks was to create and establish national identity and unity. Textbooks published during the nineteenth century emphasized an “oversimplified focus on national pride,”[^58] and this 100 year trend continued to influence textbooks published in the early 1900s. Women who were picketing with signs that read “Kaiser Wilson” or “How long must women wait for democracy?” did not create a sense of national pride or tie into the notion of a cohesive narrative about the United States. Both positive and negative textbooks downplayed or eliminated controversy within the woman’s suffrage movement in order to bolster the sense of a united America.

[^58]: Elson, Guardians of Tradition, 339.
Therefore women who dared to challenge the status quo were demonized, or their fight was marginalized.

A parallel objective of textbooks was to be a “character teacher”\(^59\) for students. The large number of immigrants who came to America during the early 1900s led political leaders to view textbooks as the unique vehicle through which to educate immigrants in what it meant to be American.\(^60\) Schools, tasked with the “Americanization of newcomers, naturally had to take on the task of defining what ‘an American’ was and was not.”\(^61\) Here again the dichotomy of opinions about the role of women in American society showed itself with two different views about how an American woman should behave.

More positive textbooks advanced the picture of a good citizen as one exemplifying virtues of persistence, intelligence, and hard work. The textbook *Our America: Past and Present*, published in 1937 by authors Daniel Knowlton and Mary Harden, cultivated this idea by placing the woman’s suffrage movement in the section that instructed students on the “rights and responsibilities of an American citizen.”\(^62\) The story of one of the leaders, Susan B. Anthony, was recounted in this section as an encouragement to girls to be determined citizens. The authors included the sentence, “Just one hundred years before this, there was born in a little New England village a Quaker baby, who was to spend the whole of her long life in trying to

\(^{59}\) Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 300.
\(^{60}\) Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 341.
improve the condition of women.”63 This provided motivation for students to work hard to overcome difficulty.

Textbooks with a more negative approach to the woman’s suffrage movement portrayed a different version of what it meant to be a good female citizen of the United States. These textbooks encouraged a more docile woman. Any overtly contentious or political actions by women was phrased in a most negative way. The militant branch of the woman’s suffrage movement was especially scorned. However, all textbook publishers and authors downplayed the controversial aspects of the woman’s suffrage movement, in part to create nice, non-argumentative leaders to operate as good character teachers for students to emulate.

Not only was the woman’s suffrage movement portrayed as a completely homogenous group and its leaders as good citizen character examples, it was also portrayed as a case of a problem already solved. The vote was a problem, but the suffragists had overcome this obstacle and the right to vote would solve all problems.64 Now women only had a bright future to look forward to where everyone would be equal. For example, the last sentence in A First Book in American History read as follows. “The long contest was really almost over. In 1920 the amendment was ratified by enough states to make it the law of the land. From small beginnings had grown a great movement. Out of discouragement and defeat had come the promise of victory.”65 This was too simplistic and naïve a notion, and definitely not the experience of women following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

---

63 Knowlton, Our America Past and Present, 772.
64 Beard and Bagley, The History of the American People, 335.
In his 1995 book, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, James Loewen wrote, “The stories that history textbooks tell are predictable; every problem has been solved or is about to be resolved.”66 This oversimplification of conflict with a readily available, perfect solution negated students’ need to think critically about the woman’s suffrage movement. Loewen suggested that “students should consider gender roles in contemporary society as a means of prompting students to think about what women did and did not achieve in the suffrage movement.”67 Instead, history was served to them in bite-size pieces of information to swallow without thinking. By providing already solved problems, no one would question the unity or perfection of the United States and leaders removed from any taint of controversy could properly train new citizens to value their country without a critical second thought. This trend would run from the 1920s through the 1950s in history textbooks. Not until the political and cultural upheaval of the 1960s would the idea that the United States was a “pure, high minded nation and a model of virtue among sinners”68 begin to be challenged.

**1940s and 50s Introduction of External Pressures**

During the early 1940s, “the textbook market took a sharp rightward turn, and it continued in that direction for the next twenty years.”69 While the 1920s and 30s saw a variety of narratives regarding the woman’s suffrage movement, the trend in the 40s and 50s began to shift towards marketing textbooks to larger and larger audiences and subsequently the narrative reverted to a pallid and fact soaked prose.70 This trend contributed to one

---

increasingly unified and whitewashed narrative of history as textbook publishers increasingly sought to avoid controversial issues and authors. A desire to portray America, including woman’s suffrage, in a more harmonious way prevailed.\textsuperscript{71} One twist on this old problem in textbooks was that during the 1920s and 30s this trend was fueled by the desire for the Americanization of immigrants. However, after 1924 legislation that slowed immigration to a trickle, this process of Americanization shifted to America is Great rhetoric. McCarthyism and the Red Scare led to fear driven self-censorship and a bland narrative. Although the rationale shifted the result of a consensus history was the same, although stronger in the 1940s and 50s. For example, one 1950 textbook asserted that, “In America today, women have gained more equality with men than anywhere else in the world.”\textsuperscript{72} While this was an acknowledgement that things maybe were not perfect, at least America was still the best place for women.

Following World War Two, historiography underwent a series of transformations that would set the stage for a very different narrative of the woman’s suffrage movement in the 1960s and 70s and eventually fueled the history wars of the 1980s and 90s.\textsuperscript{73} History textbooks were beginning to be funneled into two very different narratives. One side emphasized consensus history which minimized conflicts and maximized agreement. Due to external pressures, this consensus history dominated history textbooks during the 1940s and 50s. However, the opposite narrative fought to include conflicts as well as previously sidelined groups of people, such as women, African Americans, and lower class workers.\textsuperscript{74} This version of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{71} Moreau, \textit{Schoolbook Nation}, 253.
\textsuperscript{72} Clyde B. Moore, Helen McCracken Carpenter, Laurence G. Paquin, et al., \textit{Building a Free Nation} (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1950), 437.
\textsuperscript{73} Nash, \textit{History On Trial}, 53.
\textsuperscript{74} Nash, \textit{History On Trial}, 54.
\end{flushleft}
history would dominate history textbooks during the 1960s and 70s. Part of the reason for this shift was that significant numbers of people other than white, upper-class, Protestant, males were becoming historians. The GI Bill among other things encouraged a broader range of Americans to study history, including women, Catholics, Jews, African Americans, and the children of early twentieth century immigrants. The Cold War did not prevent this diversity of people studying history. This would affect the history narrative in later decades.

World War Two, and its aftermath, as well as the Cold War resulted in political and cultural attitudes during the 1940s and 50s that moved authors away from including issues that marred the unity of their historical narrative. Conflicts were not considered to be conducive to textbooks’ goal of creating responsible citizens or national pride. Therefore textbook agents (those who marketed and sold textbooks) who were naturally interested in earning a living, began to market “managed texts” in history. Highly controversial issues were ignored or glossed over to maintain good relations with the general public and not lose sales. This practice lingered until the upheaval of the 1960s and 70s and influenced the depiction of the woman’s suffrage movement.

In general, the portrayal of the woman’s suffrage movement in the 1940s and 50s became more conservative than in the 1920s and 30s, with much of the prose minimizing women’s agency while emphasizing their domestic role. Pressures from WWII, the Cold War, and related issues with McCarthyism, led to an increasing tendency to create consensus history. This resulted in a whitewashed view of the woman’s suffrage movement and muted the strong

---

75 Nash, *History On Trial*, 56.
76 Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation*, 218.
differences of portrayal from the 1920s and 30s leaving less room for controversy and imperfection within textbooks. This new whitewashed portrayal of the woman’s suffrage movement lacked some of the sharp edges found in the language of textbooks published in the 1920s and 30s but favored a condescending and patronizing portrayal.

1940s and 50s Textbook Excerpts

_The Beard’s Basic History of the United States_: Charles and Mary Beard: 1944

Then, after the style of that earlier declaration which had asserted the natural equality and rights of man, there followed a long list of “repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman:” among other things, man has denied to her the right to vote […] To the Declaration of Sentiments the convention added a set of resolutions dealing with these rights and privileges and affirming specifically that “it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.”

Although these new tacticians were unable to move Woodrow Wilson from his rigid opposition to such an amendment during the campaign of 1916, they secured the endorsement of the Republican candidate, Charles E. Hughes, and a helpful support from Theodore Roosevelt. […] With so much power already in the hands of women voters it was difficult for any politician in Washington to treat their demands with historic ridicule or indifference. Indeed President

---

Wilson was finally moved to call upon Congress in September 1918 to pass the suffrage amendment to the Constitution.78

Building A Free Nation: Moore, Carpenter, and Paquin: 1950

For a long time women in the United States were looked upon as being less capable than men. For this reason, they were not permitted to have as many privileges. They were not allowed to vote or to hold public office. Often they were denied legal rights, such as the right to own property in their own name. Few jobs were open to women, for most men agreed that “woman’s place is in the home.” Some women like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton thought differently. [...] The women at this meeting drew up a “Declaration” patterned after the Declaration of Independence. In this paper they listed their complaints. It has taken many years but women have won many of their goals. In 1920 they received the right to vote. Today women have practically the same legal rights as men. [...] Women have also found their life at home more pleasant. Now they are usually treated as equals. [...] In America today, women have gained more equality with men than anywhere else in the world.79

Our Free Nation: McGuire and Portwood: 1950

---

78 Beard and Beard, The Beard’s History, 385.
79 Moore, Carpenter, and Paquin, Building A Free Nation, 436-437.
The demand of women for the right to vote grew stronger. Among the leaders in the movement to secure the vote were Susan B. Anthony, Anna Howard Shaw, and Carrie Chapman Catt. At the end of the nineteenth century **four states had given women the right to vote.** These states were Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and Idaho.\(^{80}\)

No social change of the twentieth century was more marked than was the change in the position of women. They had gained new rights on every front. In 1920 their long fight for the vote ended in victory. The Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, establishing the right of all women over twenty-one years of age in the United States to vote was adopted. [...] Yet in spite of their greatly improved condition some women **were restless and bored.** They had not yet learned to use the greater freedom and leisure that a power age had produced. Women had made great progress in gaining rights. But in some states they did not have full equality with men in matters of property and business. To overcome this difficulty certain women’s groups worked to secure the adoption of an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. **Other groups of women opposed this** because it would end the laws that had been passed for the special protection of women in industry.\(^{81}\)

---


\(^{81}\) McGuire and Portwood, *Our Free Nation*, 689-690.
Woman’s suffrage was a companion reform to prohibition. [...] In 1869
the Territory of Wyoming had conferred the suffrage on women and by 1911 six
western states, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Washington, and California,
had accepted the innovation in toto, while many other states gave women the
right to vote in certain elections. Like the prohibitionists the suffragists hoped to
crown their efforts by obtaining an amendment to the Constitution that would
end the denial of the suffrage to women, and, while adding state after state to
their list of converts, they continued to work on Congress. An outbreak of
“militancy,” borrowed from Great Britain during the World War, may have had
something to do with bringing Congress to yield in 1919. The Nineteenth
Amendment became a part of the Constitution in 1920.82

Because women seemed to be more easily aroused against
intemperance than men, temperance advocates very generally favored the
“emancipation of women,” particularly with respect to conferring upon them the
right to vote. The woman suffrage movement, like the temperance movement,
had attracted attention long before the Civil War, but the attainment of suffrage
by the illiterate freedmen of the South had spurred the women reformers on to
renewed activity. Surely women were as fit to cast their ballot as ex-slaves.
Led by such intrepid workers as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton,

82 John D. Hicks, The American Nation (The University of California, Berkley, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1955),
408.
and joined by a host of professional reformers who before the Civil War had centered their attack upon slavery, the suffragists made a little progress. A few states reluctantly conceded to women the right to vote in school elections, and far out in the West the two territories of Utah and Wyoming established complete political equality. **Eventual victory for the suffragists** was forecast by the increasing freedom with which women attended college, entered such professions as the ministry, the law, and medicine, and organized Women’s Clubs.  

1940s and 50s Coverage, Placement and Tone

The 1940s and 50s saw a general decrease in the coverage of the woman’s suffrage movement. While the Beards’ history textbook and a few others maintained significant levels of detail and coverage, all textbook coverage shrunk, most to a couple of paragraphs. Very few details about the woman’s suffrage movement were included, far fewer than in the positive textbooks from the 1920s and 30s. Instead more generalized language was employed. This decrease in coverage mirrored the attitudes of the time that the suffrage movement no longer occupied as central or current of an idea as it had before. This was partly a result of the new histories of events such as the Great Depression and World War II being added to a finite total number of pages included in textbooks. It also reflected the more conservative attitudes of the 1940s and 50s.

One area of coverage that changed in a positive way in multiple textbooks was the inclusion of pictures of women in active poses, for example suffragists marching in parades,

---

83 Hicks, *The American Nation*, 100.
holding banners, or in cartoons. While there were still plenty of still life headshot pictures of women, there were increasingly more active pictures of women. This was a generally positive progression for the woman’s suffrage narrative, providing an active visual of women, even while the prose tended to regress.

Textbooks published in the 1940s and 50s linked the woman’s suffrage movement more closely with that of prohibition than any other reforms or work. In the 1920s and 30s the woman’s suffrage movement was occasionally linked with reforms but more normally with women increasingly entering the workforce. However, textbooks in the 1940s and 50s emphasized prohibition as the most direct correlation for Americans’ support of the woman’s suffrage movement. For example in Hicks’ textbook he wrote, “Woman’s suffrage was a companion reform to prohibition.” He also wrote, “Because women seemed to be more easily aroused against intemperance than men, temperance advocates very generally favored the “emancipation of women,” particularly with respect to conferring upon them the right to vote.” Not differentiating between these two lessened the importance of the woman’s suffrage movement. Both are reforms, but the suffrage movement pertained to a woman’s standing and importance in society not just an improvement for living. It was also reflective of the attitude of some Americans who wanted women to return home after the end of WWII, and did not want to give working women too prominent of a role in this historical context. By linking the suffrage movement with prohibition instead of public sphere work, conservative authors downplayed women’s role outside of their homes.

84 Hicks, American Nation, 367-368.
85 Hicks, American Nation, 100.
The tone in the 1940s and 50s became more unified and blander across multiple textbooks than it was in the 1920s and 30s. The more overt judgment of the woman’s suffrage that was found when written by people who had recently experienced the struggle was gone. I found that grouping textbooks into a singular dichotomy of those with positive and negative tones as with those published in the 1920s and 30s was no longer relevant. Rather I chose to group textbooks into two more closely related groups, those with a positive tone and substantial coverage or those that seemed to be generally in favor of women voting, but had adopted condescending language that denied female agency and dignity. The more extreme negativity on one side of the spectrum from the 1920s and 30s was gone, replaced by more condescending language.

Multiple textbooks employed this patronizing language. For example in Building A Free Nation, the author wrote, “For a long time women in the United States were looked upon as being less capable than men. For this reason, they were not permitted to have as many privileges. [...] Few jobs were open to women, for most men agreed that “woman’s place is in the home. [...] In this paper (Declaration of Sentiments) they listed their complaints.”86 The choices of words demonstrated a patronizing attitude towards women. The use of the words “For this reason” implied that the attitude of men towards women was reasonable, perhaps outdated now but certainly within the realm of acceptable. In addition, the use of the word “privileges” instead of the word “rights” made it seem that what the women were fighting for

---

was optional. Their demands were trivialized as “complaints” instead of another word that would more accurately reflect the needs of the situation.

In *Our Free Nation*, the authors wrote, “Yet in spite of their greatly improved condition some women were restless and bored. They had not yet learned to use the greater freedom and leisure that a power age had produced.”

The idea that women’s continued struggle for more rights could be classified as a result of their restless boredom, is extremely demeaning and derogatory. This differed from language found in textbooks in the 1920s and 30s that argued that women did not and should not have the right or the ability to vote. Textbooks from the 1940s and 50s were more dismissive. For example, in *Building Our Free Nation*, “Now they [women] are usually treated as equals. [...] and women have practically the same legal rights as men.” It did not say that they were equals but that they were usually treated as equals. Yet it was not the same strident, demeaning language as displayed during the 1920s and 30s, but a more dismissive, superior language.

Other examples of this condescending tone were found in the rationale for connecting woman’s suffrage with prohibition. For instance, “Because women seemed to be more easily aroused against intemperance than men.” This caricature of women implied women were more irrational and less emotionally stable than men. Instead of arguing that women bore the brunt of domestic abuses by intoxicated men, the rationale was based on their emotional state. Hicks’ rationale for giving women the right to vote was: “Surely women were as fit to cast their

---

87 McGuire and Portwood, *Our Free Nation*, 630.
89 Hicks, *The American Nation*, 110.
ballot as ex-slaves.”90 Women’s right to vote came not because of their inherent worth as a human beings or even on their ability to improve the nation, but because they were at least as good as African Americans who could now vote.

While the majority of textbooks followed the above pattern in coverage, placement and tone, the Beards’91 and Muzzey’s92 textbooks were different and far less condescending. The Beards’ text on the woman’s suffrage movement covered seven pages. However, even this was a decrease from the eleven pages found in their textbook in the 1930s. Nonetheless, seven pages by the Beards and three pages by Muzzey was significantly more coverage than other textbooks. Not only was the coverage more extensive but these textbooks also employed a positive, non-sexist tone in their description of the woman’s suffrage movement. They wrote positively about the many contributions women made to the abolitionists’ and revolutionary movements and the selfless ways they improved the lives of many other Americans. For example, the Beards wrote, “From early colonial times women had been active in public as well as private affairs. They had not only carried on domestic industries that fostered national independence; they had edited and published newspapers, written and printed pamphlets, tracts, poems, and plays in support of the Revolution.”93

1940s and 50s Female Agency

Many of the textbooks in the 1940s and 50s also continued to deny women agency. For example, in Our Free Nation the authors wrote, “At the end of the nineteenth century four

93 Beard, The Beards’ Basic History, 216.
states **had given** women the right to vote.”

In *The American Nation* Hicks wrote, “In 1869 the Territory of Wyoming had **conferred** the suffrage on women and by 1911 six western states, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Washington, and California, had accepted the innovation *in toto*, while many other states gave women the right to vote in certain elections.”

The continued use of words such as “conferred” and “had given,” removed female agency from the narrative.

Two popular textbooks continued to grant agency to women during the 1940s and 50s. Both David Muzzey’s *A History of Our Country*, and Charles and Mary Beards’ *The Beard’s Basic History of the United States*, gave women the credit for earning their own right to vote.

Muzzey wrote about the “steady campaign” waged by Susan B. Anthony. The Beards wrote on multiple occasions about “women who had been active in public as well as private life.” “it is the duty of women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.” And “These women and others traveled up and down the land and appealed for the enfranchisement of women [...] They argued their case before members of state legislatures and constitutional conventions, published journals of agitation, wrote articles and letters to the newspapers, issued books on the subject, and spared to labor in their efforts to persuade the hostile or indifferent that their cause was just and vital to the advancement of democracy.”

---

95 Hicks, *The American Nation*, 408.
97 Beard and Beard, *The Beard’s History*, 216.
98 Beard and Beard, *The Beard’s History*, 216.
99 Beard and Beard, *The Beard’s History*, 217
100 Beard and Beard, *The Beard’s History*, 383.
The Beards especially credited women with earning the right to vote, and in no way implied that this vote was conferred upon them or given to them.

1940s and 50s Textbook Trends and Biases

All textbooks continued to struggle with some of the same reoccurring issues as in the 1920s and 30s. The first problematic issue was the ongoing notion that all problems were already resolved. In Building a Free Nation 1950, the authors wrote, “It has taken many years but women have won many of their goals. In 1920 they received the right to vote. Today women have practically the same legal rights as men. […] Women have also found their life at home more pleasant. Now they are usually treated as equals. [...]”\(^{101}\) This type of prose admitted that there was a problem, but that now without much ado the problem has been fixed.

Closely connected to this problem was the one that promoted the idea that there was unity within the ranks of the woman’s suffrage movement. As with textbooks published in the 1920s and 30s none of the textbooks published in the 1940s and 50s mentioned any of the many disagreements between women in the woman’s suffrage movement. For example in The American Way of Life, 1941, there was only one guarded sentence that alluded to any controversy in the women’s movement: “While these women [Stanton and Anthony] demanded educational, economic, and political equality there were others who had their own pet ideas of women’s rights. There was Lucy Stone, for example, who held that women should have the right to keep their maiden names after marriage.”\(^ {102}\) In reality, the controversy

---

101 Moore, Carpenter, and Paquin, Building A Free Nation, 436-437.
between Stone, Anthony, and Stanton was a strong difference in method, not merely a
different emphasis or pet project of Stone’s. The disagreements among these women was
oversimplified or washed out.

As with previous decades of textbooks only the leaders of the woman’s suffrage
mattered. In general, even fewer female leaders were mentioned, often only Susan B. Anthony.

There was still no mention of the role that thousands of common women played.

1960s and 70s Introduction to External Pressures

The 1960s and 70s were characterized by civil unrest and protests. The Civil Rights
Movement dominated this time period with numerous protests, legislation, and conflict led
primarily by the African American community. Anti-war protests fueled by the Vietnam War
further characterized the 60s and 70s as an age of marches and anger against the
establishment. The role of women was also in flux during this time. According to Gerard
Giordano, author of Twentieth-Century Textbook Wars, the turmoil and overthrowing of many
previous cultural norms during the 1960s was evident in the portrayal of the women’s rights
movement in textbooks in the 1960s and 70s. Women were fighting for equality with men,
primarily by pushing to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. The ERA push was at its height
during the mid-1970s. However, textbooks did not start including the ERA until the 1980s.

Textbooks increasingly linked the woman’s suffrage movement to the fight for women’s rights
in the 1960s and 70s. The 1960s and 70s saw textbooks focused on the inclusion and fight for

---

equality of African Americans. Coverage of the woman’s suffrage movement faced a slight decline due to the interests and focus of the nation on the Civil Rights Movement.

The countercultural nature of the 1960s also led to a deconstruction of the historical narrative.\textsuperscript{104} This was often promoted by the increasing diversity of historians. This new scholarship focused on groups other the white Europeans and emphasized a more social history.\textsuperscript{105} This affected the narrative of the woman’s suffrage movement, by eliminating a more European focus (the influence of British suffrage militancy was muted), but not by including non-white groups to the narrative. The inclusion of multi-culturalism did not generally affect the main historical narrative. So while a more diverse group was included in other areas in high school history textbooks, it did not impact the woman’s suffrage narrative. Textbook authors used this approach to try to make many different groups happy. They attempted to have one national narrative with many sidebar inclusions to keep everyone happy and buying their textbooks. Yet, by the 1980s and 90s this approach was increasingly rejected by all groups.\textsuperscript{106}

The preeminence of civil unrest through marches during the 1960s led to a vastly more positive portrayal and focus on this aspect of the woman’s suffrage movement. For example, in \textit{West’s Story of Our Country}, the author included the public shaming of the women who were marching, but also their perseverance in overcoming the shame to achieve the changes they wanted.\textsuperscript{107} Readers and authors of these textbooks were able to relate to public scorn heaped

\begin{footnotes}
\item[104] Nash, \textit{History On Trial}, 76.
\item[105] Nash, \textit{History On Trial}, 86.
\item[106] \textit{History of the Book}, 317.
\item[107] Willis Mason West and Ruth West, \textit{West’s Story of Our Country} (Boston: Ally and Bacon, 1960), 271.
\end{footnotes}
on those marching. In *This is America’s Story*, the authors wrote, “They even paraded before the White House to awaken the public to the need for this reform.”

Textbooks published during the 1920s-50s would normally either not mention the more militant aspects of the woman’s suffrage movement or described it negatively. Changes in the political climate of the 1960s and 70s completely altered this narrative in many of the textbooks.

Textbooks continued to be published by major publishing companies. In addition, Texas and California began to require that all of the schools in their states purchase textbooks from an approved list. This created a textbook world in which a relatively few textbooks dominated the scene. What was included and excluded in these popular textbooks became even more important than when a bigger variety of textbooks existed. Controversy over what the historical narrative was became headline news. Following are excerpts from several of these popular textbooks.

1960s and 70s Textbook Excerpts

*This Is America’s Story*: Wilder, Ludlum, & Brown: 1966

But leaders in the battle for women’s rights had to fight long and hard to win suffrage for all American women. Women wrote newspaper article and gave lectures. *They even paraded before the White House to awaken the*

---


public to the need for this reform. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was added to the Constitution extending to women the right to vote. Women in all parts of the country voted in the election of 1920. Since that time they have taken more and more interest in government. Women today not only vote but hold many offices in our nation, state, and local governments.\textsuperscript{110}

Moreover, women often serve their communities by arousing public interest in political issues and elections. In the 1960s women are taking an even greater part in politics than they have done in the past. Since there are a few million more women of voting age in the United States than there are men, they could decide an election.\textsuperscript{111}

\textit{The Federal Union:} Hicks, Mowry, \& Burke: 1964

And though women failed to win the vote in any state before the Civil War or make much of a dent in the almost totally masculine professions, the feminine reformers did at least plant the seed for more sweeping reforms after the Civil War.

\textit{West’s Story of Our Country:} West: 1960

Women were beginning to ask why they should not have the rights enjoyed by men. They were not allowed to vote. [...] In 1848 the first Women’s Rights Convention was held at Seneca Falls, New York. Some people were shocked; others amused. Absurd cartoons were made about “women’s rights.”

\textsuperscript{110} Wilder, Ludlum, \& Brown, \textit{This Is America’s Story}, 534.
\textsuperscript{111} Wilder, Ludlum, \& Brown, \textit{This Is America’s Story}, 551.
Newspapers mad fun of the “Reign of Petticoats.” Many of the leaders were insulted on the streets. Their meetings were broken up by mobs. But Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and other able women in the country, aided by a few ministers and statesmen, continued to work for justice for women. Leading men also took up the cause of the women. The poets Emerson and Whittier worked for it. Abraham Lincoln urged that all who carried the burdens of the Republic should share in its government, “not excluding the women.”

1960s and 70s Coverage, Placement, and Tone

During the 1960s and 70s coverage of the woman’s suffrage movement ranged from one paragraph to seven pages. While the actual amount of text generally declined slightly compared to the 1940s and 50s, the number of places that female suffrage was referenced expanded. In the 1920s and 30s there was generally one section (place where the woman’s suffrage movement was mentioned) on the movement, in the 1940s and 50s generally two sections, and in the 1960s and 70s an average of at least three separate albeit generally brief sections on the woman’s suffrage movement. The woman’s suffrage movement was slowly being integrated into the national narrative and not just injected as a separate and unrelated event. The woman’s suffrage movement continued to be included with other reforms, voting expansion, and working expansion, but now also with earlier references to expanding territories and later with the then current fight for women’s rights.

112 West and West, West’s Story of Our Country, 270.
The tone of these textbooks became increasingly impartial and unemotional, and employed more neutral language than in previous decades. It became more difficult to ascertain the author’s or publisher’s personal point of view. However, national trends still influenced the narrative. Instead of individual people’s biases influencing the narrative it became more national. One area where the tone of the writers generally changed was in regard to the civil protests and marches executed by the woman. These received much more coverage and far more positive coverage.

The tone also became more hopeful and optimistic. Textbooks generally connected the woman’s suffrage movement with present day advances for women. They were witnessing the changes and advances for African Americans and were hopeful and expectant that women would achieve similar gains. For example, in This Is America’s Story written in 1966 the authors wrote, “Women today not only vote but hold many offices in our nation, state, and local governments. [...] In the 1960s women are taking an even greater part in politics than they have done in the past. Since there were a few million more women of voting age in the United States than there are men, they could decide an election.” In Challenge and Change written in 1977 the most extensive section of the woman’s suffrage movement came in a separate box called Linking the Past with the Present. In this section, the authors wrote,

“The decade of the twenties marked the beginning of a new era in the continuing fight for woman’s rights. Numbers of women had joined the labor force during World War 1, and had proved that they were as able as men in many jobs. And after the war, increasing numbers of women held jobs in

113 Wilder, Ludlum, and Brown, This Is America’s Story, 534, 550.
business and industry. The 1920s also saw women make major gains in political rights. The Nineteenth Amendment which gave women the right to vote was adopted in 1920. In the same year the League of Women Voters was set up to help women take part in politics. And more and more women did so. In the 1970s women’s groups still work for greater economic and political opportunities.”

The hope was that women could continue to change things for the better for themselves because they had already come so far since they won the vote in 1920.

Some textbooks, such as those published by textbook author John D. Hicks, kept the same prose that they had used during previous decades. These still contained sexist language and condescending reasons for giving women the vote. However, the influence of the new wave of feminism still affected them, and they often contained an additional section of coverage or picture. For example, Hick’s kept the identical two sections in the textbooks he authored in the 1930s and 40s. However, in the textbook published in the 1960s and 70s, he also included a picture of suffragists marching and carrying a banner. Underneath the picture, Hicks wrote, “Suffragettes. This unlovely epithet (the women’s banner reads ‘The vote is denied to criminals, lunatics, idiots, and women’) was applied to women who in the Wilson period actively sought the right to vote for members of their sex.’ ‘Feminists’ of the

\[114\] Harold Eibling, Carlton Jackson, and Vito Perrone, Challenge and Change: United States History: The Second Century 2nd ed. (River Forest, Illinois: Laidlaw Brothers, 1977), 236
nineteenth century were somewhat less militant, but no less determined. Victory came in 1920.”¹¹⁵

1960s and 70s Female Agency

Textbooks published in the 1960s and 70s contained a dualistic approach to female agency in the woman’s suffrage movement. Almost all textbooks included multiple statements or sections on the work the suffragists engaged in. They included words like “demanded,” “earned,” and “fought for” the vote. However, many of them still also included words that placed women in a passive role. The vote was “granted” them or “conferred” upon them. While these textbooks struggled to break free from the ongoing external pressures to conform, they were also able to include the active role of women due to other external forces such as an increasingly politically active and vocal female population. This created a new norm for women in textbooks.

1960s and 70s Textbook Trends and Biases

Textbooks published in the 1960s and 70s also began incrementally to include people other than just the leaders of the woman’s suffrage movement. Pictures were one way that this “leaders only” mantra was gently challenged. The pictures generally included some of the common women involved in the struggle. West’s Story of Our Country also included the role that men played. “Leading men also took up the cause of the women. The poets Emerson and Whittier worked for it. Abraham Lincoln urged that all who carried the burdens of the Republic

should share in its government, ‘not excluding the women.’”¹¹⁶ These were the beginnings of a more inclusive historical narrative.

As in earlier portrayals the woman’s suffrage movement continued to be presented as a homogenous group. The 1960s and 1970s did not see the inclusion of the arguments and rifts within the movement itself. However, there was a challenging of the homogeneity of the people of the United States as a whole. The sharp and contentious disagreements between the woman’s suffrage movement and those who opposed it was delineated in detail in several prominent textbooks. In *Your Country’s History*, the authors wrote, “Men and boys ridiculed them. They snatched the banners and signs and tore them. They knocked down the women, dragged them along the sidewalks, kicked them. The pickets were thrown in jail for picketing and for ‘obstructing traffic.’”¹¹⁷ Other textbooks, such as *The Federal Union¹¹⁸* and *The American Nation¹¹⁹* continued to mute even these differences by ignoring them or presenting them in more general ways. Nonetheless this was the most direct attempt to challenge the persistent idea that America was perfectly united. The civil unrest and protests of the 1960s and 70s opened the door for textbooks to challenge that narrative.

**1980s and 90s Introduction to External Pressures**

Textbooks published in the 1980s and 90s were influenced by several major external events, including the biggest recessions since the Great Depression, and Reaganism.

Descriptions of the woman’s suffrage movement were influenced primarily by the rise of the

---

¹¹⁷ Mackey, *Your Country’s History*, 585.
¹¹⁹ Hicks, Mowry, and Burke, *The American Nation*. 
New Right. This conservative turn under President Reagan dominated the political landscape as disaffected liberals and conservatives joined forces to create this New Right. This conservative coalition pushed back against the agendas for women of the 1960s and 70s. Reproductive rights were often at the center of disagreement, but so too were acceptable roles for women. This fight included the intense political and cultural conflict between conservatives headed by Phyllis Schlafly, who pushed for more traditional roles for women, and liberals headed by women such as Gloria Steinman and Betty Friedan, who argued against Schlafly’s traditional model.\textsuperscript{120} This controversy over equality for women was in the foreground for authors and publishers of textbooks and often received preferential (more text) treatment over the fight for woman’s suffrage. Although this battle started in the 1970s it did not start entering textbooks until the 1980s. When it did it often took preeminence over the woman’s suffrage movement.\textsuperscript{121}

Not only did the New Right push for a more conservative narrative, there was also a general desire to strengthen history education and overcome historical illiteracy that was a result (according to some) of an unclear and diverse historical narrative of the 1960s and 70s.\textsuperscript{122} This view of history promoted the idea that the fragmented history that emerged from the cultural upheavals of the 1960s should be replaced by one more traditional model of history. There was also a renewed push to reconnect academics and teachers to help write this new

\textsuperscript{121} Giordano, Twentieth Century Textbook Wars, 91.
\textsuperscript{122} Nash, History On Trial, 98-99.
narrative.\textsuperscript{123} Ironically, both the “cultural left” and the “religious right” opposed the current multi-cultural approach to history, although for very different reasons.\textsuperscript{124}

Politicians also became increasingly involved in what historical narrative should be included in high school history textbooks.\textsuperscript{125} This meant that political pressures was now a preeminent external pressure on the historical narrative. For example, in 1989 a group of historians and teachers attempted to create National Standards for history.\textsuperscript{126} Lynne Cheney, the wife of Vice President Dick Cheney, led a strong attack against the proposed National Standards. There was so much disagreement surrounding the National Standards that eventually instead of being mandates they were suggestions.\textsuperscript{127}

The textbook market continued to be dominated by large publishing companies and state approved adoption lists. The controversy centered on women’s rights led textbook publishers and authors to create textbooks that sent mixed messages. Textbook authors attempted to appease both sides by downplaying controversial aspects of the woman’s suffrage movement and including text that would appease both sides. Textbooks generally tried to avoid anything that would place their textbook in the center of the fight over acceptable roles for women. Such a textbook would hinder sales and decrease the publishers’ profitability.

During the 1980s and 1990s scholars in higher education began to study the history of women in more detail. More monographs about women were published in the 1990s than in

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{123} Nash, History On Trial, 110-111.  \\
\textsuperscript{124} Nord, History of the Book, 318.  \\
\textsuperscript{125} Nash, History On Trial, 127.  \\
\textsuperscript{127} Nash, History On Trial, 150.
\end{flushleft}
all of the previous decades combined.\textsuperscript{128} This increase in readily available knowledge and information about the woman’s suffrage movement led to the inclusion of more historical information in textbooks. This included the use of documents written by women regarding issues such as suffragists’ tactics.\textsuperscript{129} Since these documents were now catalogued and analyzed in monographs, textbook authors could use this new information to add details to the woman’s suffrage narrative in high school history textbooks. Another example of the inclusion of new material were the discussions between Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucrecia Mott after Stanton called for the vote for women at the Seneca Falls Convention.\textsuperscript{130} The fact that history textbook authors knew that Mott was surprised when Stanton called for the vote was a result of the increased scholarship surrounding this issue. These details were a result of the increased study of women in history.

This larger base of knowledge also led to a more accurate portrayal of some aspects of the woman’s suffrage movement, such as the inclusion of non-leaders and men. This increased knowledge did not lead to greater coverage of controversial issues, such as some women’s racist beliefs or the quarrels between leaders, since textbook authors desired to remain neutral preempted this.

The normalization of women in politics in the 1990s resulted in many of these scholarly works focusing on the political aspects of the woman’s suffrage movement. Increased attention to the differing political strategies emerged, with discussions of the American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Woman Suffrage Association, offering a state by state or

\textsuperscript{128} Dubois, \textit{Woman Suffrage & Women’s Rights}, 21.
\textsuperscript{130} Graff, \textit{America}, 286.
federal attack play,¹³¹ and the inclusion of the entirety of the Declaration of Sentiments.¹³² This focus on women in politics during this time period often led to the inclusion of statistics about how many women were currently holding political offices.

Simultaneously, an increased interest in the anti-suffrage movement emerged due to the views of those opposed to the ERA. Terms such as the “domestic” and “feminine” as well as ideas of public and private spheres¹³³ were found in textbooks. These terms demonstrated the cultural and social scholarship on women and the inclusion of the rationale of those opposed to the woman’s suffrage movement. Anti-suffragists’ views and rationale against suffrage were detailed.¹³⁴ Although this trend began in the 1990s, it was textbooks in the 2000s that really began to examine this. Textbook authors were able to include this information because of the scholarly work done by women in higher education.

1980s and 90s Textbook Excerpts

*This is America’s Story:* Wilder, Ludlum, & Brown: 1986

As women reformers worked for one reform or another, they became interested in winning more freedom for themselves and for other women. In 1848, a convention for women’s rights was held at Seneca Falls, New York. The meeting was organized by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The delegates drew up a declaration of rights asking for all the rights and privileges belonging to them as citizens of the United States. Many people thought the Seneca Falls women were wrong to ask for such rights. One newspaper called

the meeting “shocking and unnatural.” American women did not get equal rights as a result of the convention. But more and more women did begin to take part in activities aimed at gaining more rights and opportunities.  

Ever since the 1840s the question of woman’s suffrage (voting rights) had been debated in this country. At first most people- both men and women-agreed that political decisions should be made by men only. As women became more active in community life, however, more people began to think there was no reason to deny women the right to vote. [...] But leaders of the suffrage movement had to fight long and hard to win the vote for all American women. These leaders wrote newspaper articles and gave lectures. They paraded in front of the White House, hoping to win public attention to their cause. 

Rise of the American Nation: Todd & Curti: 1982

Although the progressives did little if anything to secure the vote for blacks, many promoted woman suffrage. By 1900 four states – Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and Idaho- had granted full voting rights to women. Vigorous campaigns by woman suffragists between 1910 and 1914 led seven other states, all west of the Mississippi, to give women the right to vote. Throughout the early 1900s strong opposition existed even within progressive circles to a Constitutional amendment granting women the vote. Woodrow Wilson, the progressive Democrat who was elected President in 1912, opposed such an

136 Wilder, Ludlum, and Brown, This Is America’s Story, 565.
amendment on the grounds that states alone had the power to fix suffrage requirements. In response a group of militants led by the courageous and persistent Alice Paul, organized a demonstration against it Wilson on his inauguration day that ended in a near riot. Other demonstrations bordered on violence when opposition to them mounted. Activist leaders were jailed and fined. Meantime the militants increased pressure on Congress.\textsuperscript{137}

\textit{America: The Glorious Republic: Graff: 1983}

The progressives’ desire to widen the people’s role in politics helped advance the cause of woman’s suffrage. Ever since the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, the question of voting rights for women had been debated. For many years, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, leaders of the National Woman Suffrage Association, carried on the campaign, often in the face of unending opposition. The dam began to break in 1869 when Wyoming Territory gave women the right to vote.\textsuperscript{138}

Suffragists Tactics: Gertrude Foster Brown left a career in music to devote herself to the suffragist cause. As president of the New York State Suffrage Association from 1913 to 1915, she helped plan strategies to convince the public of the injustice done to women by denying them the right to vote. [...] The first parades were small and timid affairs. In May 1911, three thousand women and eighty-nine men were in line. A year later, ten thousand women marched and


\textsuperscript{138} Graff, \textit{America}, 532.
in 1915, forty thousand. Always in New York, women were received with respect. Not so the men sympathizers. Jeers and scurrilous remarks showered on them. The mildest was ‘Go home and wash the dishes’ or ‘Rock the baby’ [...] 

Women from every class and walk of life and from every kind of employment were in line. Women from luxurious homes from the tenement districts, girls from the workshops of the lower East Side, trade union women, teachers and professionals women, young girls and elderly women- all united for a common cause.”

1980s and 90s Coverage, Placement and Tone

Textbooks published during the 1980s and 90s continued to include the woman’s suffrage movement in multiple places throughout the text. The movement continued to be linked with westward expansion, general expansion of voting rights, reforms, and women working. However, the 1980s and 90s saw a decreased amount of coverage on the woman’s suffrage movement. The high was down to 4 pages as opposed to seven during the 1960s and 70s and eleven in the 1920s and 30s. This was largely because the second wave of feminism and the fight for issues like the ERA or Title IX were included. These more recent events covering the rights of women overshadowed the earlier push for suffrage. One area of coverage that saw significant decline from the previous decades was the Declaration of Sentiments. Previously the entire document was often included, now it was normally just mentioned. The emphasis on the political nature of the woman’s suffrage movement was no longer as relevant.

139 Graff, America, 534.
One other area of coverage that saw significant decline was the coverage of the women’s parades and protests. People living in the 1980s and 90s were weary of continued social unrest and more conservative in their response. As a result, textbook authors who still had the goal to have their textbooks be character teachers, downplayed this aspect of the woman’s suffrage movement.

Textbooks increasingly included photos of women in active poses. These included women in parades, holding banners, and giving speeches. Interestingly, this was the first decade to include pictures of women with children. For example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was included holding one of her children. One of the parade photos included a woman pushing a child in a stroller. One could argue that this was a concession to the New Right, which valued the role of women as mothers. Even as the textbooks were including sections on women’s rights, they were also being conciliatory to more conservative external pressures.

The tone of textbooks published in the 1980s and 90s remained muted, a return to language more likely to be found in textbooks from the 1940s and 50s rather than from the 1960s and 70s. For example, when discussing the fact that men controlled the property of women, textbook authors used the term “managed” their property. They also wrote, “Leaders of the National Woman Suffrage Association, carried on the campaign, often in the face of ‘unending opposition.’” Authors mentioned that there was opposition, but by generalizing it and using neutral words authors negated the sharp edges of the movement that

---
140 Wilder, Ludlow, and Brown, This Is America’s Story, 566.
142 Wilder, Ludlow, and Brown, This Is America’s Story, 360.
143 Graff, America: The Glorious Republic, 533.
the details provided.\textsuperscript{144} This was a euphemism for what had actually happened. The importance of the right to vote was also diminished with statements such as “Equally important for many women was the introduction of new labor-saving devices.”\textsuperscript{145} Having equipment that saved time was not the same as having the human right to vote. It would be the equivalent of saying that it was equally important for men to have the use of a tractor as it was for them to be allowed to vote.

There was also a strong push to create consensus history, as always, but in a stronger way that the 1960s and 70s. When writing about the woman’s suffrage movement, the authors had a tendency to imply that everyone agreed about the issues. For example, the author of America’s Glorious Republic wrote, “Women from every class and walk of life and from every kind of employment were in line. Women from luxurious homes from the tenement districts, girls from the workshops of the lower East Side, trade union women, teachers and professionals women, young girls and elderly women- all united for a common cause.”\textsuperscript{146} Women were definitely not all united for one common cause. In This Is America’s Story the authors wrote, “At first most people- both men and women- agreed that political decisions should be made by men only.”\textsuperscript{147} Even though there was a problem the authors implied that most Americans agreed that it was a problem, and they agreed on the solution.

1980s and 90s Female Agency

The 1980s and 90s inconsistently depicted female agency in the woman’s suffrage movement. On some occasions women were granted agency while on others the agency was

\begin{footnotes}
\item[144] Wilder, Ludlow, and Brown, This Is America’s Story, 565.
\item[145] Graff, America: The Glorious Republic, 598.
\item[146] Graff, America: The Glorious Republic,
\item[147] Wilder, Ludlow, and Brown, This Is America’s Story, 565.
\end{footnotes}
decidedly refused them. For example in *American: The Glorious Republic*, Graff wrote “she helped plan strategies to convince the public of the injustice done to women by denying them the right to vote.”¹⁴⁸ This sentence gave credit to the women for planning strategies to win the vote. In another textbook, the authors wrote, “In response a group of militants led by the courageous and persistent Alice Paul, organized a demonstration against Wilson on his inauguration day that ended in a near riot. Other demonstrations bordered on violence when opposition to them mounted. Activist leaders were jailed and fined. Meantime the militants increased pressure on Congress.”¹⁴⁹ Clearly women were the reason for the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

However, in other textbooks, the authors write, “The dam began to break in 1869.”¹⁵⁰ This was passive language the negated female agency. The dam was broken by women’s persistent fight. However, this sentence and others like it relegated women’s actions to the sidelines.

### 1980s and 90s Textbook Trends and Biases

The 1980s and 1990s textbooks were also an example of another new trend that would later be seen as a problem. In an attempt to include women in the historical narrative, authors and publishers began to include them as part of the national narrative, but also increasingly in break-out sections. For example in *This Is America’s Story*, there was a separate page on Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the campaign for suffrage,¹⁵¹ but also multiple inclusions of the woman’s suffrage movement. The 1960s and 1970s started both integrating the woman’s

---

¹⁵¹ Wilder, Ludlow, and Brown, *This Is America’s Story*, 566.
suffrage movement into the national narrative by including it in multiple spaces, but also creating a separate space for women.\textsuperscript{152} This trend had its roots in higher education and the belief that in order to give women the credit they deserved in history it was best to give them a separate space that was not overshadowed by the history of men. However, as this trend progressed, many historians began to push against the idea of a separate women’s history. The beginning of gender studies, which encompassed both men and women, replaced the previous women’s studies which placed women in a separate category. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, historians argued to include women’s history more within the national narrative and less as a separate entity.\textsuperscript{153}

The rationale for giving women the right to vote also shifted. Previously the rationale had ranged from women being as deserving of the vote as freed African American men, to women being the moral leaders in reform movements and especially likely to support prohibition, to the rights they had earned from their working in the public sphere. However, in the 1980s and 90s the right of women to vote was linked to natural human rights and constitutional rights. These textbooks also focused more on the rationale for the opposition to suffrage than the rationale for it. More text space was spent explaining why people opposed the vote than space for women to explain why they deserved the vote.

\textbf{2000s Introduction to External Pressures}

In the 2000s textbooks became significantly larger and more colorful. Publishers tried to make textbooks more engaging and less text-heavy for students to read. These textbooks


\textsuperscript{153} Sheppard, \textit{Cartooning for Suffrage}, 3.
contained far more photos, graphs, and cartoons than any previous textbooks. These textbooks also contained multiple breakout sections. Many events and people related to the woman’s suffrage movement were included in these sections. However, this was more reflective of a general textbook formatting change than a desire to create a separate space for women as it was in the 1980s and 90s. In the 2000s the woman’s suffrage movement was integrated into the main narrative and not relegated to the sidelines.

2000s Textbook Excerpts

*Liberty, Equality, Power: Murrin, Johnson, & McPherson: 2002*

Led by such **venerable figures** as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. **Thousands of young, college-educated women campaigned door-to-door, held impromptu rallies, and pressured state legislators.** [...] The main reason for success in these sparsely populated western states was not egalitarianism but rather the conviction that women’s supposedly gentler and more nurturing nature would tame and civilize the rawness of the frontier. This notion reflected a subtle but important change in the thrust of the suffrage movement. Earlier generations had insisted that women were fundamentally equal to men, but the new suffragists argued that women were different from men. Women, they stressed, possessed a moral sense and nurturing quality that men lacked. [...] In other words the enfranchisement of women would enhance the quality of both public and private life.\(^\text{154}\)

Suffragists were slow to ally themselves with blacks, Asians, and other disenfranchised groups. In fact, many suffragists, especially those in the South and West, vehemently opposed the franchise for Americans of color. [...] Unlike suffrage pioneers of the 1840s and 50s many Progressive Era suffragists were little troubled by radical discrimination and injustice. [...] After a series of setbacks in eastern and Midwestern states, the movement regained momentum under the leadership of the strategically astute Carrie Chapman Catt, who became president of NAWSA in 1915, and successfully coordinated myriad grassroots campaigns. Equally important was Alice Paul, a radical who founded the Congressional Union in 1913 and later renamed it the National Woman’s Party. Paul and her supporters focused their attention on the White House, picketing President Wilson’s home for 24 hours a day, unveiling large posters charging him with abandoning his democratic principles, and daring police to arrest them. Several suffrage demonstrators were jailed, where they continued their protests by going on hunger strikes. [...] Predictions that suffrage for women would radically alter politics turned out to be false. The political system was neither cleansed of corruption, nor did the government rush headlong to address the private needs of women and their families.\footnote{155 Murrin, Johnson, and McPherson, Liberty, Equality, Power, 726.}

American Odyssey: Nash: 1999

Like the fight for Prohibition, women’s struggle for voting rights got its final push from the war experience. Women had begun to pursue to right to
vote in 1848, but the fight died down in the decades before the Progressive Era.

[...] Agnes Geelan, who later became mayor of her town and state senator from North Dakota, remembered: ‘We were allowed to vote in state elections... but there were restrictions. Women could only vote for women candidates. Men could vote for either men or women and I didn’t like that discrimination.\textsuperscript{156}

The right to vote did not grant women full equality. In many states, a woman still could not serve on juries, hold office, enter business, or sign contracts without her husband’s permission.\textsuperscript{157}

Boyer’s The American Nation: Boyer: 2001

Another part of the progressive agenda-the campaign for woman’s suffrage-faced strong opposition. [...] \textbf{When one state senator expressed the belief that the vote would rob women of their beauty and charm, a suffragist reacted angrily.} ‘We have women working in the foundries...Women in the laundries...stand for 13 or 14 hours in the terrible steam and heat with their hands in hot starch. Surely these women won’t lose any more of their beauty and charm by putting a ballot in a ballot box once a year than they are likely to lose standing in foundries or laundries all year.’

In 1914 Alice Paul, a militant young Quaker suffragist, \textbf{broke away from NAWSA. She formed a second organization, the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, which in 1916 became the National Woman’s Party.} The
party adopted a national rather than a state-by-state strategy, focusing on
passing a constitutional amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote.\footnote{Paul Boyer, Boyer’s The American Nation (Austin: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 2001), 591.}

Launching what came to be called Catt’s Winning Plan in 1916, NAWSA
won a string of successes for suffrage at the state level. After the United States
entered World War I in 1917, leaders of the movement—along with millions of
American women—lent strong support to the war effort. Their patriotism helped

\textbf{weaken opposition to woman’s suffrage.} Even President Wilson came out in
support of woman’s suffrage. [...] Labor lawyer Crystal Eastman declared at the
amendments passage, “What we must do is to create conditions of outward
freedom in which a free woman’s soul can be born and grow.” Carrie Chapman
Catt declared, “Now that we have the vote let us remember we are. . . free and
equal citizens. Let us do our part to keep it a true and triumphant democracy.”

She cautioned, however, that the vote was only and “entering wedge.” Women
still had to force their way through the “locked door” of political decision
making.\footnote{Boyer, Boyer’s The American Nation, 592.}

\textbf{2000s Coverage, Placement, and Tone}

Textbooks published during the 2000s dedicated a similar amount of space and number
of references to the woman’s suffrage movement as the previous decades. The woman’s
suffrage movement continued to be linked to the origin of the ERA and prohibition. The 2000s
more strongly linked the woman’s suffrage movement with the Progressive movement as a
whole rather than just prohibition. In general, the early period of the woman’s suffrage movement and the early leadership of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony was replaced or at least equaled by more extensive coverage of the Progressive Era suffragists led by Alice Paul and Carrie Chapman Catt.

For the first time, textbooks also routinely included ordinary women in their narrative and not just the leaders of the movement. This created a more diverse picture of who the suffragists were. This history from the bottom up approach that was prevalent in higher learning in previous decades made its way into textbooks, and resulted in the inclusion of ordinary women in pictures but also the use of their own voices. For example in Boyer’s *American Nation*, the author wrote, “Labor lawyer Crystal Eastman declared at the amendment’s passage, ‘What we must do is to create conditions of outward freedom in which a free woman’s soul can be born and grow.’” Carrie Chapman Catt declared, “Now that we have the vote let us remember we are... free and equal citizens. Let us do our part to keep it a true and triumphant democracy.” The voices of both Crystal Eastman and Carrie Chapman Catt were utilized. Later in the same textbook a lengthy quote by an unnamed suffragist was included. “When one state senator expressed the belief that the vote would rob women of their beauty and charm, a suffragist reacted angrily. ‘We have women working in the foundries...Women in the laundries. stand for 13 or 14 hours in the terrible steam and heat with their hands in hot starch. Surely these women won’t lose any more of their beauty and charm by putting a ballot in a ballot box once a year than they are likely to lose standing in

---

161 Boyer, *Boyer’s The American Nation*, 593.
foundries or laundries all year.’”\textsuperscript{162} This was an acknowledgement that the great heroes approach to telling history eliminated most of the people involved.

The tone of the 2000s remained decidedly bland and neutral. Publishers continued to present students with a carefully neutralized story. However, within this bland narrative there increasingly were mentions of the breaks within the movement. In \textit{Liberty, Equality, Power} the authors wrote about how women suffragists split with some abolitionist over voting rights for African Americans.\textsuperscript{163} However, even while mentioning this split, it did so with expressionless language. In \textit{American Odyssey} the authors wrote, “The two groups (NAWSA and the NWP) argued intensely over tactics. The Woman’s party favored radical actions such as picketing the White House and going on hunger strikes when arrested. In a somewhat less radical way, NAWSA publicized women’s contributions to the war effort, an argument President Wilson used in urging Congress to approve suffrage.”\textsuperscript{164}

\textbf{2000s Female Agency}

Textbooks published in the 2000s provided mixed results for the agency of women in their own story. On the one hand, most publishers included descriptions or pictures of what women accomplished, some in more detail than others. In \textit{America: Pathways to the Future} the authors wrote, “Working women were becoming involved in unions, picketing, and getting arrested. To many of these being denied the right to vote seemed ridiculous.”\textsuperscript{165} However, other textbooks or even different sections of the same textbook gave men agency. For example

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{162} Boyer, \textit{Boyer’s American Nation}, 591.
\item \textsuperscript{163} Murrin, Johnson, and McPherson, \textit{Liberty, Equality, Power}, 724.
\item \textsuperscript{164} Nash, \textit{American Odyssey}, 344-345.
\item \textsuperscript{165} Andrew Cayton, Elisabeth Israels Perry, Linda Reed, et al., \textit{America: Pathways to the Present} (Needham: Pearson Education, 2003), 405.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
in *A History of US*, the authors included the following quote by President Wilson. “The services of women during the supreme crisis have been of the most signal usefulness and distinction.”

President Wilson was at best a reluctant supporter of the woman’s suffrage movement. He blocked the movement on numerous occasions and refused to offer it support until he was forced to. Yet the textbook authors chose to use a quote from him instead of any of the many women who battled for female suffrage. This deprived women of their due credit, and implied a false sense of support on the part of President Wilson. This equivocating back and forth caused confusion within the historical narrative. While authors and publishers were attempting to provide everyone with the history they approved of, they ended up without a clear narrative.

**2000s Textbook Trends and Biases**

While the language remained neutral, textbook authors and publishers also engaged in revisionist history. They reimagined certain aspects of the woman’s suffrage movement that they believe earlier historians portrayed incorrectly. One example of this was the inclusion of women’s history in the national history. Historians no longer wanted a separate history for women, but a fully integrated national history narrative in which women were incorporated and their influence on various aspects of life included. A second example of revisionist history was the reason textbooks gave women the vote in the West. In previous decades it was connected with women’s contributions to the West and a generally egalitarian nature that supposedly dominated the West. However, in the 2000s the rationale was that women had a more gentle nature and were a positive moral influence on the West. Yet another retelling of

---

history was the role that World War One played in granting the women the right to vote.

Previous textbooks generally did not include the role of World War One or write about the negativity that was heaped on women for pushing for suffrage during the war. However, textbooks published in the 2000s, equate suffrage as a “more successful byproduct of World War One.” In *American Odyssey* the authors wrote, “Women’s struggle for the voting rights got its final push from the war experience.” This was a new twist on an old and well established narrative.

This more nuanced version of the woman’s suffrage movement, with the inclusion of ordinary women and the disagreements within the movement, was in large part a result of the work of female historians in uncovering primary source material on the woman’s suffrage movement, analyzing it, and writing about it. These historians laid the groundwork for others to include more detailed information. As this more nuanced work brought to light the uglier side of history, textbook authors and publishers still wanted to maintain the ability to use textbooks as character teachers for students. The information was included but generally in toneless and unemotional ways. Students were still not required to engage with the controversy and make critical thinking decisions. On occasion, textbooks used primary source material to provoke thought without directly saying it. For example in *Liberty, Equality, and Power* students were asked to analyze poems written by female suffragists. The analysis of these documents could lead to critical thinking while also maintaining an unbiased appearance to placate buyers.

---

Some textbooks continued to push the uglier side of history into the public, providing a more accurate and less airbrushed portrait of the suffragists. In the textbook *Liberty, Equality, Power*, which was a decidedly more progressive textbook, the authors wrote, “Suffragists were slow to ally themselves with blacks, Asians, and other disfranchised groups. In fact, many suffragists, especially those in the South and West, vehemently opposed the franchise for Americans of color. They, like their male counterparts, believed that members of these groups lacked moral strength and thus did not deserve the franchise. Unlike the suffrage pioneers of the 1840s and 1850s, many Progressive Era suffragists were little troubled by racial discrimination and injustice.”171 This was a surprisingly candid portrayal of the woman’s suffrage movement for textbooks. A less than perfect side of the suffragists was laid out.

In addition, there was growth over time shown within the movement. It was not the exact same goal for the entire seventy year campaign. Rather, what women were interested in changed. While this was a positive step toward a more accurate depiction of history, *Liberty, Equality, Power* was more of an anomaly than mainstreamed.

**Conclusion**

The changing portrayal of the woman’s suffrage movement in high school history textbooks provides concrete evidence that, despite historians’ desire to offer an objective and unbiased history, the historical narrative was biased and malleable. The external political, cultural, and economic pressures surrounding the writing and publishing of textbooks subtly changed the way the narrative was presented. This is an important lesson to provide for others, so that textbooks produce critical readers.

The coverage of the woman’s suffrage movement has changed, and these changes provide students with some big picture or overarching themes to remember when studying history. In the 1920s and 30s the woman’s suffrage movement received the most coverage that it has to date. With an all-time high of eleven pages of text, the woman’s suffrage movement was a significant event in some history textbooks. However, the 1920s and 30s also had some of the lowest amounts of coverage with a single paragraph or no coverage at all. All of the decades following saw declining coverage of the woman’s suffrage movement. Summarizing these shifts helps us analyze the external pressures affecting the history narrative.

The tone of high school history textbooks in some ways provides us with the clearest view of the changes to interpreting the woman’s suffrage movement. In the 1920s and 1930s there was a wide variety in tone. Some textbooks were extremely positive, while others were decidedly negative. This sharp difference in portrayals was muted in the 1940s and 1950s. The narrative was generally more cohesive and generalized. By the 1960s and 1970s the words used were neutral but the details included were more divisive. More details about the less than perfect actions of suffragists were included. At the same time, the general ending tone was hopeful and positive that women would be able to accomplish all of their goals. The 1980s and 90s tone continued to use neutral language and attempted to include information that would satisfy both conservatives and liberals. This created a somewhat confusing picture of the role of women even within the woman’s suffrage movement. The 2000s reflected an ongoing desire to use language that will satisfy everyone, but actually satisfies no one. This is an area where external pressures continue to exert significant pressure. Students of history should be
cognizant of the way slight wording changes or the inclusion of exclusion of particular events can bias the historical narrative.

Some external pressures have remained consistent from the 1920s until the 2000s. The role of textbooks as character teachers and as a way to promote a positive image of the United States has remained fairly consistent, with only mild deviation in the 1960s and 70s, and hints of it in textbooks published in the 2000s. This affected the interpretations the woman’s suffrage movement by presenting a false picture of the unity and positivity both within and without the party. The woman’s suffrage movement was composed of thousands of different women from different regions, economic backgrounds, religions, races, and cultures. These women certainly did not all act or think alike. Neither did they all share the same opinions as to the best methods to obtain suffrage. Sharp differences existed between suffrage leaders to such an extent that the party eventually broke into two separate parties. Even Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, although always portrayed as a unified twosome, had substantial differences of opinion. However, by studying the ways in which the history narrative changed and why, hopefully a broader, more diverse, and true to historical records picture will emerge; one that includes the fights and disagreements. By studying both the imperfections and strengths of people in history students will engage more and be able to relate to the leaders. Perfect people do not inspire students to struggle to reach their goals and to keep going when they make mistakes.

One area of study that is changing, particularly since the turn of the twenty-first century, and ought to continue to change is the inclusion of people other than leaders in textbooks. While it is important for students to be able to identify the leaders of the woman’s suffrage
movement, it is equally important for them to realize the involvement from the ordinary people just like them. This will encourage students to be involved in their communities and governments and not feel that what they have to contribute is unimportant. This has only begun to be a reality in high school history textbooks after the turn of the twenty-first century.

The inclusion of women into the historical narrative has lagged behind that of some other minority groups. The development of a field of women in history did not get underway until the 1960s and 70s. This was referred to as the “Age of Discovery” for women.\(^\text{172}\) However, it took time to build a foundation of catalogued primary sources and secondary analytical texts of them. The inclusion of any women was considered history from the bottom, and women of color continued to be excluded from most textbooks. However, after the intensive study of women in the late 1900s, a more nuanced and detailed depiction of the woman’s suffrage movement has emerged. Textbook authors are able to locate and read sources by and about women involved in the suffrage movement. In addition, as personal social media leads to an increasing focus on individuals, the history of ordinary people will also continue to increase. It is possible that at some point, there will be so much common history that the historical narrative will face a backlash and textbook authors will retreat to a heroes-centered narrative.

In history textbooks the role that women played within the woman’s suffrage movement has varied from decade to decade. While the initial inclusion of the woman’s suffrage movement was a nod to the importance that women wielded following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, textbook authors have continued to struggle with giving women

\(^{172}\) DuBois, Woman Suffrage, and Women’s Rights, 7-8.
full agency. Descriptions continued to include verbiage such as “were given” and “conferred.”

The voices of men were still included. Despite these negative portrayals female agency is one area that has slowly been on the upswing. The inclusion of pictures almost always show women in active poses. In addition, the language used has increasingly (although not without some setbacks) given women credit for the work and described the work. One way textbooks continue to deny women agency is to generalize their activities to such a degree that it no longer seems like a struggle or accomplishment. Textbook authors continued to struggle with this aspect of female suffrage.

One area of study of the woman’s suffrage movement that will likely see change as the continued result of deconstructionist history is challenging the notion that the woman’s right movement was composed of a first and second wave of feminism. Traditionally, the first wave centered on the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and the second on the passage of the ERA. According to current scholarship, which is reflected in textbooks, women in the 1940s and 50s were not as interested in women’s rights. Current historical scholarship is challenging this view, and it is possible that in the future textbooks will reflect this with one section on women’s rights from Seneca Falls (or earlier) through the future. There may not be two different sections of textbook, representing the first and second wave of feminism.

The most consistent problem that textbooks continue to face is the whitewashing or bland retelling of history. The overarching problems of creating one historical narrative that can be sold to multiple schools and the belief that creating national pride is the job of textbooks

---

continues to lead to this type of history. Perhaps cheaper online books will help ease the
depression of economics and size on textbooks allowing them to include more diversity. The
second problem needs a further education of the public to value of the creation of a realistic
narrative. America can be a great nation while not being a perfect nation. Students should be
confronted with the ways America, its leaders and ordinary people have struggled with complex
issues. Contrary to prevailing belief this could create a stronger younger generation not a
weaker one.

The changing narrative of the woman’s suffrage movement in high school history
textbooks provides concrete evidences of attitudes that are so ingrained in American society
that they find their way into textbooks, despite authors’ attempts to attain objectivity. This
knowledge is the first step to understanding the United States historical narrative and to
making improvements in the future. Students trained to be able to effectively analyze the
historical narrative as well as the way in which biases are perpetuated and to value its diversity
and flaws will be deliberating and informed citizens.
### Appendix

#### List of Analyzed Textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbooks from the 1920s &amp; 30s</th>
<th>Textbooks from the 1940s &amp; 50s</th>
<th>Textbooks from the 1960s &amp; 70s</th>
<th>Textbooks from the 1980s &amp; 90s</th>
<th>Textbook from the 2000s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Our America Past and Present</em>, 1938</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography

Textbook Bibliography


Scribner’s Sons, 1936.


Trends in Women’s History Bibliography


**Textbook Analysis Bibliography**


