

WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS AND THE ORIGINS OF THE SOCIAL STUDIES:  
VOLUNTEERS, PROFESSIONALS, AND THE COMMUNITY CIVICS CURRICULUM,  
1890-1920

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At the 1909 annual meeting of the National Education Association (NEA), speaker Laura Drake Gill declared: "Next to the press, the organized women are often counted the greatest force in the country for the creation of public sentiment." She was speaking as the president of the newest department of the association, the Department of Women's Organizations, which represented nearly one-million clubwomen around the United States and served to coordinate women volunteers' school reform activities. The Department of Women's Organizations overshadowed the rest of the NEA membership, which stood at approximately 5,700, because it was comprised of the members of the major women's national organizations, such as the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, the Council of Jewish Women, and the Southern Association of College Women. Active only during the 1910s, the Department was a vocal presence in the NEA, therefore it raises questions about the role of women volunteers in shaping the school course of study, in particular the making of an early social studies curriculum, community civics.<sup>1</sup>

During that same decade, university men served on the NEA Committee on Social Studies, which was given the charge of developing a new civics program that would prepare young people to apply the social sciences to community problems and to emphasize the notions of social welfare, usefulness, efficiency, and responsibility. The committee prepared two influential social studies curriculum documents, "The Teaching of Community Civics" (1915) and "The Social Studies in Secondary Education" (1916), which later were developed into the prototypical social studies program for middle and secondary schools. David Warren Saxe asserts that community civics, which emphasized that community members should band together to study and solve social issues, became the focus of the early social studies and was well taught in schools into the 1920s.<sup>2</sup> Community civics was different from traditional civics courses because it included younger children and incorporated new educational theories, as it downplayed individual, formal political participation. Julie A. Reuben argues that community civics "attempted to build support for governmental activism by encouraging students to see themselves as members of communities rather than as autonomous individuals." In addition to concerns regarding immigration, according to Reuben, community civics was shaped by changing notions about citizenship and early-twentieth century state building.<sup>3</sup>

Following Reuben's line of thinking on early-twentieth century state building and the proliferation of civic voluntary associations, this article is intended, in part, as a corrective to the existing history of the social studies that utilizes a biographical approach and focuses almost exclusively on the authoritative documents prepared by male professionals.<sup>4</sup> Curriculum historian Herbert Kliebard reminds us that the official documents do not necessarily represent what transpired in classrooms, and that these formal statements are "far more ambitious and grandiose than one could possibly expect in practice."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the goal of this article is to reweave part of the early history of social studies by examining it through a gendered lens, through the possible influences and role played by women in the development and implementation of community civics. Organized laywomen are but one of the overlooked competing interest groups that Kliebard claims "saw in the course of study the vehicle for expression of their ideas and the accomplishment of their purposes."<sup>6</sup> Therefore, this examination of women's groups can inform

the history of social studies by revealing the public's response to, or role in, curriculum change as it can bring a gendered perspective to the existing history.

This article will follow Gerda Lerner's line of thinking in regard to the conceptualization of women in history, since women as a group are not necessarily "visible among those making decisions." The challenge, according to Lerner, is to examine the traditional sources in social studies history for "androcentric bias...[and] seek to counteract such bias by seeking primary sources which provide women's points of view."<sup>7</sup> A readily available collection of primary source documents that speaks to the history of curriculum is found in women's club papers, and in particular the proceedings of the NEA's Department of Women's Organizations (1909-1921).<sup>8</sup> These official documents, reports, and papers represent women volunteers' thinking about ideas similar to those that appear in the community civics sources and suggest possible areas of influence. The intent, however, is not to claim causality. Rather, it is to add another dimension, or context, to the existing history in order to show how difficult it can be to parse the ideas of the wider public from professionals in the history of curriculum.

Civic voluntary associations filled the landscape of American society in the post-bellum years, devising a new kind of citizenship that was carried out through national groups and associations.<sup>9</sup> Especially conspicuous in the early twentieth century, women's federated organizations were the arbiters of social change through their extensive networks and powerful lobbies in Washington before women secured the right to vote.<sup>10</sup> Few social studies scholars have explored these wider influences in the history of social studies. For example, in the 1920s and 1930s, Bessie Louise Pierce documented the impact of citizens' associations on public school history and the civics curriculum in two major books, looking at such organizations as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, and Daughters of the American Revolution.<sup>11</sup> Beyond Pierce's research, little has been done in the history of the social studies to consider the impact of citizens' organizations on the school curriculum.

Therefore, this article adds a leitmotif to the early history of social studies by investigating the parallel work of women's organizations alongside the curriculum called community civics. This study maintains that the development and popularization of this early social studies program was influenced by the Progressive-Era context of social, civic, and political activism, in particular that of women's organizations. By demonstrating how citizens helped shape the social studies curriculum, this article suggests a symbiotic relationship between social studies theorists and women volunteers, and the role volunteers played as lobbyists or promoters of curricular notions.

### Community Civics

After 1900, the purpose of schooling was transformed from an emphasis on the liberal arts to the production of "law-abiding citizens properly trained for efficient functioning in their destined social roles," as the school curriculum was remade around the new functional emphasis.<sup>12</sup> This major shift was a result of a confluence of events, which included industrialization, immigration, and urbanization, as well as concerns over child labor and compulsory school attendance. Progressives, such as John Dewey, promoted the notion that education should be geared to the present—not some future time—and that schools and communities should be more closely linked. He argued, "preparation for citizenship shows precisely what I have in mind by the difference between the school as an isolated thing, related to the state alone, and the school as a thoroly [sic] socialized affair in contact at all points with the flow of community life.... The content of the term citizenship is broadening; it is coming to mean all the relationships of sorts that are involved in membership of a community."<sup>13</sup>

Building on progressive notions of education as social, and citizenship as membership in a community, leading educators in the early-twentieth century created a new subject in the curriculum that would reflect these goals. In particular, educational leaders through the NEA constructed an innovative area of curriculum, the social studies, that combined the social sciences and history toward practical ends. Between 1890 and 1920, various professional committees, organized by the NEA and the American Historical Association (AHA), deliberated the content of the history and civics curriculum for youth. This new subject area "emerged from discussions in the 1890s and 1900s about the need to improve and expand citizenship education in the schools in order to help purify American politics and solve social problems."<sup>14</sup>

In 1912, the NEA Committee on Social Sciences was formed as a subgroup of the Committee to Reorganize Secondary School Studies. It was renamed the Committee on Social Studies and worked over the next several years to compose the central tenets of the field. By 1915, the foundation of the social studies program was titled “community civics” by the NEA Committee on Social Studies, under the leadership of Arthur William Dunn. Like many progressives of this era, Dunn and the other committee members were intimately connected to community reform organizations that helped shape their thinking of the community civics program and social studies.<sup>15</sup> Community civics was “intended to acquaint pupils with the civic condition of their own community,” and in conceptualizing citizenship, it went beyond voting and obeying the law to emphasizing community action.<sup>16</sup>

Community civics emphasized that the good citizen “habitually conducts himself with proper regard for the welfare of the communities of which he is a member.”<sup>17</sup> Following this definition, the committee outlined four stages of citizenship development. The first was home education, with the goal of cultivating proper parent education for the development of good citizenship. Next was early education (ages six to twelve years), which was to focus on the interdependence of community members, rather than the cooperation of organized agencies. During this stage, in particular, the school was to “interpret to the child the community nature of the home.” In other words, students learned it was their responsibility to cooperate with home and school.<sup>18</sup> Following this stage, for twelve to fifteen year olds, community civics was to emphasize the wider circle of human relationship that would cultivate proper social thought, social feeling, and social action. Vocations were to be highlighted during these early years of adolescence, to show the students the value of such occupations as a condition of citizenship. Also, community study should be undertaken to cultivate a spirit of agency in students of this age. Finally, for fifteen to eighteen year olds, civic education was designed to include “courses in history and elementary economics, culminating in an advanced course in civics.”<sup>19</sup>

The documents of the Committee on Social Studies were prepared during the third decade that the women’s club movement (1890-1920) was in full force. Several parallels may be found between clubwomen’s reform activities and the definition of community civics as recorded by the Social Studies Committee, which suggest areas of influence. In particular, the first three phases of the community civics curriculum reflect women’s clubs’ major areas of interest during the Progressive Era: the emphasis on the education of young children in the home and parent education, the promotion of progressive pedagogy and home-school cooperation, and the dedication to community welfare. First, women’s clubs were largely responsible for drawing attention to the education of young children through their widespread creation of kindergartens at the turn of the twentieth century. An important part of the kindergarten program, mother’s clubs, emphasized kindergarten ideology that emphasized parent education and a closer connection between home and school. Second, this closer connection between home and school was forged in large part by women’s associations. Most notably, the National Parent-Teacher’s Association, (PTA) was founded in the Progressive Era and encouraged local schools to organize home-school groups around the country in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Finally, women’s organizations were active during this era in community and school improvement. They carried out a large measure of municipal and legislative reforms designed to implement health initiatives, protect the home and family, and promote the well-being of society.

### Home Education and Citizenship for Young Children

The emphasis of the community civics curriculum on young children and home education reflects the ideals of the women’s club movement of the turn of the twentieth century. The relationship between women volunteers and educational reform was strong. As observed by a club leader in 1897: “The latter part of the nineteenth century has been distinguished by two movements: one, popular education; the other, the woman movement. In many ways the two are interdependent, for with the entrance of woman into the educational field the cause of primary education has become paramount.”<sup>20</sup> It was at this conference that General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) president Ellen M. Henrotin suggested the NEA and women’s clubs combine forces to secure “for the public school the very best that can be obtained.”<sup>21</sup>

The catalyst for women's emphasis on parent education and the education of young children was their maternalist ideology, which Molly Ladd-Taylor maintains was "a uniquely feminine value system based on care and nurturance...[to share] responsibility for all the world's children."<sup>22</sup> Maternalist ideology had a strong civic component, which was based on a belief in white women's capacity—whether they were mothers or not—to nurture children as well as serve the nation by raising citizens.<sup>23</sup> Yet, civic motherhood was not solely the purview of white women for, as Sheila M. Rothman argues, civic motherhood was embraced by women of color and women of the lower social classes, who sought to make a better life for their children and "raise the quality of the citizenry of the nation."<sup>24</sup>

One of the major white women's organizations of the late nineteenth century, the GFWC, was founded in 1890 to unite the many grassroots women's clubs around the United States. The civic education of youth was a central interest of the early GFWC, and as early as 1893 the Federation formalized its stance on public education, which included support for compulsory education, a differentiated curriculum, and a greater role of the federal government in education.<sup>25</sup> At its annual meeting in 1897, the GFWC resolved to "emphasize systematic instruction in ethics in the public-school curriculum" in order to prepare future citizens.<sup>26</sup> By 1900, the GFWC had begun to support measures to include civics instruction in schools and to educate children for patriotism through leagues of good citizenship among youth.<sup>27</sup>

The association most explicit in its adherence to civic motherhood ideology, the National Congress of Mothers (NCM), founded in 1897, based its program on civic and social betterment. The Declaration of Principles of the Mothers' Congress in 1897 asserted that it was the special responsibility of mothers to "inculcate love of humanity and love of country" in children.<sup>28</sup> From its inception, the NCM emphasized the public importance of childrearing, where the woman's influence in the home continued the social reproduction of established norms and expectations.<sup>29</sup>

In the 1890s, the GFWC, NCM, and other women's associations promoted the kindergarten idea as a way to prevent society's ills. The kindergarten was a favorite reform effort of women's voluntary associations because of its emphasis on education for motherhood, as well as its accent on nurturing the development of young children. In 1895, a speaker at the Mothers' Meetings at the NEA reminded the audience that the kindergarten's emphasis on bringing into the home the "spirit of song, the love of nature, and the love of God...constitute an excellent platform for citizenship."<sup>30</sup> Likewise, the emphasis on parent education, or as the clubwomen called it, a "trained motherhood," was viewed as a critical component of home and community life.<sup>31</sup>

The community civics program's first stage of citizenship development, which targeted home education for children not yet in school and proper parent education, embodies the kindergarten ideals of the early twentieth century. For example, the favoring of prevention over reform, one of the key motives for kindergarten education, is a recurring theme in Arthur W. Dunn's text, *The Community and the Citizen*: "It is much better...to prevent wretched home conditions from gaining a foothold in the community than to have to correct them after they have appeared."<sup>32</sup>

Women volunteers outlined a civic education model for school-aged children by proposing an approach that emphasized community reform and responsibility. In a book published in 1905, NCM president Alice M. Birney suggested that the preparation of girls for citizenship necessitated the perpetuation of civic motherhood, as girls were to be trained as future wives and mothers. In contrast, the civic education of boys did not emphasize the parenting role, nor did it rest solely on formal political participation or Constitutional rights. Instead, Birney defined citizenship expectations according to the activities undertaken by women's associations during this era. She advised that a boy

should be trained to feel a sense of duty toward the community in which he lives, and an active interest in all that concerns his welfare. The boy who can be roused to righteous indignation over defective or insufficient water supply, bad pavements, poorly lighted streets, and other municipal discomforts and menaces to health, will, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, be a public-spirited, useful citizen when he reaches manhood.<sup>33</sup>

The definition of civic education that appears in the NEA's 1915 document "The Teaching of Community Civics" reflects similar themes as this explication by Birney, including gender-differentiated roles in teaching civics. Furthermore, Dunn's text asserts that men who are good husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers will likely make good citizens. According to Dunn, women have a special role in civic

education of all members of the household “because their influence is so great in molding the character of the men.”<sup>34</sup> Dunn believed the foundation of community betterment to be the home because of the role it played in raising individual children and the “services [it renders] to the community as a whole.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, social studies men and volunteer women were of the same mind when it came to the need for cooperation between home and school, a common feature of the kindergarten movement, progressive education, and community civics. As women were educated for motherhood, the better home life would be, and the better school, community, and society would become.

### Progressive Pedagogy and Home-School Cooperation

The close relationship between women volunteers and professional educators in the kindergarten movement in the 1890s opened the door for laywomen to have a voice in educational matters and to work with professionals in school reform efforts. Between 1890 and 1907, women’s club leaders spoke regularly at NEA annual meetings, primarily through the Kindergarten Department, reporting on their school reform endeavors that included health initiatives, moral education, and the need for cooperation between home and school. In 1897, GFWC president Ellen Henrotin spoke at an NEA Kindergarten Department meeting on “The Cooperation of Woman’s Clubs in the Public Schools.” In discussing the work of state associations, she noted that similar reforms were being undertaken around the nation as the federated system of women’s clubs allowed for the rapid dissemination of ideas. She told the women attendees that the relationship between volunteers and professionals was symbiotic: “They need you, your practical experience, your unselfish devotion, your patience, your exact knowledge; and you need them, their influence on public opinion, their co-operation with you both in the schoolroom and in the home.”<sup>36</sup>

Henrotin encouraged women in home-school and parent-teacher groups to continue to gather data on school and community needs that they could later act upon.<sup>37</sup> As early as 1898, NEA speaker Margaret J. Evans claimed that more than 160,000 clubwomen were surveying the needs of local schools.<sup>38</sup> Similar activities were found in the community civics program, in which students were to be taught to “visit in person and study at close range the vital elements of their city, village, or rural area. Personal visitation and first-hand information is a distinctive feature of the course.”<sup>39</sup> In the interest of gathering information and seeking a course of action, Dunn’s community civics text presents many activities that required students to survey local communities for areas of improvement. For example, he suggests “Let each pupil report a plan to improve the appearance of his own yard. Begin a systematic movement to put these plans into effect.”<sup>40</sup>

Henrotin and other women volunteers were concerned with two interrelated progressive educational ideas in regard to citizenship: teaching ethics and manual training. In 1898, Margaret J. Evans addressed the NEA attendees in the Kindergarten Department by discussing women volunteers’ civic and educational reform work in California, Georgia, and Missouri, commenting that through these efforts, the next generation will have “better notions of civic cleanliness.”<sup>41</sup> After reviewing a long list of accomplishments, Evans turned to the important topic of moral education and the school curriculum and emphasized the important role of progressive pedagogy:

These are the burning educational questions discussed in the women’s clubs. They appreciate the difficulty of reconciling the schools of philosophy which differ on the basis of morality.... It is evident that preaching and the tedious repetition of moral maxims will avail little. The instruction must manifestly be concrete and by illustrative examples adapted to the age and experience of the pupil.

The clubs are asking: Is it too much to hope that this National Educational Association may give due attention and thought to this, the most important subject possible for consideration? Is it too much to hope for a special committee upon it? It is surely as pressing as any subject which has come before committees of ten or fifteen.<sup>42</sup>

Referring to the NEA committees that were pivotal in the curriculum changes of that era, Evans reveals clubwomen’s interest in the decisions made by educational professionals in regard to shaping the schools for a new century. Women volunteers endeavored to influence the turn of events as best they

could, and based this influence on civic motherhood and the notion that women knew what was best for the young in matters of morality and character education.

Yet, the women volunteers also respected the professional role of the educator while they promoted hands-on learning. While they pushed for curriculum reform, women's club leaders also instructed volunteers in home-school groups to refrain from suggesting any particular program or course of study, largely out of respect for teachers, the majority of whom were women and members of clubs themselves.<sup>43</sup> Club leaders explained to their members, "While we have a right to say to the professional educators of the Nation, 'You must give our children the training which will make them efficient and reliable men and women and good citizens,' we must remember that we have not the right to say by what text books and by what methods they shall do it. That is a professional matter and must be left to the educators themselves."<sup>44</sup> This notion of respect for professionals appears later in community civics courses that were geared to teach students to defer to expert opinion on social and political issues.<sup>45</sup>

The women's organizations of this era were independent. As major national associations that undertook far-reaching civic and educational reform work, they were led by women, staffed by women, and the membership was almost exclusively female.<sup>46</sup> However, to the officers of these groups, their representation through an NEA department legitimated their efforts. By 1907, women's clubs had become such a presence in public educational reform that they held a meeting with NEA officers to discuss the possibility of forming their own department to consolidate the duplication of efforts around the country. The focus of the department was to coordinate the relationship between the educator and citizen and to "fight for better citizenship."<sup>47</sup> With their petition granted, speaker Helen Grenfell informed NEA leaders of woman's special influence: "Since the masculine mind is proverbially the one to solve great problems, it is not surprising that minor details of school economy have been left for the feminine mind to grapple with."<sup>48</sup> Grenfell highlighted women's penchant for progressive approaches to teaching: "Is it any wonder that women have always taken more kindly to the kindergarten idea than men? Their whole brief experience has been on the approved Froebel doctrine; they have 'learned by doing,' and while their educational ideals may not have been so high as those of the world's great savants, they have been broader.... The truly educated child is practical, is adapted to his surroundings."<sup>49</sup> Grenfell believed women volunteers to be the "natural allies of the professional educator."<sup>50</sup> The cooperation theme continued to the late 1910s, when social studies leader Harold Rugg presented a paper to the Department of Women's Organizations on "Cooperation between Boards of Education and the Public."<sup>51</sup>

Jonathan Zimmerman argues that national associations were successful in replacing traditional academic content with citizenship and a curricular focus on relevance in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>52</sup> Women's organizations were prominent among these groups to promote the relevant curriculum in the early years of the century. The reports of the Department of Women's Organizations of the 1910s focus on the fact that clubwomen were not entirely pleased with schools "old methods" and that women had something to offer in regard to teaching patriotism and citizenship. One club leader remarked, "We all learn by concrete lessons, and the giving of medals for essays on patriotic subjects, the presentation with ceremony of flags to our public schools, make an impression more lasting than the learning of pages of written history."<sup>53</sup> Clubwomen believed their organizations had a special role to play in citizenship because of their expertise derived from their "apprenticeship in public work," which was undertaken for the common good and the welfare of the community, not for individual satisfaction.<sup>54</sup> The same notion appears in community civics documents, as Dunn points out in his definition of good citizenship as "performing well one's part as a member of the community."<sup>55</sup>

### Community Welfare

Women's associations, according to Anne Firor Scott, are a central feature of the social and political history of the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>56</sup> They were especially effective in the push for social welfare programs directed at mothers and children, such as mothers' pensions and the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Act.<sup>57</sup> Yet we cannot overlook public education as the focus of women's reform activities. Women volunteers, seeing an opportunity to cure society's ills by reaching the young through the public schools, built schoolhouses and refurbished them, created libraries and playgrounds,

and instituted a variety of health initiatives, such as nurses and school lunches.<sup>58</sup> Professionals and volunteers were often inspired by the same books. For example, Jacob Riis's *Children of the Poor* is cited by NCM founder Alice M. Birney as part of the inspiration to her work and it appears as a suggested reading in Dunn's references in *The Community and the Citizen*.<sup>59</sup> Mrs. O. Shepard Barnum, speaking at the NEA annual meeting in 1908, quotes Jacob Riis as she claims "in some communities the women's clubs represent the only moral force."<sup>60</sup>

Through the Department of Women's Organizations the undertakings of women volunteers were made apparent to the education professionals of the NEA. Women volunteers let all know of the far-reaching influence of their network. Mrs. O. Shepard Barnum, a club leader and teacher at the Comstock School in Los Angeles, explained that "[Women's] organizations, comprising 900,000 members, are compact, with national, state, district, and city sub-organizations. They have their standing committees and receive impulse and instruction quickly and systematically from center to circumference."<sup>61</sup> By 1909, twenty-five states had "fully organized committees" to discharge the duties of the Department.<sup>62</sup> Thus, women's associations worked to spread progressive educational reforms throughout the United States, including those ideals of the new curriculum. Barnum spoke for the clubwomen when she announced that they could "greatly increase the speed with which the progressive movement passes from the NEA mountain-top to the valley and plains."<sup>63</sup>

The central focus of women's associations during this time was community reform and welfare. Perhaps most importantly, they institutionalized various curricular programs and social services. William J. Reese explains that club women were involved in extensive efforts to promote various social service innovations in public education—including vacation schools and domestic science and manual training programs—because they saw schools as an extension of the home.<sup>64</sup> During the years the Department of Women's Organizations existed, reports of community welfare work were a consistent feature of its proceedings. This work became so extensive that by 1912, leaders of the Department declared: "It has proven impossible this year to incorporate or even to indicate in this summary all the many and full reports received."<sup>65</sup> These efforts were well known to the other members of the NEA, not only through their affiliation in the organization, but also through the occasional joint meeting. Most notably, at the 1914 annual meeting, the Department of Secondary Education met with the women's organization representatives.<sup>66</sup>

Committee on the Social Studies' writings on community welfare in the community civics program appear to codify the tangible work of women's municipal reforms. For example, women's endorsement of pure milk availability and curbing the spread of disease and infection in regard to drinking water—favored health issues of women's clubs beginning in the late 1880s—later appeared in the community civics curriculum. The report on community civics outlined the following hygiene example:

For example, pupils can...help to prevent the spread of disease by using individual drinking cups and by cultivating a sentiment at home against contaminating the sources of water supply.... It is hardly appropriate for a child to reprove the milkman for carelessness in handling milk, but he may exert influence in securing proper care of milk and milk bottles in the home.<sup>67</sup>

Dunn's important civics text contains example after example of community welfare activities for students to carry out, from determining the condition of streets, lawns, and yards and suggesting improvements to exploring the benefits of owning versus renting property.<sup>68</sup> For clubwomen, as for the community civics program, the goal of education was moral suasion, for with the "new civics, behavior became more important than political principle." Therefore, through its emphasis on helping others, community civics became a kind of moral education in the public schools.<sup>69</sup>

By 1918, a strong, coordinated relationship had been forged between women's organizations and professional educators, with women volunteers following the professionals' lead. The Department of Patrons annual report reveals that as a result of the war "[volunteer] women are closely in touch with state departments of public instruction and with state university extension departments, so that what they do has local significance and is well directed."<sup>70</sup> The Social Studies Committee completed its first series of documents by the time the United States entered World War I, among the most notable being the Cardinal Principles Report of 1918. The Cardinal Principles of Education—health, command of

fundamental processes, vocation, worthy use of leisure time, worthy home membership, citizenship, and ethical character—were a later iteration of the Social Studies Committee’s Eleven Elements of Welfare and promoted by the PTA to its growing membership.<sup>71</sup> Around the same time, the NEA transformed itself into a modernized organization, with its membership growing to over 200,000 in 1930.<sup>72</sup> The strength of the NEA and its increased emphasis on professionalism meant the dissolution of the Department of Women’s Organizations, since lay members did not fit the restructured organization. Reports of the Department of Patrons no longer appear after 1921. Likewise, social and political changes in the 1920s, not the least of which were the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and the Red Scare, changed the nature of women’s volunteer work in public education. With the exception of the PTA, women’s associations after the 1920s retreated from public school activities. From this point on, the PTA concentrated its energies on parent-teacher cooperation and fund-raising events, while it embraced educational programs such as the Americanization of foreigners and the eradication of juvenile delinquency.

### Conclusion

Women’s voluntary associations, while outside of the formal discussions and decision-making power of the NEA curriculum committees, had fashioned their own version of citizenship education and community civics beginning in the 1890s. Because women did not have suffrage, they found other ways to make social and political change based on their maternalist belief in civic motherhood. They understood themselves as not having political power, yet were aware of their ability to sway public opinion and to make far-reaching social change through their belief that the “hands that rock the cradle [have] been enforced, in order to educate the cradled child, to rock also the political machine.”<sup>73</sup> Operating in dissimilar ways from men’s associations because of their disenfranchisement, clubwomen tended to favor a curriculum through which social issues might be addressed and social ills ameliorated. For women’s organizations, involvement in the local community was the pinnacle of citizenship.

But where does the stream of influence from women’s associations to the NEA Committee on Social Studies begin and end? Although it is difficult to pin down direct causal links, this study has attempted to trace the areas of influence from women volunteers’ work and writings to the social studies program of the 1910s, within the context of Progressive-Era reform work. Direct influence aside, the Progressive-Era women’s club movement provides an important context to the development of the social studies and its first program, community civics. Ideas about the new curriculum were not forged solely in the confines of intellectual discussions among male professionals, but were inspired in part by the day-to-day community and educational reform activities of women volunteers. For the Social Studies Committee, their most readily available incarnation of the community civics curriculum was found in women’s public reform activities. The community civics program embodied the ideals of women’s voluntary reform efforts, including attention to young children’s civic growth and development, the emphasis on progressive pedagogy, and a valuing of community welfare. In turn, women’s organizations promoted the ideas and ideals of the nascent field of social studies because it reflected their own values regarding political participation, civic responsibility, and community reform.

The role of citizens and volunteers cannot be effaced from the history of the development of the social studies curriculum; citizens and volunteers have had a stake in the subject area that most directly addresses their participation in a democracy. Moreover, this study has implications for social studies researchers; in order to work toward a fuller history of social and civic education, researchers need to pay special attention to citizens’ reaction, contribution, disagreement, and reworking of the social education curriculum, both within and outside of schools. These patterns in the history of the social studies curriculum must be understood as more than what is created by professional educators; it is, as Herbert Kliebard posits, the result of the interplay of social forces and differing opinions over what makes for an appropriate education in a democracy.<sup>74</sup> The history of social studies to date has tended to focus on the official leaders of the National Council of Social Studies, social studies theorists, and textbook authors. This history is greatly enriched with an understanding of how nonprofessionals, laypersons, veterans, mothers, fathers, citizens, and volunteers reacted and responded to the purposes put forth by these leaders.



## NOTES

1. Laura Drake Gill, "The Scope of the Department of Women's Organizations," National Education Association, *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses*, 1909 (Chicago, 1909), 74; "Membership Education of the National Education Association," National Education Association, *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses*, 1900 (Chicago, 1900), 4. (Hereafter referred to as *NEA Proceedings* with the corresponding year.)

2. David Warren Saxe, *Social Studies in Schools: A History of the Early Years* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 1, 16, 144-47. Saxe explains that the popularity of social studies, however, "did not rise appreciably until the decades of the 1920s and into the 30s," 16. See also Saxe, *Social Studies in Schools*, 19, 153-54 and Sidney Cecil Silverston, "Community Civics: Education for Social Efficiency" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1972).

3. Julie A. Reuben, "Beyond Politics: Community Civics and the Redefinition of Citizenship in the Progressive Era," *History of Education Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1997): 400-01. The immigration interpretation is a popular one among curriculum historians, and Reuben rightly challenges it by linking the development of community civics to wider trends in civic participation and what it meant to be a citizen. However, as I will demonstrate, this new approach was not "apolitical" as Reuben asserts, because it appears to have codified women's grassroots political activism in the early decades of the twentieth century. For a discussion of women's political activism throughout United States history, see Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984): 620-47. For an examination of grassroots activism in education, see William J. Reese, *Power and Promise of School Reform: Grassroots Movements During the Progressive Era*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002).

4. For example, see N. Ray Hiner, "Professions in Process: Changing Relations Between Historians and Educators, 1896-1911," *History of Education Quarterly* (Spring 1972): 34-56; Saxe, *Social Studies in Schools*; Michael Whelan, "Social Studies for Social Reform: Charles Beard's Vision of History and Social Studies Education," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 25, no. 3 (1997): 288-315. Some of the research has examined the role of women social studies educators, yet still takes the perspective of the professional. See, for example, Murry A. Nelson, "Emma Willard: Pioneer in Social Studies Education," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 15, no. 4 (1987): 245-56; Margaret Smith Crocco and O.L. Davis, Jr., eds., "*Bending the Future to Their Will*," *Civic Women, Social Education, and Democracy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); and Margaret Smith Crocco and O.L. Davis, Jr., eds., *Building a Legacy: Women in Social Education 1784-1984* (Silver Springs, Md.: National Council of the Social Studies, 2002).

5. Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958* (New York: Routledge, 1995), xiv.

6. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, xv. The competing interest groups that Kliebard is referring to are the various committees of the NEA and other leading male educators of the times. He established a framework of humanists, developmentalists, social efficiency experts, and social meliorists that is still widely applied. Elsewhere I argue that women's groups cut across these four categories. See Christine Woyshner, "Mothering and Moralism during the Progressive Era: How Women's Associations Reinterpreted Science to Shape the School Curriculum" (unpublished paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, April 2003).

7. Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York: Oxford University Press), 170, 172, 174.

8. The Department of Women's Organizations of the NEA was comprised of members of the GFWC, NCM, the Council of Jewish Women, the Southern Association of College Women, the Association of Collegiate Alumnae, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. It met for the first time in 1908, and two years later the name was changed to the Department of School Patrons, though its gender representation changed little. It was still made up of the same seven women's associations.

9. The research on voluntary organizations is extensive, and can be said to have begun with Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* in the 1830s. For a recent collection that explores this subject, see Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, eds., *Civic Engagement in American Democracy* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

10. This research, too, is extensive. See, for example, Karen Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980); Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Anne Meis Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African American Women's Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

11. Bessie Louise Pierce, *Public Opinion and the Teaching of History in the United States* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926) and *Citizens' Organizations and the Civic Training of Youth* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), vii. Pierce's studies focused on those groups with large and influential memberships.
12. Herbert M. Kliebard, *Forging the American Curriculum: Essays in Curriculum History and Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 21.
13. John Dewey, "School as Social Center," *NEA Proceedings*, 1902, 374-75.
14. Reuben, "Beyond Politics," 401.
15. Reuben, "Beyond Politics," 402.
16. "Statement of Chairman of the [NEA] Committee on Social Studies," 1913, reprinted in Saxe, *Social Studies in Schools*, 183. (All references to the NEA social studies committee reports in this article rely on the reprinted versions of these reports in Saxe.) See also Reuben, 403.
17. "The Teaching of Community Civics," 1915, reprinted in Saxe, *Social Studies in Schools*, 188.
18. Reuben, 412.
19. "The Teaching of Community Civics," 1915, reprinted in Saxe, *Social Studies in Schools*, 189-90.
20. Mrs. Ellen M. Henrotin, "The Co-Operation of Woman's Clubs in the Public Schools," *NEA Proceedings*, 1897, 73.
21. Henrotin, "The Co-Operation of Woman's Clubs in the Public Schools," 80.
22. For maternalism, see Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Lynn Y. Weiner, "Maternalism as a Paradigm," *Journal of Women's History* 5, no. 2 (1993): 96-130; and Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 3.
23. Molly Ladd-Taylor, "Toward Defining Maternalism in United States History," *Journal of Women's History* 5, no. 2 (1993): 110.
24. Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 105. Because of the parameters of this study, I only focus on the mainstream efforts of white women's organizations.
25. "Address by Mrs. Charles Henrotin, of the Congress Auxiliary Woman's Branch of the World's Fair," May 12, 1892, 48. In *Convention Records (Addresses and Papers), 1890-1894*, General Federation of Women's Club Archives, Washington, D.C., hereafter referred to as GFWC.
26. Henrotin, *NEA Proceedings*, 1897, 76.
27. "Proceedings of the Fourth Biennial," 1898, 43, 51: GFWC. See also Mildred White Wells, *Unity in Diversity: The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs* (Washington : GFWC, 1953), 56, 166-69.
28. National Congress of Mothers, *The Work and Words of the National Congress of Mothers First Annual Session* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897), 293. The NCM is known today as the National Parent-Teacher Association, or PTA.
29. This idea is developed in Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York, 1981).
30. Henry W. Blake, "Mothers' Meetings: Discussion," *NEA Proceedings*, 1895, 533. Blake was editor of the "Kindergarten News" and was introduced as "a kindergarten father."
31. Mrs. Clarence E. Meleney, "A Mother's Advice to Kindergartners," *NEA Proceedings*, 1900, 370-76.
32. Arthur W. Dunn, *The Community and the Citizen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1914), 32. See also William Bishop Owen, "Co-Operation between Home and School," *NEA Proceedings*, 1911, 1109. A principal at the Chicago Normal School, Owen declared "the scope of school patrons is prevention rather than reform."
33. Alice McLellan Birney, *Childhood* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co, 1905), 106.
34. Dunn, *The Community and the Citizen*, 28.
35. Dunn, *The Community and the Citizen*, 22.
36. Henrotin, *NEA Proceedings*, 1897, 83.
37. Henrotin, *NEA Proceedings*, 1897, 79.
38. Evans, "Women's Clubs as an Educational Factor," *NEA Proceedings*, 1898, 240.
39. "Statement of Chairman of the [NEA] Committee on Social Studies," 1913, reprinted in Saxe, *Social Studies in Schools*, 183.
40. Dunn, *The Community and the Citizen*, 167.
41. Margaret J. Evans, "Women's Clubs as an Educational Factor," *NEA Proceedings*, 1898, 238.
42. Evans, *NEA Proceedings*, 1898, 243. This line of thinking continued into the twentieth century as clubwomen promoted "three results in pupils—knowledge, efficiency, and character; therefore, we will make the effort to introduce into all schools training for the hand as well as for the head, and definite instruction in ethics and civics." *NEA Proceedings*, 1908, 1217.
43. *NEA Proceedings*, 1905, 201-202.

44. Mary Abbott, "Education Committee Report," *Proceedings*, 1906, 205, GFWC.
45. Reuben, "Beyond Politics," 413.
46. The National Congress of Mothers, or National PTA, had male members.
47. Laura Drake Gill, "The Scope of the Department of Women's Organizations," *NEA Proceedings*, 1909, 72.
48. Helen Grenfell, "The Influence of Women's Organizations on Public Education," *NEA Proceedings*, 1907, 132.
49. Helen Grenfell, "The Influence of Women's Organizations on Public Education," *NEA Proceedings*, 1907, 128.
50. Grenfell, "The Influence of Women's Organizations," 127.
51. Rugg, *NEA Proceedings*, 1919, 427. "Cooperation" was the subject of this particular session.
52. Jonathan Zimmerman, "Storm over the Schoolhouse: Exploring Popular Influences upon the American Curriculum, 1890-1941," *Teachers College Record* 100, no. 3 (1999): 603.
53. Grenfell, *NEA Proceedings*, 1907, 130.
54. Laura Drake Gill, "The Scope of the Department of Women's Organizations," *NEA Proceedings*, 1909, 73
55. Dunn, *The Community and the Citizen*, 9.
56. Scott, *Natural Allies*, 111.
57. The Sheppard-Towner Act supported educational programs and free clinics for mothers, but was repealed in 1929. See Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 167-90 and Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 494-522.
58. See Reese, *Power and Promise of School Reform*; Christine Woyshner, "Race, Gender, and the Early PTA: Civic Engagement and Public Education, 1897-1924," *Teachers College Record* 105, no. 3 (2003): 520-44; and William W. Cutler III, *Parents and Schools: The 150-Year Struggle for Control in American Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000).
59. Dunn, *The Community and the Citizen*, 34.
60. Barnum, "Women's Work in the Socialization of the Schools," *NEA Proceedings*, 1908, 1236.
61. Mrs. O. Shepard Barnum, "Women's Work in the Socialization of the Schools," *NEA Proceedings*, 1908, 1236.
62. Gill, *NEA Proceedings*, 1909, 71. The Department was relying on already organized women's associations to follow suggestions made by the Department rather than working through the state units of the NEA.
63. Barnum, "The Work of the Coming Year," *NEA Proceedings*, 1910, 1078.
64. William J. Reese, "Between Home and School: Organized Parents, Clubwomen, and Urban Education in the Progressive Era," *School Review* (November 1978): 34.
65. "Summary of State Reports [of the Department of Patrons]," *NEA Proceedings*, 1912, 1341.
66. *NEA Proceedings*, 1914, 851. The focus of this particular joint session was sex hygiene, or sex education. One principal and two high school teachers (all men) presented their papers on the topic.
67. "The Teaching of Community Civics," 1915, reprinted in Saxe, *Social Studies in Schools*, 196. See also "Statement of Chairman of the [NEA] Committee on Social Studies," 1913, reprinted in Saxe, *Social Studies in Schools*, 184.
68. Dunn, *The Community and the Citizen*, 166-68.
69. Reuben, "Beyond Politics," 414, 416.
70. "Report of the General Federation of Women's Clubs," *NEA Proceedings*, 1918, 429.
71. Saxe, *Social Studies in Schools*, 156. The PTA's membership surpasses one million in 1930, and grows precipitously thereafter.
72. Wayne J. Urban, *Gender, Race, and the National Education Association: Professionalism and Its Limitations* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer Press, 2000), 2, 9. See *NEA Proceedings*, 1930, 4, for state and national membership, 1907-1929.
73. "Report of the Committee on Education to the General Federation of Women's Clubs," *Official Proceedings of the Seventh Biennial*, 1904, 50; GFWC.
74. Kliebard, *Forging the American Curriculum*, xiv.