

Rethinking Suffrage 2020

LESSON 3—Monuments and Memory: Honoring the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1924-PRESENT

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- What is the purpose of murals, memorials and monuments and how do they shape our collective memory or the way we think about history?

INTRODUCTION--How Americans remember their past is often reinforced by public monuments, which help both to create and reinforce our collective memory of events. Some scholars go so far as to argue that monument building is an act of power, or a way of reinforcing a particular interpretation of the past. Thus, public memory can also be shaped by excluding individuals or rejecting commemorative monuments. As James Grossman, the executive director of the American Historical Association, noted in 2016: “That which is memorialized and that which is left to popular memory is not accidental. Choices are made about what is built, displayed and given plaques. Memorials are public commemorations that legitimate what comes to be called heritage.”

I. Warm-Up: Can you name these famous monuments? What do these examples reflect about who is memorialized in the United States? Record your answers [here](#).



The images below all depict statues in Lincoln Park in Chicago, Illinois. Compare these monuments to the ones you just analyzed. What do you see? What do you think? What do you wonder? Add your observations to the [warm-up worksheet](#).



II. The Early Suffrage Monuments: The Problem of *Visible Representation*

Take a walk around any public space in major cities of the United States and what do you notice? Lots of massive statues honoring mostly white men. Of the 5,575 outdoor sculpture portraits of historical figures in the United States, only 559 portray women, a mere 10% of all statues, according to the Smithsonian American Art Museum's online inventories catalog. As Daniel Lewis observes in [It's Way too Hard to Find Statues of Notable Women in the U.S.](#), this lack of visible representation "is problematic because leaving their narratives out from public art takes away from the significant roles that women have played in history." Compounding the gender gap is the issue of historical interpretation: deciding who and what is remembered. Explore the image gallery and notice what these monuments reflect about how the story of the battle female suffrage is remembered and told.



Frances E. Willard Statue, U.S. Capitol

DID YOU KNOW?

Although the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920, very few sites relating to women's history—and even fewer relating to woman suffrage—were formally identified or preserved until late in the twentieth century, according to the [National Park Service](#). The statue on the right depicts [Frances E. Willard](#), and was the first honoring a woman in the United States Capitol building.

Chosen for this honor by the state of Illinois, it was erected in 1905 (after Willard's death in 1898) and paid tribute to Willard's leadership of the Woman's Christian Temperance Movement (WCTU). Although the WCTU recruited many women to the suffrage movement, Willard's role in the suffrage movement was neither recognized nor honored at the time the statue was dedicated.

Photo credit: Architect of the U.S. Capitol

U.S. Capitol - Portrait Monument to the Women's Suffrage Movement, by Adelaide Johnson, featuring Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott.

The monument was presented to the U.S. Capitol as a gift from the women of the United States by the National Woman's Party and was accepted on behalf of Congress by the Joint Committee on the Library on February 10, 1921, one year after the ratification of the 19th amendment.



This image depicts the original presentation of the monument to Congress in 1921. (Photo credit: Architect of the U.S. Capitol)

What do you see?

What do you think?

What do you wonder

Record your observations [here](#).

Today, the *Portrait Monument* is displayed in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda--as seen below. However, anyone looking for it before 1997 would have had a hard time locating the monument. Find out why below.



Photo credit: Architect of the U.S. Capitol

READ: Lorraine Boissoneault uncovers the hidden history of the *Portrait Monument* in this [article](#) in Smithsonian magazine. As you read it, think about the factors that contributed to the failure to commemorate the battle for female suffrage.

READ, REFLECT AND DISCUSS--Monuments and the Visible Representation of Women

- Who was the intended audience for the Johnson sculpture?
- Who are the subjects?
- What choices were made in the design process?
- Why did the sculpture end up in the Capitol crypt?
- Why was the original inscription removed?
- How did the *Portrait Monument* finally end up in the rotunda?

III: The Suffrage Parades and Forgotten Marchers: What Story Gets Told?

The mural below was painted in 1973 by [Allyn Cox](#), who created a series of murals for the U.S. Capitol between 1952 and 1974. It commemorates a 1917 suffrage parade in New York. The Cox murals adorn the walls and ceilings of the first floor of the House wing, also known as the [Cox Corridors](#), and commemorate key milestones in American history.



Study the mural carefully.

What do you see?

What do you think?

What do you wonder?

Record your analysis [here](#).

Suffrage parades were a key tactic in the final push for federal suffrage amendment, beginning with the first national suffrage parade in 1913--one day before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration. Cox offers one interpretation of the suffrage march in his mural. Michelle Mehrten's [Ted-Ed Talk](#) below offers another way to think about the battle for female suffrage and the significance of parades. As you watch, engage in active viewing by answering these [questions](#) on the worksheet.

WATCH:



REFLECT: All artists, particularly those who create public art, make choices about their subjects. Why do you think Allyn Cox chose to memorialize the suffrage parades as he did? Add your response to the [worksheet](#).

IV. Memory and Choices Today: Whose Story Gets Told?

As the centennial of the ratification of the 19th amendment approaches, there has been a renewed effort to memorialize the battle for female suffrage. Many applaud this effort to address the [gender gap](#) in public sculpture, noting that visible representation of female achievement is long overdue. Some memorials, like the controversial [planned monument to women's rights](#) for Central Park in New York City, take a more traditional approach. Others, such as the [Women Leading the Way](#) suffrage project, are more innovative.

Original design, NYC Suffrage Monument (2018)



Final design, NYC Suffrage Monument



WATCH: The first seven minutes of this [video](#) of the press conference announcing the winning design for the NYC Suffrage Monument. The monument is celebrated for its message to girls--that history can be *herstory* and that "it is theirs to write, theirs to act on and theirs to memorialize." Notice who was in attendance at the press conference and pay close attention to what the artist, Meredith Bergmann, says about the location, subject and design of the monument. Record your observations [here](#).

READ: This [article by Martha Jones](#), criticizing the final design of the monument. What revisions were made to the original design and why? What story of suffrage does the final design actually tell? Add your answers to the [worksheet](#).

EXPLORE AND COMPARE: How does the design of the NYC suffrage monument compare to the design of the [Women Leading the Way](#) suffrage project and the [Tennessee Woman Suffrage Monument](#)? Which more accurately commemorates the story of female suffrage? Add your conclusions to the [worksheet](#).



"Suffragettes-2020" --the [painting](#) which inspired the [Women Leading the Way](#) suffrage project.

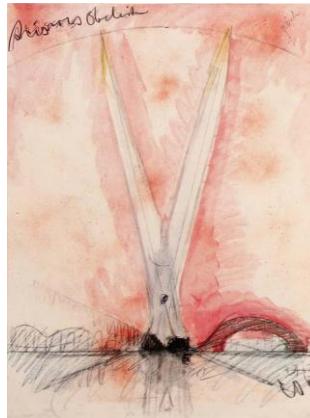


Tennessee Woman Suffrage Monument, 2018

V. Design a Suffrage Memorial: How Would You Tell the Story of Suffrage?

How someone views history and the weight they assign to particular historical actors, ideas or organizations shapes the story they tell. Monuments and memorials, therefore, reflect the stories important to their human creators. As Jackie Craven has noted in her [essay on famous memorials](#), "the design of memorial is often more symbolic than the accurate representation."

REFLECT: Who should be remembered and how? How would you tell the story of the American women's suffrage movement? Would you design an [anti-memorial](#) in the spirit of Claus Oldenburg or would you be more inspired by Gunter Demnig's [stepping stones \(stolpersteine\)](#) project? Perhaps you would simply identify the final figure to be carved into the U.S. Capitol's [Portrait Monument to Suffrage](#)?



Oldenburg, "Scissor Monument - A Proposal to Replace the Washington Obelisk"



Gunter Demnig installation, The Stolpersteine Project, Berlin



Johnson, "Portrait Monument to Suffrage" US Capitol

CREATE: Design a suffrage monument or memorial which captures your story of the American women's suffrage movement.

- Produce a sketch or 3-D model of the memorial and give it a **title**.
- Include any **descriptive text or inscription** which is a visible part of the design.
- Write a 2-3 paragraph essay, making sure to **defend your design choices**, including your **subject(s), location, scale** and **any descriptive text or inscription** on the monument.
- Take a photo of your memorial and post it to the class suffrage monuments gallery.