

A Case for Using Images to Teach Women's History

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RESEARCH IN HISTORY EDUCATION has long suggested that teaching with primary source documents adds significant value to a student's learning experience, resulting in deeper levels of understanding beyond mere fact acquisition.¹ Recent studies have specifically identified the value of using digitized primary sources.² One category of primary source documents that has received increased attention recently, particularly with regard to teaching women's history, is the use of images.³ Historical images are becoming increasingly more available, especially due to the digital archives of the Library of Congress. As a faculty member in Social Studies Education and Women's Studies, I eagerly turned to images to guide "Women in Modern History," an honors course with a focus on the history of American women over the past 100 years.

My goals in this course were to increase the level of critical thinking and to inspire deeper levels of historical understanding. Using images to supplement readings and class discussions created a stronger starting point for thoughtful class discussions, added complexity to student writing, and enhanced peer interactions as students put together group presentations. I taught specific image analysis strategies identified by social studies and media literacy scholars as powerful tools for understanding content and context, and then utilized those strategies throughout class lectures, discussions, activities, and evaluations. Most class sessions were held in a large- or small-group discussion format inspired by images. By the end of each fifty-minute class session, the students typically left with more



Figure 1: *New Woman on Bicycle*, c. 1890s. Reproduced with the permission of the B. & H. Henisch Collection, Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University Libraries.

questions than answers. They came to each class with their readings completed, eager to see new images and to learn new strategies for analyzing them. Although I'm certain that factors other than the image focus contributed to their high levels of motivation (e.g., honors students, assigning *New York Times* best-selling books as texts, and small class size), the images were clearly the peak point of enthusiasm.

This paper will present a combination of anecdotal experiences from the class, practical lesson and assignment strategies, and the performance outcomes of my students on their final assessment as evidence of the effectiveness of the strategies utilized. I will argue that incorporating images of women and thoughtfully teaching students to analyze those images

invigorates deeper levels of historical understanding. These methods are especially applicable in secondary and postsecondary history classes, but could certainly be adapted for use in elementary classes as well.

During the first week of classes, I projected an image of a woman with her bicycle at the turn of the twentieth century (Figure 1). At this early point in the semester, my nineteen students had not learned image analysis strategies, and most had not yet completed their first reading assignment. Furthermore, these mostly first-year students regularly (and perhaps mindlessly) consume images by reflexively swiping the screens of their smartphones. Following the image analysis strategy called Close Looking,⁴ I said nothing about the image, but rather instructed students to simply look for a minute or so without commenting or making assumptions, attuning to visual details. Close Looking requires one to notice details that could be missed in a cursory glance. After a minute, I solicited visual observations from my students without the use of inferences by asking students to simply recall what they could see; going around the room, each student made an observation until physical details were exhausted. At first, their observations were rudimentary: "It's a woman with a bicycle." Gradually, they became more astute: "She's wearing a dress, a *long* dress." It was clear that students were ready to start analyzing the image further.

Close Looking requires that inferences must follow detailed visual observations. I welcomed student guesses about who and where this woman might be and, later in the discussion, what she might represent. "It must be the olden days; who rides a bike in a long dress?" one of my students said. Another quipped, "Didn't women always wear dresses back then?" I bit my tongue to avoid asking, "back when?" and allowed the students to work together to make inferences, knowing that understanding develops within struggle (Alfie Kohn has often said the best teachers in the world have teeth marks on their tongues⁵). Many of the students had brought their books to class that day and began to page through the first reading assignment for more clues. The discussion grew lively with speculation, and stories developed about where she might be going and whom she might be meeting; one of the students even named her "Alice." By the end of the class, and thanks to the student who found the term in one of our books, the students identified Alice as a "Wheeler"—a term used to describe the women who rode bicycles during this time.⁶ By the next class meeting, my students were poised to discuss how this image, and Wheelers in general, represented the coming of a "New Woman" in America, and how these women were perceived by various others, past and present. Image analysis clearly led to students' motivation to both read and participate so willingly.

In the following sections of this article, I will first provide a pedagogical rationale supported by relevant literature undergirding this image approach. Next, in a teaching methods section, I present the image analysis strategies I taught, followed by examples and anecdotes of the strategies in action during class sessions and in student assignments. I will analyze data from my students' final assessments to conclude that the image focus led to deeper levels understanding than would have been achieved otherwise. I close with suggestions and next steps for readers wondering where to start, and my opinions from this experience about why women's history is an especially important subject to teach with images.

A Rationale For Image Analysis Pedagogy

I sought to use images as a tool for helping students to develop deep historical understanding. History teachers at both the college and high school levels are charged to teach the subject as identified in the course catalogue, but they also have a more daunting, less obvious charge. That charge is to teach students to think critically about history, avoiding the perpetuation of historic myths, often encouraged by the all-knowing voice of the grand narrative in traditional history textbooks. This type of history skill building is imperative for helping students to develop a sophisticated understanding of the world, past and present. Research has identified that the content of most high school history courses is still driven largely by textbooks.⁷ This fact is highly problematic since content analyses of high school history textbooks have found that the most widely adopted texts are boring, incessantly long and tedious, and fail to delve deeply into the true nature of history.⁸ Further, these texts tend to vastly under-represent women, especially women of color, by regularly presenting the experiences of women in sidebars rather than as a part of the main narrative, by including far fewer women than men in images, and by including more women on the conservative end of the political spectrum.⁹ As such, many college students come to their history classes with limited background knowledge and historical thinking skills and a lack of interest in or appreciation for history, especially women's history. Even in my class where about half of the students were members of the honors college and seventeen of the nineteen were women, I found this to be the case.

By emphasizing images in teaching history, the subject becomes invigorating for students, particularly in the digital age where images are as much a part of students' mental consumption as text (perhaps even more so). Walter Werner posits that "visual texts are not just useful tools for learning about the world; increasingly they ARE the social world and need to be treated AS subject matter in the classroom."¹⁰ Student reception to

learning with images has been found to be positive. Coohill found that his students, whom he dubbed the “History Channel Generation,” retained far more knowledge when he began using images instead of text as a visual aid for his history lectures. The images gave students a deeper connection to the content.¹¹ Similarly, Suzette Youngs found that her students constructed more sophisticated responses to historical images than text.¹² Scholars have agreed that history teachers cannot simply add images as illustrations to the curriculum; these images must be thoughtfully situated and discussed as part of the historical narrative.¹³ Teachers need to facilitate this process using specific methods for analyzing images.

Scholars have found that students who are taught visual literacy skills (specific tools for interpreting images) are more capable of recognizing and deconstructing complex issues, demonstrating powerful understanding of context, and considering author perspectives on the content of nonfiction texts.¹⁴ Jennifer Rothwell said, “Images can have great potency. In using historical images, it is important to try to distinguish between two orders of facts: the facts of history and the facts of image making.”¹⁵ Images must be read critically rather than passively. Sam Wineburg has suggested the use of a sourcing heuristic to consider how the source of an image influences its meaning and reception.¹⁶ Rachel Mattson has introduced other tactical heuristics (interpretive devices) for reading images, such as considering the historical context of the image, how the image may be read in conjunction with supplementary text, and how images can be more deeply explored by posing a series of historical questions.¹⁷ Further, both Christine Woysner and Susan Shifrin suggest specific strategies for the analysis of images of women, which are outlined later in Figure 2.¹⁸

Teaching Methods

Class sessions usually combined large-group discussions and small-group work. In a deliberate effort to avoid traditional textbooks, I chose three best-selling history books for their thorough representation of women's history, engaging voice, and relatable content and writing style for college students. Two of the books, *America's Women* and *When Everything Changed*, written by *New York Times* columnist Gail Collins, depict a (mostly) chronological story of women in America, including experiences of women of color and of women at a variety of socioeconomic status levels. The other, *The Body Project* by Joan Brumburg, explores women's history through the lens of a woman's relationship with her body. Highly relatable by college students, this sensitive relationship is chronicled within the historical context of the greater American social fabric.¹⁹ More details about how these books and other supplemental readings (such as passages from work by Anne Moody,

Strategy Name	Author	Description
Close Looking	Woyshner	Phase 1: Physical observations made without inferences, speculation, or assumptions until thoroughly examined. Phase 2: Observations include inferences, speculation, and assumptions.
Switching Places	Woyshner	Discussion of how the context and meaning of an image would change if the people or groups of people pictured switched places and took on each other's roles.
Juxtaposition	Woyshner	Two or more images are placed together and analyzed, compared, and contrasted.
Sourcing	Wineburg/ Mattson	The image's source is considered, including how that source influences what is portrayed. Consider motivation of the creator, intended audience, and perceptions by intended (and unintended) audiences.
Inside-the-Frame/ Outside-the-Frame	Mattson	Phase 1: Analysis of what we can see happening in the image (inside the frame). Phase 2: What other circumstances exist (outside of the frame) that may provide context for the image?
Intertextuality	Mattson	Images and documents are combined for analysis.
Framing Historical Questions	Mattson	Creation of a series of questions about an image based on historical context.
Fashioning	Shifrin	Study of the way a person or group of people are dressed to provide more information.
Figuring	Shifrin	Analysis of figures such as cartoons and allegorical figures and how those figures are intended to be portrayed and how they are received by others.
Portraiting	Shifrin	Creation of a graphic portrayal or description. Often used as illustrations and may perpetuate stereotypes if not analyzed in conjunction with other strategies.
Telling	Shifrin	Use of an image to tell a story by constructing a narrative.

Figure 2: Strategies for historical image analysis.

Gloria Steinem, and Betty Friedan) influenced the class will be provided later in the article. Each class session was heavily influenced by the analysis of images. These images were gathered from sources such as the Library of Congress digital archives, the Digital Vaults, the Associated Press, and Google Images. Along with showing images in class and connecting those images with content from the assigned readings, I explicitly taught students image analysis strategies I utilized in my teaching methods (see Figure 2 for strategy names and descriptions). By teaching these strategies, the students were then able to use them in their independent and group work, such as papers, presentations, online discussions via our course website and Facebook, and an essay-based final exam.

I led class sessions with an activity where I demonstrated an image analysis strategy, but did not explicitly teach the strategy until after completing the activity. I found this to be much more powerful than teaching the image analysis strategy first. Sometimes, when students know the goal before an activity, it prevents the natural thinking process; I wanted students to explore the images without preconceived notions about what they were supposed to see or discover. Having the example to work with, my students were able to better understand the image analysis strategies when I taught them after implementation. As with any teaching method, there is a great deal of overlap in the use of the strategies outlined in Figure 2. I often combined them in my daily lessons and encouraged students to do the same in their work. Below, I will provide three examples of lessons I conducted with image analysis strategies from two different eras.

Content Example 1: The 1940s

The lessons highlighted in this section will explore the strategies of Close Looking, Inside-the-Frame/Outside-the-Frame, Juxtaposition, Sourcing, and Framing Historical Questions through the use of three very different sets of images. When I informally asked students at the beginning of the semester what they expected to learn about women in the 1940s, a couple of the students mentioned Rosie the Riveter by name (though a surprising majority did not), and most made reference to women working on the home front, waiting for their men to come home. This one-dimensional portrait of American women during World War II is not surprising given what is known about the reliance of most high school history course curricula on mainstream textbooks.²⁰ As such, when I opened the class by showing the two images in Figures 3 and 4, students were—expectedly—puzzled. The images (Figures 3 and 4) are both accessible through the Library of Congress digital archives. Using the Inside-the-Frame/Outside-the-Frame strategy, I asked students to first look at the images, one at a time, focusing



Figure 3: *Bridge game, Nurse Aiko Hamaguchi, Nurse Chiye Yamanaki, Miss Catherine Yamaguchi, Miss Kazoko Nagahama, Manzanar Relocation Center, California, photograph by Ansel Adams, 1943, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppprs-00108, <<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002696000/>>.*

on what the women were doing in order to create a narrative of what was happening within the frame. Figure 3 is a photograph of a group of four women playing cards. Figure 4 is a photograph of an infant nursery where a new baby is being shown through a glass window. I found it helpful to use the Close Looking strategy in conjunction with the Inside-the-Frame portion of this exercise. Through Close Looking, students were able to identify that the card game in Figure 3 was likely to be bridge, that at least several of the women in these two images appeared to be Asian, and that the walls were bare. Students also thought it possible that the same woman might be pictured in both images, but no guesses were made about who and where these women may be.

Once my students were thoroughly curious (and most certainly stumped), I told them that these photographs were taken by Ansel Adams in a Japanese American Internment Camp in California in Manzanar. There were several moments of quiet reflection on this new piece of information; I watched students' eyes change as they looked at the photos, developing a new meaning. This shift from considering the image Inside the Frame



Figure 4: Nurse Aiko Hamaguchi, mother Frances Yokoyama, baby Fukomoto, Manzanar Relocation Center, California, photograph by Ansel Adams, 1943, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppprs-00343, <<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002697854/>>.

to considering what was happening Outside the Frame led to a ripe discussion that lasted for most of the remainder of our class time. First, I was inundated by questions about the camps, some of which I was able to answer and others for which I suggested independent research outside of class. (These are the kinds of class sessions a history teacher lives for, where both teacher and student leave wanting to look stuff up.) Being such a controversial and dark subject in the history of America, most of my students had only learned about the camps very generally, reporting that they were mostly “glossed over” in their American history classes. Certainly, none of them had considered the specific experiences of women in the camps. Content resources that helped supplement our discussion included the Library of Congress teaching with primary sources materials, Collins’ *America’s Women*, and an eyewitness account from a woman who lived in an internment camp that one of my students found on YouTube.²¹ One of the many benefits of a small class was our ability to have these discussions where all students were involved; the discussions flowed from large group to small group without unnatural direction on my part, and I



Figure 5: *Careless Talk Costs Lives / Al Doria*, poster by the WPA War Services, c. 1941-1943, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, WPA Poster Collection, LC-USZC2-1587, <<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98517955/>>.



Figure 6: "I'd Rather Be With Them - Than Waiting," 1941-1945, poster by the Office of War Information, c. 1941-1945, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, World War II Posters, 1942-1945 Series, <<http://www.research.archives.gov/description/513677>>.

allowed students to use their books, reading and class notes, smartphones, computers, and/or tablets to find information to bring to our discussion.

Once some of their content questions were answered, our Outside-the-Frame discussion continued, prompted as appropriate by a series of questions I planned ahead of time. For example: 1) Describe how other women (perhaps especially new mothers) around the country may have reacted if they saw Figure 4. How might their reactions be influenced by their personal backgrounds, experiences, and prejudices? 2) Describe why women in the camps may have engaged in recreational activities such as the bridge game in Figure 3. References were also made to other images in the series such as organized sports. 3) Regarding Figure 4, consider and discuss the paradox women faced in the camps in creating a “safe” and nurturing environment for their families given their imprisonment.

I led our 1940s lesson with the above images and this particular topic because I knew it would likely be unexpected and uncharted territory for these students, but also because it served as an example of how the stories of many American women, particularly women from minority groups, are left out of the traditional historical narrative. Establishing this premise before looking at some of the more typical images of women that students had expected to see in the 1940s unit elicited a more skeptical and critical approach to analyzing texts and images.

Next, we turned to the images most students have seen of women on war posters, most traditionally, of course, Rosie the Riveter. Although most of my students have seen images of World War II propaganda and women in the workplace, none have ever critically analyzed these images. Without careful analysis, these images can be misunderstood and the opportunity for analysis of subtext lost. I selected fourteen images of war posters to use for a small-group in-class activity where the students used the strategies of Sourcing and Juxtaposition to make sense of how women were targeted by advertisements in the 1940s. The students worked in groups of three or four to examine a stack of hard copies of the fourteen images first by critically “reading” the images through Close Looking and then by employing the other strategies.

Sourcing requires one to consider who created the image and for what purpose, while Juxtaposition refers to the strategy of looking at two or more images together to compare, contrast, and inspire new questions. In exploring World War II propaganda, these two strategies went very well together, as students could look at the subtle differences between posters created by different organizations such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). For example, Figure 5 shows a WPA advertisement with the famous quote, “Careless talk costs lives,” and an image of rouged (presumably female)



Figure 7: *Willa Brown*, 1939, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, Black Wings Item #20, <<http://civilrights.si.edu/blackwings/items/show/20>>.

lips. Figure 6 shows a WAC with the text “I’d rather be with them—than waiting,” and a woman standing in uniform. As I circulated the room, I listened to students compare these two images in particular by noting how the WPA poster suggested that women were not knowledgeable about the war and would be more likely to gossip, while the WAC poster suggested women were strong and capable to serve in the army. Examining the source of multiple images also reinforced students’ understanding of historical facts as part of a greater picture. Learning about the WAC in a vacuum, for example, is much less powerful than learning about the WAC as it may have influenced and been interpreted by women on the home front.

Other images I used during our unit on the 1940s were of black women serving in the military, including a portrait of Willa Brown, a black female pilot who served as an officer and led desegregation efforts in the United States military (Figure 7). Using the strategy of Framing Historical Questions, students worked in small groups to develop a series of questions



Figure 8: *Election Day!* print by E. W. Gustin, c. 1909, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-51821, <<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97500226/>>.

about the image of Willa Brown in a greater social context, and then worked together to answer them and add to the list by conducting research; students answered the questions on their own lists, and then exchanged lists with other groups of their peers. At the end of our 1940s unit, students wrote a one-page reflection in response to the open-ended question: How were American women changed by the 1940s? They were permitted to answer this question by focusing on any of the women or groups of women we discussed in class or by conducting independent research from our required readings or their selected supplemental readings to write about other women who intrigued them. In showing images like those pictured in this example along with more traditionally seen images of women in the workforce and in propaganda posters, my goal was for students to develop a more holistic view of American women in the 1940s.

Content Example 2: Women in Politics

Images are incredibly powerful in teaching about women in American politics. Almost all of the image analysis strategies identified in Figure 2 were used at some point during the semester, either as part of our exploration of women's suffrage in the earlier part of the semester or through our studies of the continuing saga of the Equal Rights Amendment in the later part. Using Juxtaposition, we were able to compare the historical waves of feminist (and anti-feminist) political activity through images.

The Switching Places, Intertextuality, and Fashioning strategies were used with Figure 8, a popular image obtained through the Library of Congress digital archives as part of the "Votes for Women" Suffrage Pictures, 1850-1920 Collection. I first implemented Close Looking with the class, as is often the case with an image so packed with wordless text to analyze. Going around the room, students made only physical observations without inferences until the nuanced details were thoroughly explored. The date stamp reads 1909, more than a decade before the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment (as an interesting side note, a number of my students were surprised that the suffrage movement "took so long"). A woman, dressed in an arguably masculine dress is headed out the door with her umbrella and newspaper; a sign on the wall of the kitchen reads, "votes for women." The man, who my students wanted to infer was her husband (of course, inferences had to wait until later), is seated and looking up at the woman while holding two crying infants. A black cat with a domed back—posed in a sign of fear—also looks at the woman. A dish appears to be broken on the floor under the table and the teakettle is boiling. When the observations turned toward inferences, my students found the image amusing; the babies were crying because it was the first time their father

had ever held them, the cat was about to hurt itself on the broken dish, and the dishes would surely not be done before the wife got home. While they were mostly joking, these types of gender stereotypes are exactly what was meant to be invoked by this image upon its creation.

After Close Looking, I asked the students to imagine the man and woman switching places; the man would be headed out the door and the woman would be sitting with the babies saying goodbye. This image yielded the most interesting responses of the semester for the Switching Places technique. For example, when I asked them how the image would change, one student said, “it would make more sense.” Many nodded in agreement. Another said, “I bet the babies wouldn’t be crying.” A nervous laughter erupted from these realizations by the students as they began to note the gender stereotypes being perpetuated. These comments led to a very interesting discussion about where those ideas came from and what they mean for current gender roles and expectations. The image was already a powerful resource for understanding the perception of the suffrage movement by many, but adding the implementation of Switching Places, the image created an entire line of relevant discussion that would have otherwise not come up. This particular image took most of our fifty-minute class time to analyze, and toward the end of the session, the discussion shifted to the experiences of women fighting for suffrage during this time period. We spent time talking about the usual suspects—Carrie Catt, Susan B. Anthony, and later Alice Paul—but students demonstrated the highest levels of understanding beyond historical facts, figures, and chronology when engaged in an analysis of an image such as Figure 8.

In the next class period, we used the strategy of Intertextuality, examining this image with other suffrage posters and the texts of letters, bulletins, and legislation. I provided each small group of students with a small stack of such posters and texts for both sides of the suffrage movement, and the students’ first task was to try to separate them into two piles, pro and con. For most of the artifacts, this was relatively simple, but others were trickier and required a nuanced understanding of the source (bringing in Sourcing) where available as well as historical context. Again, during all of my group activities, I allowed students to access their computers and/or smartphones in addition to their books to look up anything they wanted to know. I noticed during this activity and several others that my students would sometimes use this time to search for more images to add to those I provided. One such moment was when a student exclaimed, “See! Look at this one; it’s clearly satire!” after finding the website with images of anti-suffragist propaganda posters. It was clear that the activity of combining images with relevant texts was helping my students to cultivate a keener sense of the overarching voice for each side of the movement.



Figure 9: *Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, Head-and-shoulders Portrait, Possibly Seated in Congressional Chamber*, photograph by Thomas J. O'Halloran, 1976, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsc-01268, <<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003688128/>>.

To exemplify the image style of Portraiting, it was difficult to choose a portrait from the many female political leaders we studied, but ultimately, I chose one of Barbara Jordan (Figure 9) because Jordan is a woman classically portrayed as a “famous first.” Phase model studies have shown that a great deal of the women in traditional textbooks are portrayed as famous firsts.²² While it is important and interesting that women are recognized for their famous first achievements, in doing so, we may tend to miss some of the context underpinning that famous first.²³ Portraiting is simply displaying or describing someone graphically. While rather straightforward, and perhaps the most common that students encounter in traditional textbooks, it is also one of the most misunderstood types of images. A portrait does not tell us much about a person without other visual cues or supporting text. As such, portraits can be deceiving, and need to be substantially supplemented. Further, portraits are not always memorable. Wanting students to develop a stronger idea of Portraiting and the difference between an image as a text and an image as an illustration, I brought in a number of portraits such as the one of Barbara Jordan. Before knowing who she was, students' reactions to her picture were essentially blank. But, like many portraits, the image took on additional meaning for some of them as they learned more about her. I would caution teachers



Figure 10: *Keynote Address by Representative Barbara Jordan, Democratic National Convention, July 12, 1976*, photograph by Warren K. Leffler, 1976, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-U9-32937-32A/33, <<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002712192/>>.

from using too many portraits, or to reserve portraits for a select few cases, unless they are used in conjunction with other images, as they often lack the substantive qualities for conversation and analysis.

In contrast to the seated pose in Figure 9, Figure 10 pictures Jordan delivering a keynote speech at the 1976 Democratic National Convention. Jordan, a U.S. Representative from Texas, was the first black woman to give a keynote address at the convention. Though Figure 9 and Figure 10 both depict Jordan from the shoulders up, the second provokes more questions: Who is she speaking to? What is she speaking about? Why might this be significant? Utilizing the strategy called Telling, where an image is designed (or interpreted) to tell a story about an event, I asked students to construct a narrative to accompany this image. In order to do so, they had to conduct independent research about Barbara Jordan, read her speech, and consider multiple historical perspectives to develop a thoughtful narrative. The subtle difference in the two portraits becomes important for the pedagogy of how the images can be analyzed.

Student Outcomes

The final exam was intended to reinforce students' learning through image analysis. Students were given a period of forty-eight hours to complete their take-home final exam that was submitted electronically via our course website. The exam required three 500-word essays, focused on three time periods (1890-1939, 1940-1975, and 1976-Present), within which students could choose to focus on smaller time frames if they preferred. For each essay, the students were required to choose two images to analyze, utilizing a minimum of two learned image analysis strategies from our class (see Figure 2). The directions explicitly stated that students should not try to say "everything [they] know" about women in their chosen decade, but rather to convey clear, nuanced details to demonstrate a deep understanding of one specific, contextual facet of women's history from that time period. In focusing on depth rather than breadth, not only would the essays less likely be generic and shallow, but they also would be indicative of more salient learning likely to last beyond this course.

Seventeen students gave consent for their final exams to be analyzed for the purposes of this paper. I graded these essays based on a simple, holistic rubric, assessing their achievement of 1) a well-developed historical context with evidence of critical thinking, 2) effective use of the image analysis strategies to meet criteria one, and 3) an organized, readable paper with sentence fluency and proper conventions. Overall, the final exams were excellent; the students chose interesting and appropriate images, and their analyses of these images conveyed their historical understanding.



Figure 11: *Vassar College, 1900s Class Basketball Team*, c. 1900, Vassar College Libraries, Special Collections Dept. Photo File 10.9B Basketball 1900, <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/vassararchive/4812776851/>>.

This group of exams was the highest quality collective group of final assessments I have ever graded in a history class.

Since my main outcome goal for this class was for my students to think critically about history, I looked for evidence of critical thinking in their essays and how they went beyond relaying factual information to draw comparisons, make inferences, and question the source of information. Below, I illustrate three major patterns in their critical thinking: nuanced comprehension of history; complex rather than traditional or stereotypical conceptions about women; and sophisticated understanding of the intersection of race and gender. I provide examples of each one of these three outcomes directly from my students' final exams.

Nuanced Comprehension of History

One indicator of students' nuanced comprehension of history was their ability to apply historical concepts across time. For example, one student chose an image of a turn-of-the-century New Woman for her first essay,



Figure 12: *Oregon Hoops*, c. 1930s, *The Oregonian*, <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/theoregonian/2300613579/>>.

and, through the image analysis strategy of Fashioning, suggested that New Women are portrayed through images in every historical era. She posited that images of women in progressive roles, often suggested by the clothing worn, are used both past and present to affect and mark change. In her argument that New Women can be found throughout history as “fashioned” in images, she referred to famous images of Katherine Hepburn in pants. Fashioning, she asserted, has a powerful influence on how women (and men) view changing gender roles. This student applied the concept of the New Woman throughout time, indicating a deeper understanding of the concept beyond one historic example.

Using Juxtaposition of images, several students followed one topic or theme over time. For example, several students explored the role of women in sports, comparing the way women dressed for various sports to pose questions and draw conclusions about symbols of the emerging rights and freedoms for women. One student selected an image of the 1900 Vassar College women's basketball team wearing long dresses and what appear to possibly be corsets (Figure 11). The student used Close



Figure 13: *First Six Women Astronauts with “Rescue Ball”*, photograph by NASA, 1980, <<http://grin.hq.nasa.gov/ABSTRACTS/GPN-2002-000207.html>>.

Looking to find details and make inferences, writing, “it is hard to imagine playing basketball in a corset, bloomers, and a long dress, and even harder to imagine being discouraged from playing sports due to menstruation and/or the risk of being unladylike. These women pose with serious faces, and today I view that almost as a symbol of the serious nature of their participation at the time.” She compared this image with a photograph of the Oregon women’s basketball team in the 1930s, where the women are wearing shorts and sleeveless tanks, with big smiles on their faces and a more relaxed posture (Figure 12). Yet, she recognizes that this image is taken forty years prior to Title IX as she writes, “decades before law legitimized women’s collegiate sports, women sought opportunities to advance themselves through sport by becoming student-athletes and

dedicated members of teams. Tides of social change influenced women's ability to partake in collegiate sports throughout the middle of the 20th century." This student's ability to look holistically at one theme throughout history indicates sophisticated understanding. She extrapolated details from the images to contextualize and make meaning of women's sports within a larger narrative.

Several students wrote insightful passages about using Sourcing not only as a way to view a single image in a single time period, but also as a way to understand the historical context of images. For example, one student asserted that a portrait of women at an all-girls college in the early 1900s may have served a very different purpose from a portrait of women at a co-ed college in the 1970s, particularly depending on the intended audience for the image. Many students identified that photographers have unique motives, and their images are received differently depending on the audience, time, and context. Another student wrote about the importance of recognizing candid versus posed photographs, and how both types of images may tell very different stories about the photographer and the subject(s). In a student's essay about the 1980s, she referenced an image of women working for NASA as astronauts, but asked questions about the reception of the image by the public, given the social and political climate of the 1980s and the purpose of the image (Figure 13). She wrote, "This image was taken by NASA and most likely used in the media, including television news shows and newspapers to show their new diversity." Recognizing that the image may have had a motive beyond simple illustration is indicative of the power of Sourcing. She continued, "what was the goal of the image, and how was it received by different groups? When this picture was released, NASA may not have intended to send a woman into space, but regardless, the image could have been a vehicle for making a political statement. Sally Ride is pictured in this image, which was taken in 1980; three years later, she was the first American woman in space." In this essay, this student discusses Sally Ride in a context richer than the typical listing of famous first achievements; she considers Ride's work prior to the famous achievement and connects relevant contextual events to an individual story.

Complex Rather Than Traditional Conceptions about Women

I found a great deal of evidence in their final essays that my students developed the ability to think beyond stereotypes of women in history. Perhaps the most obvious example was the way many of the students opted to discuss women during World War II on their final assessments. At the beginning of the semester, many students were trapped in traditional conceptions of women entering the workforce during the war and leaving shortly thereafter, not accounting for the vast number of exceptions to that



Figure 14: *Women in the War: We Can't Win Without Them*, poster by the U.S. War Manpower Division, 1942, University of Texas Digital Library, <<http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc616/>>.

“rule.” In their final essays, several students analyzed images depicting women's roles in the military, though none selected the more traditional images of women working as nurses; instead, they chose images of WAC or of women in the workplace. Students were able to extrapolate examples of inequality for women during the war even when the specific focus of an image or set of images is not centered on the issue of inequality. One of the students referenced the “Careless talk costs lives” WPA poster in Figure 5, for example, using the image analysis strategy of Switching Places. The mouth in the image is clearly meant to be the mouth of a woman with its red lipstick. The student asked how the image would be viewed differently if the mouth were male, perhaps with a mustache. She identified the significance this gendering has on the subliminal message of the poster and how it was read by women, particularly young women, who were forming their identities in the context of such images that suggest women cannot control their desire to gossip. Both this student and several others drew connections from such historical examples to images in mainstream media advertising today, where the focus might be on a specific product, but the way women are portrayed in such advertisements send a subtle message about how women are or should be. Another student referenced a classic war propaganda image and analyzed it using Telling (Figure 14). This student wrote, “This image is telling the story of a very specific agenda. The entire phrase is a double entendre. ‘We can't win without them’ can refer to either the woman or the bomb. Although some might view this as depicting women as strong, I see it as the factory calling on its last resort, women. This severely diminishes the feminist potential of this advertisement and identifies how reluctant factories were in allowing women to take up soldiers' vacant positions.” This student demonstrates a keen understanding beyond traditional female stereotypes by inferring potential subtext. This student examined the way an image may have been subliminally read when it was released based on historic context.

Sophisticated Understanding of the Intersection of Race and Gender

Students consistently considered the diverse circumstances of women during these time periods, acknowledging both the small- and large-scale impacts social movements may have had on women. They considered women in the south as well as the north and women from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, one student analyzed a photograph of Fannie Lou Hamer in 1964. She was giving an impromptu speech outside the capitol building in Washington, D.C. in protest of a decision made in the House of Representatives. The student juxtaposed this image with one of Betty Friedan, marching at the front of a National Organization for Women (NOW) march just several years later. She wrote,



Figure 15: *FERA Camps for Unemployed Women. Negro Camp in Atlanta, GA,* photograph by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, 1934, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, Hyde Park, NY, <<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/collections/franklin/?p=digitallibrary/digitalcontent&id=3536>>.

“These women, both activists in overlapping causes, are similar in their activism to create change. But, they perceive different sets of problems and meet different obstacles in working to overcome them as a result of their race and experiences. The photograph of Hamer shows what black women had to embody to be heard at a point in history when white women were mocked. Black women had to be even stronger than white women to ‘hold on to the microphone.’” This student strongly identifies an example of the intersection of race and gender. I infer from her writing that she is also drawing what she learned from reading and discussing excerpts from *The Feminine Mystique*²⁴ and *From Margin to Center*.²⁵ Although the students and I discussed Friedan and Hamer, the juxtaposition in her final exam is all her own.

One student selected two images to analyze in an essay about women during The Great Depression (Figures 15 and 16). Figure 15 portrays black women during the Depression at a FERA camp for unemployed black women, and Figure 16 portrays white women working in a sewing factory. Both images were taken in 1934. This student wrote about the way the Depression was experienced differently by black women and



Figure 16: *Kent Sewing Center Showing Women at their Sewing Machines, February 27, 1934.* University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, FER0117, <<http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/fera/id/20/>>.

white women. Using the Inside-the-Frame/Outside-the-Frame strategy for Figure 16, this student wrote, “Inside the frame, the women in the Kent sewing factory seem young and well educated, yet due to the depression resorted to working in menial jobs to make ends meet. Therefore, one could feel bad for these women. But when looking outside the frame, these women are lucky to have jobs considering the economic climate.” She furthered her argument by juxtaposing Figure 16 with Figure 15. “Things were especially difficult for women of color in the Great Depression since their jobs were often lost to white women. I think this picture, especially compared to the image of the women in the sewing factory, is trying to show the huge unemployment rate of African American women....And I think the picture is showing how it affected all African Americans: younger, older, light skin, or dark skin.” This student’s essay posed rich ideas. In the space a 500-word essay allowed, she only introduced this concept, but did so thoughtfully. This particular example is especially noteworthy

because this observation about how women experienced the Depression also as a function of race was never introduced during our class; we spent a short time on the topic. The image analysis created a space for this type of deeper critical thinking and connection making.

Conclusion

One of my goals as a history educator is to inspire my students to think like historians; therefore, it is essential that I teach tools such as image analysis to facilitate this type of scholarship. The success of this class, as evidenced by the quality of my students' work, leads me to conclude that teaching with images is essential for teaching history, and especially for the teaching of women's history (or probably any history class focused on a group traditionally marginalized). Class content, particularly images, helped my students to make sense of their disparate knowledge of American history. The filling of these proverbial gaps seemed to become increasingly more important to them over the course of the semester, as many students expressed feelings of dissonance in reconciling what they thought they knew to be true about women's history with what they were uncovering in class. Once my students understood the image analysis strategies, they exhibited agency in suggesting how they wanted to analyze images projected in class. Further, they often brought in images on their own to share. Images were able to invoke much more than words, and therefore proved to be more than just powerful supplements to the text, but rather texts in their own right. Like written texts, however, images must be studied critically in light of what they do and do not capture.

With the digital accessibility of historic images, teachers are more equipped than ever to supplement their traditional curricula. Therefore, I suggest that teachers begin implementing this type of work by starting simply and expanding gradually. First, explore and select a few historic images that are powerful. Second, experiment with one or two of the image analysis strategies detailed above. Before trying the strategies in class, work through them independently or with a colleague. In anticipating how the image might be read, teachers can prepare prompting questions and appropriate juxtapositions. Of course, however thoroughly we plan and prepare, students are often likely to surprise us with their interpretations. I see these surprises as opportunities to learn and grow as a teacher. Finally, teachers must reflect on the outcomes of using images. Consider the quality of student work, whether written or verbal, and solicit student feedback on the teaching methods. Including student feedback in the pedagogical decisions of teaching with images proved to be valuable in increasing motivation in my class.

As a result of learning tools for analyzing images of women in the past, students exhibited abilities to better analyze images of women in the present, a timely skill considering the current environment of pervasive media images of women. Toward the conclusion of the semester, several of my students chartered a feminist club, the first of its kind on our campus. In serving as the faculty advisor to this very active group, I've observed how they share media images of women (both present and historical) in their club meetings, events, and Facebook group discussions, and they frequently use image analysis strategies in their conversations. While I cannot conclude with certainty that this academic discourse is a result of my class, I would like to believe it had something to do with it.

Notes

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