

An Unlikely Parallel: The Tensions Surrounding Children and Citizenship during the Americanization Era

By Kate White, Indiana University-Purdue University

Historically, the notion of citizenship in the United States has continually shifted and often been fraught with tension. During the Americanization era (approximately 1900-1925), definitions of citizenship were hotly contested. The definitions and images circulated often privileged white bodies and created hierarchies between different groups in the population; for instance, the status of citizenship varied greatly between men, women, immigrants, and, of particular interest to readers of *The Red Feather Journal*, children. The Americanization era provides an excellent historical period in which to examine the competing construction(s) of citizenship because it continues to influence our current conversations about children and education. Michael Olneck has argued that the primary significance of the Americanization movement was to create new “public meanings” rather than to have changed immigrants. During this time, there was a profound transformation of the ideal and reality of who was an American citizens due to an unprecedented influx of immigrants in the late nineteenth century. More specifically, the archival research¹ I collected at the headquarters of General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) in Washington, D.C. offers a unique opportunity to understand the tensions surrounding citizenship, and how those same tensions still exist. The following article traces the history and involvement of the GFWC with citizenship and the education of children through plays, pageants, and books. I believe that an examination of their involvement can help educators continue to reflect on the role of citizenship development with children today.

During the Americanization era, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs sponsored a range of programs aimed at children in order to ensure “good” citizenry in future generations. In the United States, the early twentieth century was marked by a special attention focused on children. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was a growing interest in the childhood of all Americans, whether or not they were materially advantaged. Based in the conviction that the future of all children was as citizens and that citizenship required particular nurturing and training, many programs were developed to provide educational assistance to children (Bullard 53). A wide-range of efforts were made to protect children by forming special welfare agencies, juvenile courts, and juvenile prisons. During this time, laws and schools treated children as individuals capable of independent thought, creating a new focus on education and its relationship to civic duty. Mothers and teachers became responsible for cultivating the right kind of reading habits at home and in classrooms for the children who were seen as citizens-in-training (Bullard 54). A newfound sense of urgency swept the nation connecting reading to citizenship and reinforcing the values of moral sense, patriotism, and service.

¹ I spent a week at the GFWC’s Women’s History and Research Center, located inside the organization’s headquarters in Washington, DC, collecting the archival documents discussed in this article: pamphlets, newspaper clippings, magazine articles, meeting minutes, convention programs, and more.

Yet, in spite of this increased attention and a myriad of effort to create citizens, scholars of childhood studies have argued that children were imaginary citizens because they could claim few political rights, although they possessed citizenship status. From 1776 to 1868, the concept of imaginary citizens spread and accounted for a large portion of the population “who could not exercise civic rights but who figured heavily into literary depictions of citizenship and were invited to view themselves as citizens despite their limited political franchise” (Weikle-Mills 4). Historically, women, slaves, immigrants, and sometimes animals have shared this status. Although they had limited legal rights, children became increasingly important in conversations surrounding the production of good citizens to ensure the future of democracy in the United States. A critical look at the pageants and plays used to educate children and children’s books from the era highlights the underlying whiteness associated with citizenship and its gendered assumptions.

While both the government and private sector offered a variety of Americanization programs surrounding the World War I era, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs focused on improving the standards of citizenry through education, specifically through initiatives aimed at children. At the General Federation of Women’s Clubs’ Eleventh Biennial Convention in 1912, one clubwoman claimed that success of the development of civic patriotism “is dependent upon the education of the child, the club member and the public” (19). With its broad membership base, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs was in a unique position to influence public schools, the American Pageant Association, and other organizations. Club members felt one of the best ways to ensure good citizens was to educate the public about the importance of children—both immigrant and native born. The General Federation developed its own agenda for America’s future and formed different committees, including the Drama department, to achieve their goals. The General Federation focused on the “educational aim” of plays and pageantry as a way to instruct and incite action among future citizens. Club members saw pageantry and plays as a way to uplift the community, unite diverse citizens, and educate Americans about democracy. Focusing on children through these committees was a logical extension of the organization’s efforts.

Do a Noble Deed: The Influence of Children’s Plays on Citizenship

Along with plays for adults, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs’ Drama pamphlet (1925) provided a list of “Plays for Special Occasions” which included patriotic plays aimed at children.² For instance, F. Ursula Payne’s “The Victory of the Good Citizen” visually illustrated the struggle between a young citizen and evils that threaten the vitality of his or her city. The character of the “Good Citizen” is represented as a graceful knight dressed in armor while the “Bad Citizen” is dressed in dirty and disheveled clothing. Other characters consisted of the abstract ideas “Cleanliness” and “Health” contrasted with the concrete objects “Newspaper,” “Banana Skin,” and “Nutshell.” The purpose of the play is to teach children how to be effective citizens by drawing their attention to good acts of citizenry. The prologue reinforces this idea by stating, “Just little deeds of every day/, Just little actions right/, Determination to obey/, Will make a child a knight” (Payne 174). The purpose of the play is to visually

² In an earlier work, I explore the contradictory nature of the General Federation’s use of pageants and plays as a form of civic education for adults.

demonstrate the role of children in good citizenship through music, dance, and dialogue. The short play begins with the Good Citizen posing the question to the audience:

Now that I have my armor on, I wish that I could do some noble deed. The knights in the olden days could fight for the honor of their country, the American soldier in France, could fight to make the world safe for democracy, but what can the knight of the [classroom or church] do to show his good citizenship? (175)

In the play, the good citizen is challenged to fight dirt and disease by keeping the streets clean. On the surface, the play shows how children can become good citizens by actively throwing away trash and setting a good example. According to scholar Harris Mylonas, "Legitimate authority in modern national states is connected to popular rule, to majorities. Nation-building is the process through which these majorities are constructed" (17). Clubwomen, quite literally, believed the play allowed children to take part in the nation-building of America by creating future democratic participants who would possess voting rights and create the majority.

The themes of the play reflect commonly held assumptions about citizens and citizenship during the Americanization era. Allegiance and obedience were common ideals expressed in the plays of the day and the actions mimicked mass consensus. Payne's play is a good representation of a typical children's patriotic play. A closer look reveals one primary cultural clash of the time—the health of the nation. This play was considered health propaganda, which circulated in response to the fear of the contamination of the nation via immigration. Christine Holbo points out that a large percentage of the population believed in "the adulteration of the national blood-stream by foreign germs: all would weaken and denigrate the body politic." The assumption is that the good citizen of Payne's play is white and must combat "dirt and disease" spread by immigrants who were often deemed bad citizens. Katharine Bullard argues, "The development of programs to promote the welfare of all children helped to establish social citizenship—the right to material assistance as a part of membership in the national community—for American children. However, in the United States, the height of progressive reform in this period also coincided with general white, middle-class consensus on the biological basis of racial divisions and the drawing of internal racial boundaries" (53). Efforts by charitable and government organizations reflected the era's preoccupation with Americanization and middle-class culture and were often focused on the children of immigrants (Bullard 54). The concept of citizenship was clearly racialized and centered on the reproduction of whiteness starting with children because they represented the future and best chance of a "pure" nation.

Here is an excellent example of how the concept of citizenship has historically been used to justify racism. Exposing the historical underpinnings of the term forces teachers interested in educating children or students about citizenship and/or public life to re-examine our teaching practices by engaging tough questions such as: what has changed regarding the rhetoric of citizenship since the Americanization era, and what still needs to be changed for children? The progressive narrative of citizenship rooted in childhood has taken on a life of its own. Historian Annelise Orleck suggests that popular versions of U.S. history "portray a vibrant democracy with a long tradition of extending citizenship rights across an unusually diverse population" (1). The Americanization era, presents a unique opportunity to illustrate the complexity of acting in the name of

democracy and to trouble the rationale of creating good citizens from birth. Ralph Cintron argues that “contemporary rhetorical studies often imagines itself as furthering democracy, and in so doing it acquires a rational and perhaps, as well, a kind of innate virtue” (99-100). He makes the point: [S]uch questions as ‘how do we determine the public good?’ or ‘how do we improve the quality of the public sphere?’ idealize the concept of the public good by suggesting that there is some determination or improvement that will somehow escape the paradoxical conditions of exclusion/inclusion” (112). Using the Americanization era as a prism to view or teach citizenship would heed Cintron’s concerns by allowing children and other students to observe the ways in which democratic rhetorics “overproduce expectations and desires that generate unrealistic claims of quality, freedom, and rights” (113), which is usually impossible for any social order to achieve and maintain. If educators draw on the moralistic and narrowly defined conception of citizenship promoted in children’s plays in the Americanization era, it becomes possible to illustrate the ways in which good citizenship continues to be associated with white, masculine, and healthy bodies. This prism also offers a way to understand current political debates of inclusion and exclusion. Both Donald Trump’s comments regarding immigrants and the debates over admitting Syrian refugees to the United States are two examples of recent rhetoric that highlight current tensions surrounding citizenship.

In addition to whiteness discussed earlier, many of the plays reproduced not only traditional gender roles but an unequal construction of citizenship this is tied inextricably to gender roles. Take for example, Marie Doran’s “The Liberty Thrift Girls” (1918), which deals with the absolute necessity that each individual sacrifice for the good of the nation. The play includes four female central characters: Mrs. Norris, Amy Norris, Lillian Schuman, and Maud Maxwell. The play uses binaries to teach a lesson. Mrs. Norris and her daughter Amy represent ideal citizens who sacrifice money and volunteer time to war efforts and recovery while Lillian and Maud represent excess, indulgence, and selfishness. Early in the play, Amy says, “[Girls] can’t fight in the trenches, I wish we could, but we can fight at home” (18). Part of the play’s message is to define “women of the country’s work,” which is caring for sick and wounded soldiers. Amy mends clothes for orphans of the war, wears old dresses, and then saves money to purchase war bonds, while Lillian spends all of her money on new hats and jewelry, goes to the opera instead of volunteering for the Red Cross. Lillian protests, “I don’t know why I have to bother with the war” (14). By the end of the play, Amy and her mother have convinced Lillian to stay and help mend jackets for American soldiers. Lillian learns the lesson that every individual has a duty to support the army and larger nation. The play concludes with a happy ending where all of the characters are helping their country. On the surface, the play teaches children by presenting a series of binaries such as man/woman, profit/sacrifice, conservation/waste, greed/selflessness, and indulgence/self-control, which were all common themes for the era.

However, Doran’s play not only reproduces traditional gender roles but also reflects the nation’s investment in a gendered construction of citizenship. In *Language, Gender, and Citizenship in American Literature, 1789-1919*, Amy Strand notes:

It is significant, that, even as women were commissioned with ever-widening linguistic responsibilities at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, their roles were yet grounded in their natural, capacities of

reproduction and nurturance—at this point in history, as we have seen, not simply biological reproductions, but social, linguistic, indeed national reproduction, the reproduction of American culture if not American children. (182)

The General Federation of Women’s Club considered patriotic recitations, drills, and pageants as an effective way to “train” children, which included imparting white, middle-class values and traditional gender roles. Looking at the paradoxes inherent in the General Federation of Women’s Club’s pageants, it is evident that there is a desire to teach all children about citizenship, but this desire is clouded by the notion of “training” that was offered which suggested that a good citizen fulfilled traditional gender roles starting in childhood. Returning to these historical artifacts can encourage a more complicated dialogue about children’s citizenship and its gendered expectations.

Train Them Young: The Influence of Children’s Pageants on Citizenship

During the Americanization era, some critics believed that America led the world on employing drama as an educational force in public schools and there was an increasing need for children’s plays and pageants (“How to Produce,” Mackay 28). In *New Plays for Red Letter Days*, the authors claim there was a “round-the-calendar demand for holiday material” for children during the first part of the twentieth century. To address this need the General Federation of Women’s Clubs wrote and produced pageants for public schools and encouraged their performance across the nation. At the twelfth annual Biennial Convention in 1913, Miss Mary Gray Peck, chairman of the General Federation’s Drama Department discussed the committee’s role in the process:

[Members of the drama committee] have devised pageants and masks, serious and comic. Our public schools have taken up the movement...That the drama has entered into our school is plainly seen in the demand for juvenile pageants and plays which pours into our committee and the headquarters of the Drama League and the American Pageant Association. It is seen also in the accounts in the daily press of spontaneous dramatic entertainments arranged by school children all over the country. (203)

A closer examination of several of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs’ recommended pageants reveal a specific rhetorical vision of citizenship and narrative of the nation’s identity. Many of the pageants suggested by the General Federation’s Pageants and Plays pamphlet center around the idea that children will become effective citizens through individual service and sacrifice to the country. The unified vision of citizenship emerges through the repetition of the same ideas in each one the pageants and plays and works to subvert potential crises by presenting the illusion of mass consensus. The plays and pageants functioned as a way to instill certain values in children and create a unified vision of America.

On the General Federation’s approved booklist, Maude Jackson’s *The New Idea Speaker for Children* (1901) reminds parents of their duty to aid in the development of their children. Jackson writes, “There is no such work which includes greater pleasure in greater honor or richer reward than the training of very young children. Your child is

what you (its parents) make it; and the work of training and developing cannot be begun too soon” (272). Some critics, along with the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, assume that children need specific instructions on how to become better citizens. Another text recommended by the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, argues that young people “are seldom given to critical evaluation of their actions,” thus they need the guidance and direction that pageantry can provide (MacKaye 8). Although I could not find any pictures of children performing the pageants discussed above, consider the three images of children performing in similar patriotic pageants during the same era. The visual images highlight the tensions surrounding the competing ideas of citizenship in the Americanization era.

Figure 1³ is from a Honolulu pageant in June of 1922. The image appeared in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* alongside an essay which argued for Americanization as the goal of education in Hawaii: “The public schools are the chief agency in harmonizing and developing the citizenship of the future...[molding] young people of many bloods into men and women not forgetful or ashamed of their race-origin but proud of an American citizenship broad enough to include the children of all bloods.” Schools were often considered the key agent for instilling appropriate values in children, especially immigrants. This quote reveals the more benevolent goals of teaching American citizenship as an equalizing umbrella which will include all nationalities.

Figure 2⁴ is a picture taken from the City of Philadelphia pageant in 1912. One critic writes, “On the whole, the pageant, which processed down Broad Street for four miles through Central Philadelphia, presented a truncated view of the city’s history that largely excluded both African-Americans and any ethnic groups beyond the earliest settlers and stressed allegiance to the city above all other ties” (Kativa). The pageant represents the paradox of how civic engagement and social change did not benefit all children. Immigrants and African Americans were often excluded from the progressive narrative of citizenship.

Figure 3⁵ is a picture of the Chicago Commons Pageant in 1924. During the Americanization era, a series of large patriotic pageants were held by many of the settlement houses. According to some information, many immigrants participated in the pageants, although other historians have indicated that immigrants, African-Americans, and sometime women were excluded from them. It is hard to determine the exact participants from the above images. However, taken together, they offer a visual illustration of the social and cultural tensions surrounding children and citizenship

³ Figure 1 can be viewed in the article by A. Kam Napier: <http://www.honolulumagazine.com/Honolulu-Magazine/September-2013/From-Our-Files-Education/>.

⁴ Figure 2 can be viewed in the article by Hillary Kativa: <http://www.phillyhistory.org/blog/index.php/page/26/>.

⁵ Figure 3 can be viewed in the encyclopedia entry written by Sarah Marcus: <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/3525.html>.

during the Americanization era. These historical examples of pageants offer a rich context in which to teach the conflicts of citizenship and flaws of democracy.

A Great Nation is a Reading Nation: The Influence of Children's Books on Citizenship

The role of reading has historically been linked to producing good citizens. First, there has always been a “proper” way to engage citizenship. There was a right way and a wrong way to craft citizens, then and now. Second, there has always been an accepted process for becoming a citizen. Early American citizenship was strongly shaped by children's storybooks encouraged young people to “love their books” as a way of forming patriotic attachments to the nation's laws (Wiekle-Mills 10). Therefore, literary and print versions of citizenship were often based on evolving cultural assumptions about what kind of citizen a child could or should be. Essentially, they offered instructions how children should interact with language, nation, and law.

The Federal Bureau for Children was established in 1912 by President Taft. It was the first federal agency that was devoted exclusively to helping to families and their children. Despite universalist language, only some were helped. The Bureau was invested in creating an image of the perfect future citizen. Bullard argues that “[t]he services provided by the Federal Bureau for Children built on the national eugenics movement that argued for material and educational assistance as a way to strengthen white, middle-class motherhood and reproduction (54). The Bureau reflected the height of progressive reform in the United States which was intertwined with general white, middle-class consensus on the biological basis on racial divisions and the drawing of racial boundaries. With a rise in immigration and immigrant children came a concern with enforcing appropriate moral and cultural values in the face of a perceived rise in crime and a changing population. The Sheppard-Towner Act, which was passed in 1921, best exemplifies the nation's focus on the importance of white children's social citizenship—the right of children to have their well-being a matter of national interest (Bullard 60). There is a modern day parallel that could be explored with students. Beginning in 2014, there has been an unprecedented influx of immigrant children from Central America who have crossed the Rio Grande. It raises a wide variety of questions for students to consider and address through a historical lens: What should happen to unaccompanied children who cross the border? What type of legal immigration reform is needed? In what ways is this situation different than or similar to rise in immigration during the Americanization era? Asking these types of questions helps create a more open and informed discussion of the role of children and citizenship today.

The forewords to children's readers and lists of recommended books at that time reflect the evolving cultural assumptions about American citizenship. During the interwar period from 1918-1939, the rise of Americanism permeated approaches toward children's education and reading. The General Federation of Women's Clubs assumed responsibility for overseeing children's literature in order to ensure healthy habits of reading for future generations. Clubwomen had already begun promoting the idea that great literature created great culture within their clubs by focusing on American literature (“American Poetry and Prose”). Members of the General Federation treated the importance of cultivating good reading habits for children as a logical extension of their internal club efforts. They believed that children needed literature as much as an

adult; good literature reflected life and would provide children with a mirror of life and model for living.

In the article “Wartime Reading for Children,” published in the General Federation’s magazine, clubwoman Alice M. Jordan discusses what constitutes educational reading and list examples of books thought to “enrich the lives and widen the sympathies of our children” (December 1918, 7). The General Federation of Women’s Clubs believed the practice of reading would prepare children to be moral and patriotic citizens committed to serving America. The article goes on to argue, “No better way can be imagined for stimulating the best traditions and ideals of our Democracy than putting these and other books like them into the hands of young people” (8). In *New Roads to Childhood* (1923), Anne Carroll Moore argues that a child must first learn “how to read for one’s self” before patriotism can be understood (135). The majority of texts on the General Federation’s booklist present reading as the “master key” needed to unlock effective citizenship. Without informed reading practices, children are destined for corruption, ignorance, and criminal behavior. The General Federation of Women’s Clubs worked to ensure the future of democracy by treating children as citizens-in-training. The ideal citizen was to be well read, knowledgeable, and devoted to civic affairs.

The early part of the twentieth century brought more initiatives focused on children’s literacy and education. In 1918, the Education Act was passed which eliminated fees for attendance at all elementary schools and changed the age requirement for leaving school to fourteen. Additionally, National Children’s Book Week began in 1919 as one of the first family-centered reading initiatives in America. Drawing another parallel between past and present, it continues to be celebrated today with the same mission statement: “The need for Children’s Book Week today is as essential as it was in 1919” and the task remains to bring “us together to talk about books and reading and, out of our knowledge and love of books, to put the cause of children’s reading squarely before the whole community and, community by community, across the whole nation. For a great nation is a reading nation” (American Booksellers Association).

Similar to other reading programs, the GFWC issued a public statement on the value of reading programs: “No other community project undertaken by a club can have more far-reaching results than a plan for emphasizing the importance of providing children with the *right* books and encouraging them to love reading” (“Promotion of Children’s Reading,” emphasis added). Their Program for Children included several emphases to encourage reading. The “Year-Round Recreational Reading Committee” in Los Angeles and the “Earn-a-Book” campaign both served to promote children’s reading. The GFWC’s pamphlet “Promotion of Children’s Reading” from the Los Angeles Year-Round meeting reported that it “had a great influence on the reading habits of Los Angeles boys and girls through closer relations between the public library branches and the classrooms in the schools, widespread distribution of approved booklists, more frequent programs on books and reading at club meetings and school assemblies, and increased interest in the service local bookstores and libraries offers parents in the selection of books for home (“Promotion of Children’s Reading”). The General Federation of Women’s Clubs’ Earn-a-Book campaign offered another way to promote children’s reading through an essay contest for grade and high schools, which offered a prize to the child who wrote the most compelling account of how he or she earned money to purchase a book during Children’s Book Week in 1926. The General

Federation believed that the “investment of hard-earned funds [would] have greater educational value [for children] than any mere talks about books” (“Promotion of Children’s Reading”).

During this time, the production of children’s literature and illustrated books also expanded. In response to the new market, publishers created juvenile departments with special editors who created new booklists year round. Consider the Figures 4-6⁶ featured on three different posters for Children’s Book Week from 1919-1930. Taken together, the pictures reflect the cultural construction of good citizenship which starts in the home, is inextricably connected to reading the correct book, and perpetuates a visual construction of citizenship embodied by whiteness and middle-class values. From the promotional materials featured in the early years of Children’s Book Week, it is clear that the literacy initiative focused on white children as the visual representation of ideal citizenship. Bullard has argued that “the children of African American sharecroppers, Puerto-Ricans, or Mexicans were not brought into citizenship because they did not share the European heritage of the nation” (62).

In cooperation with Children’s Book Week in 1926, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs produced a pamphlet titled “Suggestions for Children’s Reading” that recommended more than a dozen books for parents and their children. In the introduction to *The Three Owls: A Book About Children’s Books*, Anne Carroll Moore writes: “The recent adoption of programs devoted to children’s reading by the National Federation of Women’s Clubs is more evidence that the subject has become one of country-wide interest and significance” (64). Her comments reveal the organization’s authority and widespread influence on developing standards for proper reading practices. Each of the titles listed on “Suggestions for Children’s Reading” assumes that reading is a necessary practice for children to develop moral sense, cultivate taste, and instill character. The booklist also reflects the importance of guided or directed reading practices for children. The *Basic Book Collection for Elementary Grades* (1922) is a good example of a recommended book on the General Federation’s list that tells parents, teachers, and librarians which texts to accept and reject for children’s reading. In addition to the prevailing assumptions about reading mentioned above, the General Federation’s suggested materials also reveal an emphasis on a gendered patriotism, whiteness, and, perhaps surprisingly, a focus on cultural diversity.

Like the pageants and plays endorsed by the General Federation many of the books recommended for children contained themes of gendered patriotism. Donna Norton’s contemporary study of twentieth-century children’s literature suggests that children’s books from 1856-1903 contained the most overt themes of patriotism with conventional gender roles—men joined the military and women volunteered to help wounded soldiers. In the preface to *Patriotic Readings and Recitations* (1902), the editor Josephine Stafford explains the primary purpose of the General Federation

⁶ Figures 4-6 can be viewed in the book *75 Years of Children’s Book Week Posters*. Figure 4 is illustrated by Jessie Wilcox Smith in 1930: a young boy and girl in the home library. Figure 5 is also illustrated by Jessie Wilcox Smith in 1924: an adolescent boy and girl reading in the home. Figure 6 is illustrated in 1929 by Robert Gellert: an adolescent boy and girl pictured in a home library surrounded by a large stack of books.

approved collection: “It is part of our inheritance to preserve the utterances of the men and women who have by their voice and pen done much to advance the spirit of truth, heroism and patriotism—the chief characteristic of our American manhood and womanhood.” Many of the selections of readings, orations and recitations contain stories about masculine historical figures like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Daniel Boone who are presented as heroes in the narrative of American history. In the patriotic readers boys were often expected to recite the parts of presidents, soldiers, and adventurers. For instance, in Maude Jackson’s collection *The Idea Speaker* (1901), the recitation “The World Remembers Washington” calls for a boy speaker to say, “The whole world, and not America alone, is indebted to this noble patriot for an example of pure patriotism and nobility of life” (108).

In *Patriotic Celebrations* (1910), Marie Irish includes the recitation “Love of Country,” which proclaims, “Let the examples of patriots, in deeds of heroism and self-sacrifice, be our theme of meditation and discussion” (75). Her reader, which was recommended by the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, includes “Our Country” which reminds children of their duty to the country, “Your country calls you to come forward and bear your share of the public burden; to take part in the civic life of your town, your country, your state, and your nation. Only as you perform this duty do you show your love for the land of your birth or your adoption” (26). The General Federation of Women’s Clubs advanced the notion patriotic drills and recitation could help form children’s character by requiring them to read and recite the words from historical speeches. For instance, the recommended *Boys’ and Girls’ Own Speaker and Reciter* includes part of George Washington’s address to his army before they began the battle of Long Island in 1776. The speech highlights the soldiers’ duty to serve the country in a time of crisis that will determine if Americans are freemen or slaves. Washington reminds his soldiers of their duty to the nation: “Upon your courage and conduct rest the hopes of our bleeding and insulted country” because “Liberty, property, life and honor are all at stake” (163).

The General Federation of Women’s Clubs was interested in promoting a proper course of citizen training for children through reading, but part of the process of becoming a citizen also involved an awareness of other countries and an appreciation of other cultural customs. Naumburg’s text *The Child’s First Books* (1925) also poses the question, “Is it not possible even at the pre-school age to develop an appreciation of other people and other ways, so that a new generation may grow up ready to join in a league of world peace and co-operation?” (10). Overall, the booklists make an effort to introduce cross-cultural texts and address the cultures of other countries.⁷ The General Federation of Women’s Clubs saw children as the future citizens of the United States. Far from adopting an exclusive or limited construction of citizenship, clubwomen promoted an ideal type of citizenship which started by encouraging children to read and become life-long readers. Interestingly, the General Federation’s list also highlights the importance of understanding the diversity of other cultures. Examples of specific children’s books thought to be acceptable range from Lucille Gulliver’s *Friendship of Nations: A Story of the Peace Movement* (1912) to J. R. Chitty’s *Things Seen in China* (1922). While guidebooks for children’s reading used words like “acceptable” and

⁷ It is worth noting that at least two of the recommended reading guides point to a dearth of American children’s literature and history.

“appropriate,” the booklists themselves provide a diverse array of children’s texts. *The Child’s First Books* (1925) by Elsa Naumburg argues for the importance of recognizing foreign publications because it is only through seeing a diverse array of pictures and hearing tales from around the world that “the child learns how the work of the world is done” (4). In the introduction Naumburg argues children need good literature because it is “a mirror of life” (3). In order to represent a complicated and rich view of the world, children need to be exposed to foreign publications.

Conclusion

In the recent edited collection, *The Public Work of Rhetoric: Citizen-Scholars and Civic Engagement*, Jeffrey Grabill proposes an interesting solution to the dilemma of how teachers might conduct civic education. He states, “I want to explore the notion that [our] public work might be to support the work of others—to help other people write, speak, and make new media and other material objects effectively” (193). What I find so interesting about this proposition is that it unintentionally parallels many well-intentioned efforts that took place during the Americanization era. The idea of assisting those in need is analogous to the General Federation of Women’s Clubs’ efforts to reach out to immigrants, libraries, and schools to establish the proper process and books necessary for becoming an American citizen. While helping others, serving the greater public, or urging students to participate as citizens in a democracy can be noble goals, history has taught us that all of those terms are contested and that not everyone shares the same status as a citizen. In *Tactics of Hope*, Paula Mathieu points out that before teachers engage different discourse communities, they should ask themselves: “Can we listen? Do they want help?” (xi).

The contemporary pedagogical issues I have raised in the introduction have their roots in earlier historical and cultural moments. How, then, can we learn from them, situated as we are in another time, in schools and academic programs that face increasing pressure to justify their existence? I argue that considering historical definitions of citizenship can be useful to educators who wish to critically engage in the relationship between reading, writing and democracy. As we work to reconceive citizenship education for children in the future, we must rely on history to inform our collective struggles and pedagogical imagination. Historical analysis offers ideas to consider and questions to ask ourselves as we respond to the exigencies and contexts of our own pedagogical situations.

Consider the following questions: What kind of civic education should be promoted for children? What does our iteration of civic education ask children to do? What kind of democratic participation do we envision for children? In a time where immigration is a hotly debated topic, where politicians argue to shut down borders, and where our schools are increasingly filled with different ethnicities of children, how do we create a dialogue about what it means to be a good citizen in the United States? In Virginia Crisco’s “Activating Activist Literacy: Discovering Dispositions for Civic Identity Development,” she states, “[C]itizens form their identities by learning about unfair and unequal situations that face others who are not like them” (as qtd in Pike 39). Thus, the ideal citizen is one who can civilly listen, understand, and interact with those inside and outside of his or her communities. This idea works well when teaching through the prism of the Americanization era. It would be worthwhile to infuse

pedagogies with an exploration of the Americanization era as way to complicate the idea of good citizenship and better understand how it has historically shifted. It allows for an opportunity to see the ways in which citizenship differed depending on the specific population. For instance, the concept of citizenship did not confer the same privileges to immigrants, children, members of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, African Americans, and Native Americans. The progressive narrative of citizenship rooted in childhood has taken on a life of its own. Studying citizenship and democracy through the prism of the Americanization era allows students to witness the historic racial tensions and gendered expectations that are reflected in the era, many of which still exist today. Rather than avoiding the complications of democracy and citizenship, children and students have the opportunity to connect the past to the present in meaningful ways and to develop their own vision(s) for the future.

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