

July 10, 2023

Dear Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands,

Have you ever been to a major exhibition devoted to U.S. women's history? ("Major" being more than 80 objects.) Some people have, but most people haven't. Upon reflection, most people will realize that U.S. history—as presented in public space—is a men's history. The notable exceptions were the major exhibitions about women's suffrage, on view in 2019 at the National Portrait Gallery, the Library of Congress and the National Archives. Women's history was, for the first time, *visibly* valued. Now, you might ask yourself: why did it take until 2019?

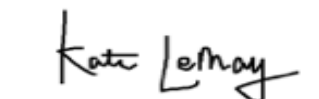
The news website *Slate* came out with an essay in 2016 asserting that 70% to 80% of historians are men. Unsurprisingly, men typically write about men's history. In fact, it was not until 2019, when the book *Votes for Women: A Portrait of Persistence* was published, that a comprehensive book accounted for the long history of women's struggle for the right to vote. It was the first publication in sixty years to link U.S. suffrage history from a beginning point, 1832, to an end point, 1965. (Eleanor Flexner published the previous book to do so, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States*, in 1959).

So, where would people learn that *women* staged one of the longest social reform movements *in the history of the United States*? In 2019, visitors to Washington, D.C., discovered for the first time that the history of women's suffrage is not a boring history of nagging spinsters; but that it is an exciting history of revolution staged by political geniuses. The men and women of the suffrage movement were the original rule breakers; they are the historical equivalent to the activists that we esteem and admire today for speaking out for their rights.

Indeed, the way educators in the United States frame women's history in general needs attention. In 2017, the National Women's History Museum revealed that of the 178 individual women named in state standards for education in middle and high school textbooks, four of them were non-U.S. women (like Margaret Thatcher) and two were not even real women (such as Rosie the Riveter).

How are women to be valued in American society when there is not even a monument to their history on the National Mall? Animating this undervalued history with the greatest impact is something that only a well-thought out, beautifully designed monument can do. This letter is meant to express my full support of building a monument to U.S. women's suffrage on the National Mall.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kate Lemay". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Kate Clarke Lemay, PhD
Historian, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution