Putting Frances Kellor in State Public School Curriculum as an LGBTQ+ Role Model

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Abstract

This article argues that, as an LGBTQ+ icon, Frances Kellor, (1873 – 1952), should have a place in The United States of America's public school curriculum. Kellor's appropriateness comes from her manifold accomplishments. Kellor worked in women's sports, immigration, African American rights, got women the right to vote, led two Presidential campaigns, and launched the field of international arbitration. As a prolific author, Kellor also left us very easily read primary sources to use in classroom discussions. LGBT inclusion stirs controversy. With Kellor, we can avoid controversy because her accomplishments merit discussion on their own. That means that her LGBTQ+ identity does not need prominence in classroom discussions. And, yet, simply acknowledging her gender identity will fill students with admiration.

Frances Kellor, LGBTQ+, curriculum, inclusion, progressive politics

1.1

American LGBTQ+ rights have captured and increasingly held headlines and national attention. This article will argue for Frances Kellor's inclusion in state and national curricula. Most obviously, conservative moral concerns plague the introduction of LGBT role models and curriculum. Judy Chiasson is the Program Coordinator for Human Relations, Diversity, and Equity for California's largest school district - the Los Angeles Unified School District. She summarized the public relations problem, "People sexualize homosexuality and romanticize heterosexuality." (Watanabe, 2011) In other words, to make LGBT figures less threatening, we must see them as people rather than simply a sexual orientation and gender challenges. Kellor's Victorian attitudes towards relationships make her a perfect LGBT role model. Her 47-year relationship with Mary Elizabeth Dreier serves as a model of devotion and monogamy in an LGBT relationship. Their private letters hint strongly at sexuality. They shared a home and grew old together. The two went out frequently, yet maintained a strong sense of public decorum. Their relationship demonstrates that LGBT persons can have conservative romantic relationships.

Kellor also merits inclusion due to her prolific and varied career. Kellor lived from 1873 – 1952. During her long life, she intersected with and led a litany of causes. She founded the National Urban League, led to the founding of State Unemployment systems, had a huge influence in women getting the vote nationally, ran two major political campaigns, steered the fate of the Ellis Island immigrants, launched women's sports and pioneered international arbitration. Since Kellor engaged in a wide array of issues at the highest level, we can include her accomplishments and include her LGBTQ+ status incidentally So, rather than strike

potential critics as propaganda for "the LGBTQ+ lifestyle," she merits inclusion based on her accomplishments not directly related to her gender. Given Kellor's incredible productivity, potential critics of her inclusion will have to supply reasons why she should not have space in the curriculum. They can only refuse her on the grounds of disapproving of the LGBTQ+ rights in general. And, in our society, such a bigoted stance faces an uphill battle.

1.2

Always wearing male attire during the Progressive era made a statement. While demure about her sexual life, Kellor publically denounced gender stereotypes and the "sex cloisters" they promulgated. Her calls for women to take on more masculine personas can spark very valuable classroom discussions. This can include a debate over whether we should address Kellor by a masculine or feminine pronoun. During her lifetime, the term 'transgender' did not exist. People like her got called, 'inverts.' And, the thought of using a masculine pronoun may never have occurred to her. As such, this article will use the feminine pronouns. But, her photos and lifestyle clearly indicate her invert status. Additionally, she lived with and was buried next to her partner, Mary Dreier. Given their nearly 50-year relationship, we may ask if we should pronounce them as 'married.' Again, in their day, this was not a possibility. Today it is common place. This article will call her married, 'husband,' and Dreier, her 'wife.' Again, rather than statements, this terminology hopes to invite discussion.

2.1

Kellor led in the acceptance of women's sports. In the early 20th century women's sports were very controversial. Critics worried that such activities would make the women masculine. Starting with her 1898 article A Psychological Basis for Physical Culture, Kellor twisted and reversed the critics' logic. She argued that women needed sports precisely because they could make them more masculine. This was necessary due to women increasingly leading lives outside the confines of the home. Kellor's writing has an accessible yet confrontational style. Thus teachers can easily include selections from her many articles and books in their teaching lessons. Her controversial statements will elicit discussion easily. For example, she derided females for being "indifferent to any form of morality other than the virtue of their own sex" instead of examining social issues. (Dudley, Kellor 1909) She denounced women's feigned helplessness and "morbid" femininity, as well as the domestic sphere itself. (Ethical Value, 1906) Using Kellor, we can ask about women's traditional roles and to what extent we might wish to challenge them. Our proposed role model argued that we blend gender discussions into physical education courses. In a book she co-authored with Gertrude Dudley, *Athletic Games in the Education of Women,* Kellor argued that the active stance sports inculcated in women, as well as the cooperative values and the democratic spirit wherein "pull" meant nothing, gave athletic

games meaning. Thus, she told her readers sports would help women fight in public arenas for political and social reform.

2.2

Prior to Kellor, people held that crime resulted from personal moral failings. In Kellor's day, the world's leading criminal sociologist, Cesaer Lombroso, convinced the populace that some people had biological predispositions to crime. Kellor helped launch the view that environmental social ills breed crime. (Freedman, 1981) To defeat Lombroso, our subject replicated his studies using an early predecessor of the polygraph, the Kymograph. She measured northern white women in colleges and prisons. Then armed with this data, she traveled 3,277 miles through eight southern states measuring female African-American penitentiary inmates. Great primary sources resulted. (Kellor, 1900) Controversy sells. We cannot but recoil at Kellor's saying of African-Americans that, "no race outside of barbarism had so low a grade of domestic life. In none other the child received so little training." (Kellor, 1901, 138) Despite some positive evaluations of African – American life, Kellor considers African – American culture problematic. Yet, she never blamed the African – Americans themselves; referring to slavery, she relates, "Negroes have not had quite forty years in which to *create* and establish all the sound principles of domestic life." (Kellor, 1901, 138) She laments, "It is difficult for them to reach an ideal of self respect when no one has faith in that ideal for them." (Kellor, 1901, 140) Kellor argues that African-Americans' failings stem from the institutionalized discrimination and brutal racism of the South. Needless to say her tour and book about southern African – American female prisons broke ground. And, her work for African – American women did not end in the south.

2.3

In the early 1900s more women worked as domestic maids than any other profession. Kellor herself had to drop out of high school to help her mother work as a domestic worker. So a personal animus likely fueled her undercover investigation of the exploitation of domestic workers. In another personal note, upon moving to New York, our role model began her quasi-marital, life-long relationship with her wife Mary Elizabeth Dreier, (1875 – 1963). Dreier headed the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory investigation that killed women and the New York branch of the Women's Trade Union League. Her investigation into the exploitation of domestic workers led to her book, *Out of Work: A Study of Employment Agencies: Their Treatment of the Unemployed, and Their Influence Upon Homes and Business* detailed her exploration of the exploitation of domestic workers. Published in 1904, Kellor "omitted tables and statistical details, at the risk of being called unscientific" because she wished to speak to a broad audience. (Kellor, 1904, v) To this end she also told her stories in *Harper's Bazaar* and *The Ladies' Home Journal*. Students will feel like their peering back into the private lives of women as they read

articles in these magazines they still see on newsstands today. Advanced scholars should ponder if Kellor has been omitted from intellectual history for seeking popular audiences. But youth will just enjoy reading from old issues of popular magazines that still exist.

These popular articles and the *Out of Work's* description of Kellor's descent into the toil by domestic workers would fit nicely into curriculum that looks into progressive era poverty, immigrant experiences and African – American history. Kellor follows women into the pits of exploitation. Herein we also hear about the impact of racism on various groups. In Out of Work, Kellor explores the disparate impact of poverty on immigrant women and African – American women coming migrating from the South. The many vignettes Kellor provides in this regard will grab the attention of students. To help black women coming north to work as domestic servants, In 1906 Kellor founded the National League for the Protection of Colored Women (NLPCW). (Ososky, 1963, 58) With an increasingly characteristic eye towards national solutions, Kellor explained "A national organization can control the seaports and establish close relations between rescue agencies in the South and those in the North." (1905, To Shield) Three years after being established, Kellor's National League had affiliates in New York, Philadelphia, Memphis, Baltimore, Norfolk, and Memphis. In 1910 Kellor's NLPCW merged with two other groups to form the National Urban League. (Urban League, 1951) The National Urban League is still a leading Civil Rights organization. But, in founding this organization, she stayed aware of her race, as a White woman. She worked hard to have African – American women lead the organizations she helped found. About the founding, one modern author noted that with the NLPCW "for the first time, Negroes in any appreciable numbers shared responsibility for the operation of charitable agencies." (Scheiner, 1965, 153) Kellor wrote, "The colored people are really doing his work of helping their unemployed women themselves." (Kellor, Frances, 1905)

2.4

In helping domestic workers, Kellor transitioned from a focus on African – American women to the booming Ellis Island immigrant population. Kellor's first official position working with immigrants raises transgender issues. At the age of 32, she became the first woman to head a New York State agency when she took the position of chief of the Bureau of Industries and Immigrants. In this capacity she took the very feminine and famous settlement house worker Lillian Wald to industrial sites. Currently high school curriculum usually includes Jane Addams and settlement houses. Rather than a settlement home, Kellor took her investigations to industrial sites. Students can compare and contrast Kellor's male image and tours of industrial sites with the motherly image that Addams and Wald portray as they open 'homes' for immigrants. Classes can discuss why their textbooks now focus on the more feminine leaders of the time. Kellor should provide a gendered corollary to the already prominent place of settlement homes, Jane Addams and immigration in our existing curriculum. The very name of the Bureau of Industries and

Immigrants suggests a view of immigrants we often miss. When US History courses discuss the “Red Scare” and the “Red Menace” we focus on the loyalty of immigrants. Kellor relentlessly denounced industries that exploited immigrants as ‘un-American’ and in need of ‘Americanization.’ As the head of a pro-immigrant organization, Kellor publicized the feeling of unfairness that led immigrants to join radical movements. Kellor’s sensitivity to immigrants and damning of industries provides interesting fodder for extended discussions of anti-communism. (Red Raids, 1920)

2.5

In 1912, the New York Times proclaimed that a year prior anyone who suggested that women would take a leading role in Presidential campaigns would have been “thought mad.” (Women As A, 1912) Yet when Kellor temporarily sidelined her immigration work to serve on the Progressive Party’s six-member Executive Committee Administrative Board backing Theodore Roosevelt’s Presidential candidacy, she rewrote gender normalcy. (Maxwell, 1969, 189) During the campaign Roosevelt boasted, “It’s been a great thing to see how women like Miss Addams and Miss Kellor, and women like that, have gone into the campaign.” (Colonel’s Last, 1912) Discussions of the impact of sexism on women can profit from the many examples Kellor’s life provides. As a Presidential candidate Roosevelt exclaimed, “I always favored woman’s suffrage, but only tepidly, until my association with women like Jane Addams and Frances Kellor, who desired it as one means of enabling them to render better and more efficient service, changed me into a zealous instead of a lukewarm adherent of the cause.” (Roosevelt, 1913, 180) This statement provides us with another justification for her inclusion in public school curriculum; she played a crucial and unheralded role in getting women the vote. And, the pairing of her name with Addams and Roosevelt’s undermines any claims that putting LGBT persons into curriculum requires elevating minor figures.

Roosevelt lost the campaign. From her position as defeated election leader Kellor soared to the peak of her creativity. She invented a form of government previously unknown called ‘The Service.’ The Service, had local groups that selected members to go to State conventions. These, in turn, sent representatives to National Service conventions. All of the Service participants researched and publicized legislation. Thus, while the Progressive Party’s political branch worked on electing politicians, her organization focused on issues. Furthermore, rather than only asking people to participate in politics every four years, the Service inspired constant activism. The Service has been portrayed as the peak of the Progressive Era. (Recchiuti, 2006) As such, it fits well in high school history curriculum’s featuring of the Progressive movement. Later Kellor advocated civilian training programs. The speak directly to the grade twelve topic of “the scope and limits of rights and obligations as democratic citizens, the relationships among them, and how they are secured.” (Recchiuti, 2006) While too theoretical for lower grades, Kellor even provides

engaging controversial standards-based materials that can speak to our oldest students. When the Service failed, Kellor returned to street activism. The articles describing her taking Theodore Roosevelt to homeless shelters are entertaining. She advocated that Ellis Island get made a homeless shelter and launched "Bundle Day" wherein all sectors of society mobilized to get clothes to the poor. Roosevelt visited the Bundle Day headquarters. When asked, he would not pose for photographs alone, "insisting that Miss Kellor stand with him." (Bundle Day, 1915) She beamed, "The biggest thing about Bundle Day is it is socializing the city – everybody is lending a hand." (Kellor, 1915) At the end of these efforts eight hundred homeless people threw a party for Kellor. (Social Era, 1915) Students will develop a sense of awe for their own activist potential when studying this LGBT role model. In terms of debate, Kellor's Bundle Day efforts demand discussions of community versus governmental activism.

California's curriculum already requires that history classes discuss the 'Americanization' movement. And, California having a large textbook market, means its inclusion should have national weight. Kellor headed the Americanization movement. Americanization Day is one of Kellor's most visibly striking programs. For Americanization Day, July 4th, 1918, Kellor's organization had 70,000 immigrants march up New York's 5th Avenue in their traditional costumes. Native Americans and several hundred Filipinos had floats. The Bolivian float had llamas. (To Teach, 1915) With just six weeks of organizing time, starting in 1915, Kellor's group created such events in over 150 cities. (Americanization Day, 1915) These events stressed that while ethnic groups battled each other overseas in the First World War, on our soil all of us American residents were united. Few events exemplify this ideal than Kellor's Americanization Day parades. And the State saying teaching this ideal is a central goal of our curriculum justifies teaching about Kellor at any grade level. Appropriately enough, Kellor also created Americanization curriculum for New York's schools. Kellor's Americanization curriculum also asks that teachers, "tell your students of the various forms of welfare work in which they can take an active part. Have them observe their community life, analyze it, and cooperate for its improvement." (Americanization Day, 1915) The curriculum prods teachers, ""*Do not only talk* about community life but get your students to think along lines of civic betterment." (Americanization Day, 1915) They are to note problems and act together to remedy them. In cooperating for community improvement immigrants will see, "a mutual understanding with an aroused interest for community life will bring definite action for the 'New Citizenship,' the citizenship of service." Research Department) Using the same word that named her Progressive Service form of government, herein she helped instigate what we today call Service Learning.

2.5

To support Charles Evans Hughes' 1916 candidacy for President of the United States, Kellor loaded up a train of activist women and they had a "31-day $40,000 transcontinental trip, during which they crossed 28 States, held 195 meetings, and addressed about 500,000 persons." (Hughes Women, 1916) A writer beamed, "No military staff on the eve of battle ever suffered so amiably the ready criticism of co-workers . . . With Frances Kellor presiding the meeting was opened with historical discussion of men's campaign trains and the masculine way of working." (Tell Why, 1916) This exciting embattled train ride would engage students as it raised discussions of gender politics and debates on suffrage. With Kellor's encouragement, Hughes became the second Presidential candidate to put suffrage on a national party platform. But to not alienate men, the train could only go in states that already had suffrage. (Hughes Gets, 1916) This limitation happened, our masculine heroine asserted, due to "the inability of the Republican leaders to grasp the idea that women can do campaign work without arguing for suffrage." (Kellor 1917) She hoped the train would refute the idea that women "have inalienable tendencies like prohibition and suffrage which they cannot keep out of politics." (Kellor, 1917) She partially accepted the limitation concerning their mobility because she thought constant activism more important than votes. High school curriculum usually already directs teachers to discuss, women's suffrage and changing social roles. Kellor's pro-suffrage train journey, can illustrate such discussions with vivid historical incident. Upon arriving in cities, the female campaigners for Presidential candidate Hughes often dispersed in cars to speak at various street corners. Many of the speeches happened in factories. Their heated rhetoric against President Woodrow Wilson's racism led to a large African-American torchlight procession. Hecklers confronted the strident social reformers everywhere they went. Weapons were drawn and fights broke out as they campaigned in Oregon. This trip even featured over 30 cities in California. Kellor is not a dry, remote figure. Students will admire her.

2.6

In 1921 America enacted very tough immigration restrictions. As this happened, our visionary subject argued that we needed to enter treaties to protect "international human beings." Her globalist position makes a stark contrast to the nationalist position the country had adopted. Kellor's friends bought her a media organization. As the single largest advertisers in foreign language papers, she helped stave off government attempts to ban foreign language newspapers and asked immigrants to stay in America. But the country clearly did not share her support of open borders. While fighting for international human beings, Kellor started researching international treaties. Her studies of the League of Nations was said to have influenced the current form of the United Nations. Kellor held the post of Vice-President of the American Arbitration Association (AAA) from its inception in

1926 until her death on January 4th, 1952. She developed a twelve-part vision of universal commercial arbitration which she ended by noting that disputes' "systematic settlement, through a science of arbitration designed to avoid the mounting menace of conflict, is a part of the realization of a vision of universal arbitration." This framework is still followed. Ever optimistic, even after World War II she hoped that arbitration would serve as a "counterbalance to the organized forces of destruction let loose through conflict and war." (Kellor, 1948) The AAA is now among the leading international arbitration organizations in the world. The AAA currently has thirty-four offices and negotiates over 200,000 disputes a year.

3.1

In Kellor we have an extraordinary figure who can serve as a LGBTQ+ role model in many contexts. In having made immigrants feel welcome, easing workers' lives, explaining the situation of African-American women in prisons to America, making playing sports alright for women, and helping them get the vote, Kellor's actions not only impacted others lives, but have impacted ours. And Kellor's many significant achievements would put those who seek to ban LGBTQ+ representations from public school education on the defensive. Even were she not LGBTQ+, Kellor merit inclusion in public schools' curriculum. As her very New York school system curriculum argued, the sort of activism she engaged in necessarily makes one a good citizen. Her exemplary public morals also make her difficult for to dismiss. Furthermore, having impacted so many disparate areas of interest, she provides teachers ample opportunities to mention her. If the teacher has no time to teach about this LGBTQ+ heroine in discussions of African – Americans, they can mention her under labor rights, immigration rights, female sports, suffrage or the formation of the United Nations. Many states now require 'service learning,' wherein students help in their communities as a prerequisite to graduation. Kellor's work could contribute to understanding the importance of such prerequisites. And her having focused on immigration means that many in our growing immigrant student population will find work relevant to their lives. Kellor provides an excellent opportunity put a positive representation of LGBT persons in our state and national curriculums.

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