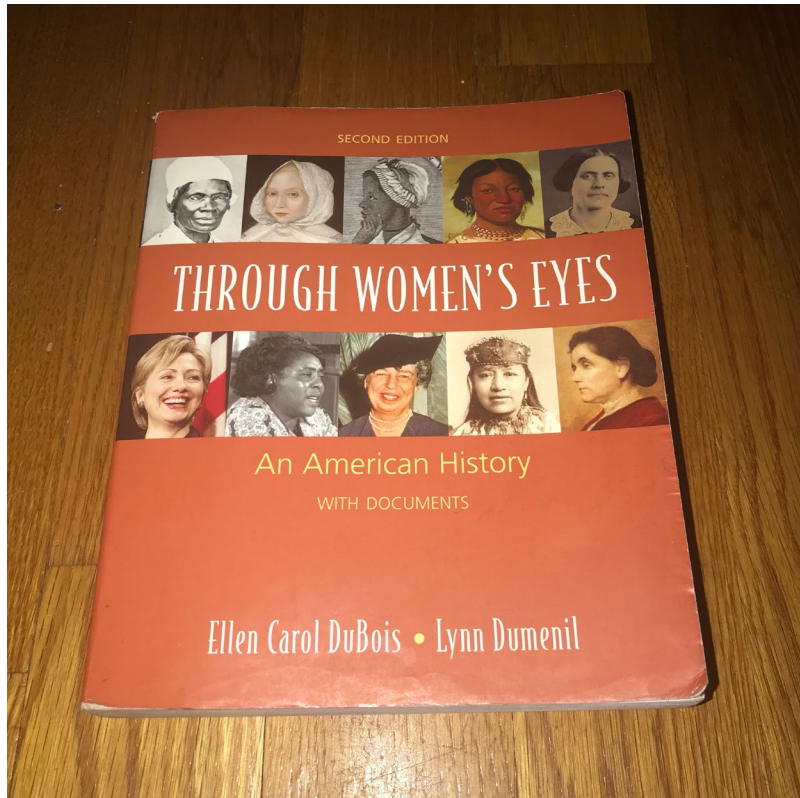


## ***TOK Exhibition: What counts as knowledge? (Knowledge and Politics)***

Often in societies, standards for what counts as knowledge are controlled by the people who hold the most power in that field. This means perspectives from whole groups of people could become erased from knowledge systems due to power structures. In all three of my objects we can see that the group that holds the most power often determines what counts as knowledge.

### **1. A Women's History Textbook: "Through Women's Eyes"**



Women's history as a course was only fully developed in the 1980s when women decided that they wanted a place to learn about women in history, as 'regular' history courses really tend to focus on 'man's history.'

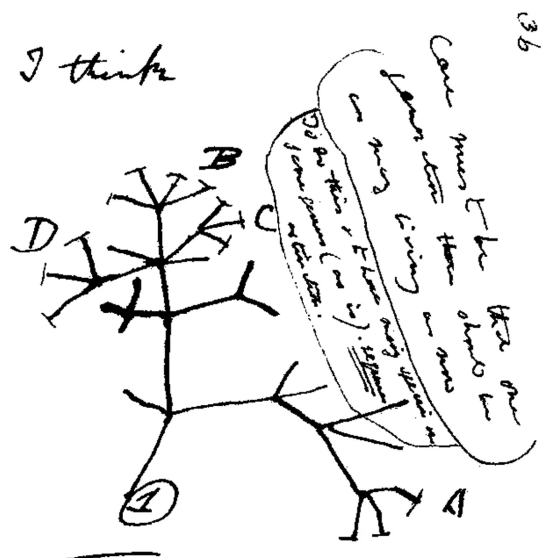
Typically, history is told from the side of the victors: those with most power. Coincidentally, those with the most power in western society have always been male. History is filled with male-dominated characters, and those who decided what was important to learn in history, happened to be men. Those in power made these decisions which deemed the actions of men, the most important parts of our history. Women's history investigates the women who were removed from the typical, men's, history. The patriarchy represents the power structure as an institution that chose what content was important in typical textbooks.

In the case of this women's history textbook, the people with the most power are men in the patriarchal power structure. This social system is shown by there being a need for 'women's history' in the first place. This textbook poses the idea that in most widely used history textbooks, perspectives of women as a group are disregarded. I know that

personally, it would be much more difficult for me to name significant women in history rather than significant men. This textbook is seen as ground-breaking because it presents women's history, which shows how unusual it is to focus on women within regular history courses.

Women's history represents a group whose history was erased from common knowledge, becoming a separate entity in order to ensure that their knowledge is seen as significant. However, this raises the question of why there needs to be a separate textbook in order to ensure that it is seen as significant. Women's history and perspectives are just as significant and count just as much knowledge as men's, regardless of whether this is recognised or not.

## 2. Darwin's Theory of Evolution



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Darwin's theory of evolution caused tension between scientists and religious believers. His theory originally faced opposition from other scientists, but soon became widely accepted in the scientific AOK. However, tension arises from the religious belief that God created humans, particularly with fundamentalist Christians who believe in a literal interpretation of Genesis. Now, science is one of the most powerful influencers in determining what counts as knowledge and what knowledge is important to teach, as religion's influence has become less prevalent.

I remember learning about a controversy a few years ago, that there are some schools in the southern United States that are unhappy to teach evolution due to their religious beliefs. The tension of power structures is very apparent here, as this shows how religion still has a much larger sphere of influence in this area. Yet, as times change, and religion becomes less relevant in some people's lives, science and evolution become the more widely known and accepted theory.

Although knowledge of evolution has eventually joined mainstream thought, this does not erase the perspective of a group who do not accept it. For them it still does not count as knowledge, even though mainstream thought says that it is. Instead, the tension between religious groups and the scientific community remains, as some religious groups maintain their belief that evolution is false. This duality of the two ideas surrounding evolution shows that the power structure between religion and science still has opposition. However, in the academic world, the scientific community holds more power and that is why evolution is seen to be knowledge and taught at almost all schools.

### **3. Bedford Science and Technology Centre, Virginia (a vocational school)**



This is a vocational school near where I live. Vocational schools are schools that teach career-oriented skills that students can apply to jobs. Vocational schools in the U.S. are much different from the rest of the world; elsewhere they are seen as respectable and are widely used to prepare people for the workforce. In the U.S., there is a belief that vocational schools are for the students who are academically inadequate. This belief is enforced by the government funding poured into traditional public schools instead of vocational public schools. The government holds the power in this power structure. Decreased government funding for these vocational schools shows that the government has determined that academics are what count as knowledge, instead of practical skills.

The inclusion of this vocational school in this exhibition helps us to look at the bigger picture. After looking at the history textbook and the theory of evolution, objects found within the educational system, this vocational school instead focuses on the educational system as a whole. In this power structure, it is not different gender groups that struggle within the power structure, or different individual views, it is to do with society and the power of the government. This vocational school represents a power structure where the government determined that traditional academics are what count as knowledge. Consequently, reduced funding for vocational schools disproportionately affects those who typically go to those schools. They are often poorer individuals or immigrants: people who already do not have as many resources available to them. Here, the government withholds the power.