

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN RHETORIC AND COMMUNICATION

# Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education

American Women Learn to Speak

Edited by  
David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs



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Historians of rhetoric have long worked to recover women's education in reading and writing, but have only recently begun to explore women's speaking practices, from the parlor to the platform to the varied types of institutions where women learned elocutionary and oratorical skills in preparation for professional and public life. This book fills an important gap in the history of rhetoric and suggests new paths for the way histories may be told in the future, tracing the shifting arc of women's oratorical training as it develops from forms of eighteenth-century rhetoric into institutional and extrainstitutional settings at the end of the nineteenth century and diverges into several distinct streams of community-embodied theory and practice in the twentieth. Treating key rhetors, genres, settings, and movements from the early republic to the present, these essays collectively challenge and complicate many previous claims made about the stability and development of gendered public and private spheres, the decline of oratorical culture and the limits of women's oratorical forms such as elocution and parlor rhetorics, and women's responses to rhetorical constraints on their public speaking. Enriching our understanding of women's oratorical education and practice, this cutting-edge work makes an important contribution to scholarship in rhetoric and communication.

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# **Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education**

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**To the feminist historians of rhetoric and composition who made this work possible by creating a framework in which to understand women's past public speaking and the arts of elocution.**

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# Acknowledgments

In describing his guiding principle as a scholarly editor and publisher, the eminent historian of rhetoric James J. (Jerry) Murphy has said, simply, “I imagined a book I wanted to read, and then tried to find the best possible people to write it.” This collection is a book we wanted—indeed, needed—to read, in order to fill a gap in our own rhetorical educations.

That need arose out of a previous collaboration, a history of rhetorical education at a chain of public women’s colleges in the South.<sup>1</sup> In researching and writing that volume, we found that we could not tell the story of these schools without understanding their unique forms of oratorical education, in particular, their emphasis on elocution, a genre that has historically not inspired much scholarly passion, even among feminist scholars of rhetoric and communication. We needed to learn more about this practice, as well as unlearn some of our previous assumptions. Fortunately, we were not alone. Inspired by the pioneering work on women’s oratorical education by historian of rhetoric Nan Johnson, in particular her study of the delimited rhetorical space offered women by nineteenth-century “parlor rhetorics,” other scholars were taking up the question of elocution; indeed, Johnson’s own work was turning to the study of this practice in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Midwestern schools of oratory and expression.

At the 2010 Rhetoric Society of America Conference, we remarked to Nan Johnson that, given this renewed interest in elocution, perhaps it was time to put together an edited collection, imagining, perhaps, that she would take on the task and invite us to contribute. Her answer was immediate: “Great idea, I think you should do it.” Her *imprimatur* quite literally gave us the courage to move forward. It soon became apparent to us, of course, that elocution was just one strand in the long arc of the histories of women’s oratorical education in America, and we are most appreciative of Nan’s sustained support and encouragement for this project over the last two years as it developed into its current form.

As this project could not have been possible without our previous collaboration, we would also like to thank those who supported us in that effort, in particular Cheryl Glenn, Shirley Wilson Logan, and Karl Kageff. Thanks also to Carolyn Miller, then editor of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*,

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Finally, we owe the largest debt of gratitude to our contributors, whose sustained efforts exceeded even our own aspirations for this volume. Their historical projects, both individually and collectively, now make it possible to see a larger vision of women's rhetorics. This *is* the book we needed to read, and we hope it will inspire other scholars as it has us.

## NOTES

1. *Educating the New Southern Woman*, forthcoming, from Southern Illinois University Press.

# Introduction

## American Women Learn to Speak— New Forms of Inquiry into Women's Rhetorics

*David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs*

Historians of rhetoric have for several decades now worked to recover women's writing practices, especially from the mid-nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries. As this work has evolved beyond what Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch term "rescue, recovery, and (re)inscription" to more robustly examining the full range of women's rhetorical practices within their contemporary contexts,<sup>1</sup> scholars have begun to take an increasing interest in women's *speaking* practices, from the parlor to the platform to the varied types of settings, both formal and informal, where women learned elocutionary and oratorical skills in preparation for professional and public life.

This volume collects key examples of this exciting new scholarship, from writers both established and emerging, filling an important gap in the history of rhetoric and suggesting new pathways for future research. Historically, rhetoricians in English studies have tended to focus on developments in written rhetoric, while those in communication have tended to focus on more visible forms of public oratory. Historians of women's education have long acknowledged the speaking practices and rituals peculiar to women's educational institutions but have not fully explored the systematic rhetorical dimensions of activities such as elocution and physical culture. Meanwhile, scholars of African American women's rhetoric, who have long attended to women's platform practices as well as their textual productions, have encouraged and inspired further inquiry into the multidimensional, embodied educational experiences lived by women across race, ethnic, and class lines. Historians of gender and culture in general are beginning to complicate previous assumptions about the development and stability of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gendered public and private spheres. Finally, scholars of American women's rhetoric in nearly every discipline or subfield are beginning to extend their research subjects beyond first-wave and protofeminist women in the nineteenth century to a wider spectrum of women in a wider range of periods, from the colonial to the contemporary.

These multidimensional experiences and locations merit critical examination. Within and without educational institutions, professionally on

public platforms, or more privately in homes or women's clubs, women in America have long studied and practiced speaking in ways we do not yet fully credit or understand. Treating key rhetors, genres, settings, and movements from the early republic to the present, the chapters in this volume contribute substantially to the scholarly discourse on women's oratorical education and practice, expanding its arena of research and calling into question still-persistent commonplaces regarding the stability and development of gendered public and private spheres, the decline of oratorical culture and the limitations of women's oratorical forms such as elocution, and the extent of and women's responses to rhetorical constraints on their public speaking. While individually treating distinct and diverse subjects, these chapters also resonate with each other, demonstrating previously unexplored intersections in both women's rhetorical practices and the history of rhetoric at large, offering us glimpses, for example, of the ongoing reshaping of belletristic traditions and women's conversational rhetorics. Collectively they offer a trenchant example of the multivalenced historiographic work now possible—and necessary—in rhetorical studies.

## HOW WE CAME TO BE HERE

The chapters in this volume owe a great debt to pioneering works in women's rhetorical history as well as past and recent archival efforts in rhetorical studies at large. While a full treatment of this literature would merit its own volume, a few key works undergird, influence, and inspire the chapters here.

Within rhetorical studies, Susan C. Jarratt's *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (1991), Cheryl Glenn's *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity through the Renaissance* (1997), and Jacqueline Jones Royster's *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women* (2000) have been critical not just in recovering women's historical writing and speaking practices but reframing historical inquiry into women's rhetorics. Communication scholar Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's two-volume *Man Cannot Speak for Her* (1989) offered both a foundational historical study of early feminist rhetorics and made many of the speeches and texts of early feminists easily available; the many anthologies and edited collections of scholarship that followed in its wake have made it possible to teach and study women's rhetorics with greater ease and success.<sup>2</sup>

Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran's edited collection *Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Transformations in the Theory and Practice of Rhetoric* (1993) was instrumental in raising still-extant questions about the intersections between both speaking and writing and institutional and popular rhetorical traditions, and Nan Johnson's *Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric in North America* (1991) called attention to the hybridized rhetorical practices that marked the period. Thomas P. Miller's

*The Formation of College English: Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the British Cultural Provinces* (1997) likewise traced the influence of long-persistent belletristic traditions on education in rhetoric and elocutionary practice.<sup>3</sup>

More recently, feminist historians of rhetoric building on these works have turned more closely to examining the development of women's oratorical practices within specific cultural contexts. Carol Mattingly's *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America* (2002) explores the means by and settings in which women employed dress and appearance in rhetorical delivery, and Lindal Buchanan's *Regendering Delivery: The Fifth Canon and Antebellum Women Rhetors* (2005) depicts the myriad ways nineteenth-century women both performed and subverted contemporary gender norms as they developed new modes of rhetorical invention and performance. As well as calling attention to delivery and the rhetorical body as sites of study, both these scholars have demonstrated the importance of examining the lives of women across the full spectrum of political activity. Nan Johnson's *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866–1910* (2002), meanwhile, reveals the persistent notions of gendered public space and performance embedded in ostensibly gender-neutral "parlor rhetorics" used for self-instruction in oratorical and dramatic performance, thus filling in a crucial gap in our understanding of the persistence of women's exclusions from public space even at the turn of the twentieth century. Jane Donawerth's recent *Conversational Rhetoric: The Rise and Fall of a Women's Tradition, 1600–1900* (2012) describes a loose tradition of women's rhetoric based on the arts of conversation that developed in France and England as early as the seventeenth century; these strands of diverse but complementary theories and practices of elocution became a gateway for women and nonelite speakers in general through to the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

While not focusing exclusively on women's public speaking, scholars such as Royster, Shirley Wilson Logan, Karyn L. Hollis, Susan Kates, Jessica Enoch, and many others have called attention to the rhetorical and oratorical education of black, Hispanic, Native American, and working-class women, further expanding the scope of our scholarly inquiry,<sup>5</sup> while Cheryl Glenn and Krista Ratcliffe have been instrumental in raising awareness of the power of silence and listening as rhetorical arts not exclusive to but historically important to women.<sup>6</sup> Rhetorical studies at large has witnessed an increasing interest in archival histories as the field moves from the larger master narratives of pioneering work of the 1980s and 90s to more finely grained microhistories and archival case studies, and the field has been further enriched by more recent scholarship on women's speaking in the field of history, including that of Mary Beth Norton, Mary Kelley, and Carolyn Eastman.<sup>7</sup>

We define rhetorical education not just as formal instruction in writing or speaking or derived from classical rhetoric, but any form of education designed to promote rhetorical competence, be it writing, speaking,



reading, listening, or—as evidenced by at least two chapters in this volume—movement of the body. Likewise, oratorical education is not simply the formal study of techniques for the platform, but may encompass any educational practice that promotes the ability to instruct, delight, move, or engage in conversation with an audience, whatever its size.

Such an expanded definition is offered not for the simple sake of diversity or to attempt to encompass for rhetoric all aspects of human communication under one architectonic umbrella; rather, it allows us better to see how various strands of rhetorical theory and practice emerge and intersect in various times and locales, among a variety of publics and counterpublics. Thus in this volume we see the persistence of Scottish Enlightenment rhetoric and belletristic traditions in unlikely places, from the home of the nation's original “first family” to nineteenth-century elocutionists. We see the tradition of conversational rhetoric at work in both the nineteenth-century educational efforts of writer and activist Margaret Fuller and the twentieth-century conduct manuals of Emily Post. We see the integration of reading, writing, and speaking, as well as the importance of family and community traditions in the rhetorical education of Congresswoman Barbara Jordan. And we see a contemporary example of the well-documented historical struggle of women negotiating rhetorical possibilities and constraints in the career of contemporary evangelical writer and speaker Beth Moore.

This volume thus not only offers a fuller picture of both alternative and mainstream rhetorical traditions in women's rhetoric but helps elucidate our rhetorical heritage as a whole. It also points to rich possibilities for further research. Where *does* oratorical education take place? Where *are* the places where women learn to speak? What counts as rhetorical performance—or rhetoric? What have we belittled, dismissed, or missed altogether? What is it crucial that we see?

Although the chapters in this volume appear chronologically, they are linked thematically, both within and across the historical periods they treat. In the sections following, we introduce these chapters by situating them within their larger research context; in doing so, we hope to suggest the exigencies that drove their inquiry, the scholarly questions they both raise and answer, and the work they perform as models of inquiry for future practice.

## DIVERSE ORATORICAL TRADITIONS IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

This collection begins with three chapters on women's rhetorical practices in the early republic. Examining diverse sites of inquiry—the oratorical education of Cherokee women, American schoolgirls, and a young scion of the new nation's political aristocracy—these chapters extend our understanding of women's rhetorical practices as well, teaching us much about the presence of rhetorical commonplaces and counterpublics in the period.

In Chapter 1, “By Women, You Were Brought Forth into This World,” M. Amanda Moulder examines two speeches by Cherokee women delivered to colonial authorities at a 1781 treaty negotiation in Tennessee: the first, written and delivered by a Cherokee Beloved Woman named Nanye’hi, the second written by a group of five women and delivered through a male kinsman. In doing so, she draws together two important threads of inquiry—the study of Native American rhetorics and eighteenth-century women’s rhetorical practices. As Moulder demonstrates, our ability to “read” this scene—and these speeches—requires not just an understanding of Anglo-American rhetorical traditions and gender divisions in colonial society and the nascent republic but also Cherokee-specific rhetorical practices and their grounding in Cherokee cultural practices, in particular matrilineal clan structure. For example, while Cherokee culture delineated gender roles, Cherokee women had more direct access to political power than did their white colonial counterparts; there was no question that Cherokee women had not only a right but a responsibility to speak. Moulder argues that “Cherokee experiences provided women with rhetorical educations and gave rise to the rhetorical commonplaces [and strategies] . . . that Cherokee women called upon to create their arguments,” among them “allusions to motherhood and matrilineal clan adoption, references to Cherokee land rights, and collaborative public speechmaking.” By examining these Cherokee-specific rhetorical traditions and in particular their intersections with the expectations of Anglo-American colonial rhetorical culture, Moulder’s chapter further encourages us to confront exactly what we mean by women’s recovery work and what constitutes the publics and counterpublics of the peoples of the Americas.

Scholarship has sometimes relayed women’s rhetorical practices in binary terms; we find either presence or absence, inscription or erasure, spaces public or private, spheres male or female, and attitudes either progressive or reactionary. In her previous work on citizen rhetorics in the early American republic, Carolyn Eastman found a much wider diffusion of oratorical practices by women than narrow readings of gendered space might suggest, most notably widespread formal instruction in elocution for schoolgirls alongside their male classmates.<sup>8</sup> Here, in Chapter 2, “A Vapour Which Appears but for a Moment,” she extends that work through a detailed archival study of public attitudes toward these educational practices, examining school curricula, popular-press treatments, and testimony from students themselves. Eastman finds that girls’ public speeches at school exhibitions were generally uncontroversial, in part because girls presented their oratorical accomplishments under the guise of feminine modesty, “assur[ing] their listeners that their aims did not extend beyond courtship, wifehood, and domestic life.” Yet Eastman argues that such “professions of reticence” do not simply signal “capitulation to conservative ideals,” but rather are a means of exploring “a new vision of marriage and new ideals of female excellence” emergent in the period. Moreover, the casting of

oratorical education for girls under feminine standards of decorum helped that practice avoid “imputations of radicalism,” assisting the expansion of female education in the period. Eastman’s work both recovers a rich context for girls’ rhetorical education in the early republic as well as reminding us that the eighteenth century with its Enlightenment perspective was much different from the later Victorian age that has so frequently framed our understanding of women’s rhetorical practices.

Although scholars have long recognized the importance of Hugh Blair and belletristic rhetoric to eighteenth- and even nineteenth-century rhetorical education,<sup>9</sup> we have few studies which observe the impact of such education on an individual rhetor, particularly a woman rhetor. In Chapter 3, “Speaking and Writing in Conversation,” Annmarie Valdes explores the connections between eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment rhetoric, oratorical education for girls and women, and women’s public participation in post-Revolutionary America through an analysis of the diaries and schoolbooks of Eleanor Parke Custis Lewis (1779–1852), a granddaughter of Martha Washington and an adopted member of the Washington household. For Lewis and other women of her social sphere, elocution and oral recitation were key features of their education, explicitly preparing them to move among the private and public spheres of their social circles. Valdes argues that this education, in particular exposure to Blair, “imbued in [Lewis] a particular belletristic taste and style of writing that was critical to her as she negotiated through her social sphere.” Moreover, Valdes demonstrates the importance of what Royster and Kirsch term “critical imagination” in her exploration of archives;<sup>10</sup> though we have no records of Lewis’s public speaking—and likely could not, given that most of it took place in ephemeral informal settings—as Valdes contends, her diaries and letters are important “archival remnants of her public voice,” demonstrating the uses to which she put her rhetorical education. Drawing upon and extending the work of scholars such as Buchanan, Donawerth, and Eastman, Valdes enhances our understanding of the diverse uses to which women put elocutionary training and the forums in which they employed them, encouraging us to blur the boundaries between strictly private and public spheres of discourse and social action.

## LEARNING TO SPEAK IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The narratives we tell about the development of opportunities for women to participate in public life sometimes trace an overly smooth arc of progression. Yet as recent historiographic inquiry reveals, in some ways the intensifying gender divisions of nineteenth-century antebellum and Victorian culture erased some of the gains made by women in the days of the early republic. With the codification of these more conservative gender norms, American women, in effect, had to learn to speak again, adjusting

to new cultural conditions. Moreover, women themselves embraced gender norms that contemporary feminist scholars have at times found troubling. Yet as Carol Mattingly reminds us, recovering a more “comprehensive and authentic tradition” of women’s rhetoric requires “learn[ing] to appreciate the many women who were rhetorically effective rather than focusing only on a few.”<sup>11</sup> The next three chapters in this volume speak to both the range of rhetorical traditions extant in nineteenth-century America—from traditional rhetorical instruction to elocution to conduct manuals to French belletrism—and the divergent ways women made use of these traditions, examining in turn women writers debating the corset and elocution, women discovering the available means to enter the public sphere in mid-century Boston, and girls learning to speak in a Midwestern French-Catholic school.

Throughout the nineteenth century, American women received—and transmitted—conflicting messages about speaking in public, manifest in intense debates about items of clothing such as the corset and women’s dress and manner of delivery on public platforms. In Chapter 4, “Negotiating Conflicting Views of Women and Elocution,” Jane Donawerth exposes these mixed messages and women’s responses to them through an examination of three nineteenth-century women writers, educator Almira Hart Lincoln Phelps (1793–1884), etiquette handbook writer Florence Hartley (fl. 1859–70), and satirical novelist and essayist Marietta Holley (1836–1926). Donawerth finds that Phelps, perhaps because she saw her task as producing both fashionable as well as educated young women, “refused to see a conflict” in arguing for an expansive vision of women’s education while discounting criticism of the corset’s ill effects. Hartley, while more conservative on women’s education, seeing elocution as less an intellectual than social skill, argues against the corset on the grounds of good taste, regarding it as an artificial affectation, rather than an expression of “natural” feminine grace. By the time the younger Holley writes, elocutionary training had become widely popular and women were increasingly common, if not entirely accepted, on the platform. Through the voice of a “country innocent” narrator, Holley skewers the elocutionary excesses of both men and women speakers, women’s-rights advocates and adversaries, while showing her audience “the illogic of society’s mixed messages” about women speaking in public. Through this examination, Donawerth demonstrates both the mixed messages that women received and their divergent responses to them; she further suggests the importance of elocution as a vehicle for nineteenth-century women—to whatever degree they accepted or challenged social norms—to find a public voice.

While formal rhetorics and conduct books can tell us much about the rhetorical environment in which they circulate, a fuller picture of women’s rhetoric requires that we also seek out examples of women enacting these practices. In Chapter 5, “To Supply This Deficiency,” Kristen Garrison offers a case study of rhetorical strategies available to and employed

by mid-nineteenth century American women through an examination of the Boston Conversations, a series of popular discussion-based classes for women organized and facilitated by reformer, writer, and educator Margaret Fuller (1810–50) between 1839 and 1844. Designed to fill gaps in women’s education and promote a transcendentalist ideal of self-culture, the Conversations served as emergent public spheres in which Fuller and her participants honed oratorical skills that would inform their later speaking and writing. Despite widespread acknowledgment of both Fuller’s influence and the importance of women’s self-culture in general, little scholarly attention has been paid to what Garrison terms “the details of the Conversations,” perhaps in part because the most substantive extant record comes from partial and “highly interpretive” accounts of two participants.

As numerous feminist and revisionist scholars of rhetorical history have argued, however, the apparent gap in or sparseness of an archival record should not cause us to shy away from inquiry, and here Garrison pointedly argues for the value of these transcripts in demonstrating the highly charged rhetorical nature of the Conversations. What emerges is a vibrant picture of women practicing what Donawerth has termed conversational rhetoric against a cultural backdrop that at once encouraged limited rhetorical training for women yet restricted their access to higher education and other “opportunities to use their rhetorical knowledge” in the public sphere, particularly in mixed-sex groups.<sup>12</sup> Examining both the single-sex 1839–40 first series and the coeducational 1841 series, Garrison finds Fuller exhibiting a hybrid practice, making use of rhetorical strategies gleaned both from the formal rhetoric of Richard Whately, which emphasized logical reasoning and broad-based cultivation of mind, and the conduct book rhetoric of author Elizabeth Farrar, which emphasized the art of listening. In further depicting Fuller’s struggles in what she regarded as the less-successful mixed-sex series, in which male participants resisted and disrupted the discourse norms Fuller sought to establish, Garrison also demonstrates the importance of listening and collaborative inquiry even in the traditional rhetorical genre of persuasive discourse.

As the chapters above make clear, we cannot speak of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rhetoric without attending to the full range of extant traditions and practices as well as tracing their intersections with the larger culture. In particular, perhaps in part due to lingering discomfort with some of our more conservative women forebears, we know too little of the various religious traditions that have informed women’s rhetorical education and practice. In Chapter 6, “God Sees Me,” Elizabethada A. Wright offers a remarkable account of oratorical training at a nineteenth-century Catholic school for women in rural Indiana, St. Mary-of-the-Woods (1841), calling attention to an underexamined yet historically important tradition of French-Catholic education in the Midwest.

Wright finds that, like similar institutions, St. Mary-of-the-Woods both encouraged students to speak—promoting public displays of learning though

oral presentations—while simultaneously requiring them to exhibit “feminine modesty and retirement.” These displays occurred against a backdrop of general suspicion about Catholicism in both the nation at large and the predominantly Protestant Midwest. Wright argues that the school’s “tradition of presentations and premiums may have been accepted . . . because it was complemented by a tradition of surveillance” codified in church-sanctioned educational manuals (most notably John Baptist de La Salle’s *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*) and welcomed by a public still ambivalent about seeing its daughters either on the platform or in “Roman” schools. While acknowledging the potentially coercive nature of such surveillance, Wright argues that the system simultaneously allowed students the opportunity to speak publicly in mixed-sex settings; “[w]hile students may have hedged their presentations with cautious and muted arguments . . . they learned how to satisfy the watching audiences.” In addition to being encouraged by the example of obedient yet independent women religious teachers, students also received a strain of French belletristic rhetoric influenced by François Fénelon that, while emphasizing “propriety and taste,” also emphasized “emotive” dimensions of rhetoric particularly available to female students. Wright’s depiction of young girls learning to be “appropriate” while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of social norms demonstrates the importance of resisting easy binaries in our historical inquiry into women’s rhetorical practices as well the importance of inquiring into the available means of understudied rhetorical traditions.

## RECONSIDERING ELOCUTION AT THE TURN OF A NEW CENTURY

As scholars of rhetoric, composition, and communication began to research the shared histories of their disciplines in earnest in the 1980s, a picture emerged of the end of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth as an instructional nadir, in which the emergence of a reductive formalism, widely known as “current-traditional” rhetoric, played out against the backdrop of a decline in oratorical culture, resulting in truncated forms of rhetorical instruction that limited opportunities for meaningful speaking and writing. While reassessments of writing instruction in the period are becoming increasingly commonplace, reexaminations of the full range of oratorical practices extant and even emergent during the period have been slower to emerge, in particular those linked to the various subsets of the popular movement of public speaking and performance known widely as elocution.<sup>13</sup>

Dubbed in 1954 by historian of rhetoric Wilbur Samuel Howell as “that strange phenomenon,” elocution and its role in training women—and men—to speak is still poorly understood.<sup>14</sup> Yet “strange” or not, elocution, in particular its manifestations in America inspired by the work of French

music, acting, and expression instructor François Delsarte, was an enormously popular phenomenon. This was particularly so among women, who were among the leaders of the field, writing textbooks, opening schools of expression, and delivering public lectures and performances.<sup>15</sup> The two chapters in this section encourage us to reassess our understanding not just of elocution and its role in fostering speaking opportunities for women but late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century oratorical culture at large.

In Chapter 7, “The Arguments They Wore,” Lisa Suter examines American Delsartism through the lens of the neoclassically styled garments, in particular Greek togas, worn by many female Delsartists. In adopting the toga, women risked mockery, as powerfully depicted by Nan Johnson’s reading of the “comic” oratorical roles offered to women in nineteenth-century parlor rhetorics.<sup>16</sup> Yet the garment simultaneously spoke to key discourses circulating in the elocution and physical culture movement. Through a close archival reading of contemporary discourse about the toga in the Delsartean trade journal *Werner’s Voice Magazine*, meetings of the National Association of Elocutionists, elocutionary textbooks, and other sources, Suter reinterprets not just the costume’s purpose but the national movement’s larger rhetorical exigency. She argues that by adopting the toga, women literally freed their bodies to move and breathe in ways unthinkable in corsets or other restrictive contemporary garments. Moreover—and much like an earlier generation of women platform speakers’ performance of feminine modesty—they were able to sidestep criticisms incurred by wearers of reform dress. Finally, by adopting the toga, a still-potent symbol of male Greek and Roman citizenship, women Delsartists signaled their right, if not to vote, then to participate in public and political space. Extending Carol Mattingly’s research on the rhetoric of dress and delivery, Suter demonstrates how “[t]he neoclassical toga thus served as one more weapon in nineteenth-century women’s suasive arsenal.”

In Chapter 8, “Womanly Eloquence and Rhetorical Bodies,” Paige V. Banaji offers a cogent introduction to an important component of nineteenth-century elocutionary practice for women: training in physical culture, a combination of bodily and vocal exercises designed to enhance oratorical performance. As Banaji notes, at a time when “the discipline of rhetoric was still primarily male-dominated, physical culture served as a site where women could contribute to the theorizing of rhetorical delivery and the rhetorical body.” Influenced by François Delsarte’s emphasis on the relationship between mind, body, and soul in embodied expression, women physical culturists grounded their study of elocution in a strong understanding of the body and devised bodily exercises as foundational training to prepare women for a variety of public performance activities, including literary reading, dramatic performance, dance, lecturing, and teaching. Examining key physical culture manuals by pioneering women in the field such as Emily Bishop, Genevieve Stebbins, and Julia and Annie Gregory Thomas, Banaji demonstrates how these texts—in sharp contrast



to ostensibly coeducational parlor rhetorics of the period—work to decouple oratorical performance from masculine ideals of delivery. Invoking a “primarily female audience”—and depicting a primarily female body—Delsartean physical culture, argues Banaji, worked “to redefine bodily eloquence according to feminine standards.” Extending the work of Lindal Buchanan and others, Banaji suggests that physical culture helped “regender” delivery by providing women “with a form of feminine eloquence they could use with propriety and effectiveness as they took on more prominent public roles.”

## RHETORICAL ENVIRONMENTS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND TODAY

As the chapters on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in this volume demonstrate, much remains to be recovered, uncovered, reexamined, and reassessed in our inquiries into women’s rhetorical and oratorical education and practices. The twentieth century is still understudied by scholars of women’s rhetoric, no doubt because it is still so close to us. Yet it is quickly transmuting into historical time and as such is available for us to grapple with and attempt to understand. Thanks in large part to the efforts of the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition, as well as the scholarly work and field leadership offered by pioneering historians of women’s rhetoric, historical researchers interested in women’s rhetorical practices have found a welcome home. Feminist approaches to historical inquiry have in turn offered scholars of all stripes a much more expansive vision of what constitutes rhetoric and what constitutes history. The time may now be ripe for us to extend this vision to women’s rhetorical practices in both the twentieth century and today.

We thus close our volume with three chapters that take us from post-World War I America to the contemporary era, analyzing in turn three remarkable women: etiquette doyenne Emily Post, Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, and prominent evangelical speaker Beth Moore. At first glance, these figures might seem to have little in common other than their level of achievement: an elite white member of the early twentieth-century New York beau monde who became the nation’s leading authority on etiquette; an African American woman from Houston who rose from modest origins to become a US Representative; and an evangelical Christian woman who transformed a part-time women’s Bible-study group into a media empire. Yet much like their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century predecessors, each learned to speak in complex rhetorical environments that sometimes fostered, sometimes constrained their efforts. Each of these women’s success in rhetoric demonstrates not only their links to the past but the continued relevance of women’s rhetorical traditions across a range of social, political, and religious spaces.



While scholars in rhetorical studies have begun to acknowledge the importance of conduct manuals to the history of women's rhetorical education, the genre as a whole remains understudied, particularly in its twentieth-century and contemporary manifestations, perhaps because it has seemed to many to embody a set of formalized, prefeminist set of prescriptive practices offering girls and women little possibility for rhetorical invention or agency. Yet conduct manuals, social primers, and other publications such as cookbooks have long played a vital role in women's self-culture and self-instruction in rhetoric.

In Chapter 9, "Rethinking *Etiquette*," Nancy Myers examines Emily Post's landmark 1922 *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics and at Home*. Published at a moment of great cultural flux, in which the rigid class lines of the Gilded Age seemed to be giving way to more widespread economic opportunity and public and professional roles for women in particular were expanding, *Etiquette* captured the imagination of a nation entranced by the idea of upward social mobility. Post (1872–1960), a socialite who had found success as a writer following a highly public divorce, likely seemed to many an ideal guide through the shifting norms of social speech and behavior.

Myers argues that *Etiquette* departs from more typical conduct manuals of the day, however, by treating "character" as a prerequisite to practicing etiquette, not a product of it. While appealing to its readers' ardent desire for social mobility, *Etiquette* presents to them an idealized society of "gentle-folk" united not simply by social status but behavior, and thus ostensibly open to anyone practicing the skills and strategies of good conduct Post prescribes, most notably reasoning, restraint, and generosity when dealing with others, no matter their social status in relation to the rhetor. Moreover, argues Myers, *Etiquette* does not simply present its readers a set of fixed prescriptive rules of conduct but rather offers flexible heuristic strategies adaptable to any social situation; in short, it functions as a rhetoric, "allow[ing] women to choose, at each moment, to interact in appropriate ways with everyone they encounter and to thoughtfully decide how they want to conduct that interaction." In showing vital links between intersecting rhetorical traditions of the conduct manual, belletristic notions of taste, and women's conversational rhetoric, Myers encourages us to not only revisit this surprisingly neglected text in rhetorical studies but the entire genre to which it belongs.

Scholars of African American rhetoric have long worked to uncover the community-embodied educational experiences and discourse practices of African American rhetors, in particular their immersion in and emergence from black church, school, cultural, and community traditions. In doing so, they have done much to dispel the myth of the atomistic "self-made" individual who pulled him- or herself up solely by the bootstraps to achieve success, both with regard to African American rhetors and public figures at large; we know now, for example, that Martin Luther King Jr.'s rhetoric

was deeply steeped in black oratorical and church traditions and that Rosa Parks was an experienced and well-trained community activist.

But we know surprisingly little about the rhetorical education of their contemporary, Congresswoman Barbara Jordan (1936–96), whose 1974 speech before the House Judiciary Committee’s impeachment hearings of President Nixon and 1976 keynote address at the Democratic National Convention still rank as highpoints of American oratory.<sup>17</sup> Though celebrating her power as a speaker, and despite a wealth of available biographical information, few scholars have examined the specifics of her comprehensive, multidimensional rhetorical education and how that training and experience translated into other rhetorical activities.

In Chapter 10, “Remember the World Is Not a Playground but a Schoolroom,” Linda Ferreira-Buckley presents a counternarrative of how Jordan, the first Southern black woman to serve as a US Representative, “grew powerful through language.” Building on the insights gleaned by foundational studies of African American educational practices in the nineteenth century by scholars such as Jacqueline Jones Royster and Shirley Wilson Logan, as well as accounts of contemporary African American sociolinguistic practices by scholars such as Geneva Smitherman, Ferreira-Buckley examines the multiple locations in Houston’s African American fifth ward where Jordan received her rhetorical training: first home, where through her family she learned to value “the potency of words”; then church, particularly Good Hope Missionary Baptist, where she witnessed “how language could change the lives” of individuals and communities; then Phillis Wheatley High School, where she formally studied oratory and forensics. Ferreira-Buckley argues that through these “intersecting influences,” Jordan’s “talents were encouraged, shaped, and disciplined,” helping to “form a leader grounded in ethics, skilled in communication, and determined to make a mark in the world.” Through these sites of instruction, Ferreira-Buckley further maps out literacy practices common in many African American homes, churches, and schools in Houston in the 1940s and 50s that contributed to Jordan’s “belief in the power of rhetorical performance.” This chapter not only contributes to our understanding of the rhetorical education of a major twentieth-century political figure but deftly connects past to present, revealing an important site of African American rhetorical education and practice within twentieth-century America.

The final chapter in this volume, Chapter 11, “Learning Not to Preach,” by Emily Murphy Cope, examines the rhetorical development and career of popular contemporary evangelical speaker Beth Moore (b. 1957), who, beginning in 1982 with a Bible-study class for women at her Southern Baptist church in Houston, rose to become one of the most prominent female evangelical speakers in the US, with a national multimedia ministry featuring best-selling books, conferences, multimedia Bible-study packages, a blog, and television and radio broadcasts.

Moore rose to national prominence despite being excluded from formal avenues of education and advancement within the Southern Baptist Convention;

as with many women religious leaders through history, she had no seminary education, but learned to speak from the very discourse that excluded her, through the apprenticeship of observation and experience. Moreover, as Cope demonstrates, Moore works within the constraining discourse of “complementarianism,” a prevailing theory of gender that maintains men and women have different and complementary roles in church and life. Within this context, to preach is not a woman’s role; so, Cope argues, Moore has had to learn “not to preach,” succeeding as an evangelical woman speaker and teacher by using physical space and genre codes to obscure the fact of her “preaching” and by appealing to an audience that has been underserved by the masculine evangelical preaching tradition. Building on the work of scholars of nineteenth-century women’s rhetorical education as well as Roxanne Mountford’s work on contemporary women preachers, Cope demonstrates not only how a contemporary woman rhetor negotiates a discourse’s rhetorical constraints but also calls attention to the need for further work on religious rhetorics and other sites sometimes excluded from rhetorical inquiry.

## CONCLUSION

In concluding, we emphasize both the advances in knowledge these individual chapters represent and their collective contribution to our developing understanding of women’s oratorical education in America. We also discuss the implications of this book for future feminist historiographic practice in rhetoric and communication, both in terms of theoretical and methodological advances and future research needs. Finally, we call upon scholars to continue the emerging conversations established and extended in this volume.

Individually and collectively, these chapters reveal a tremendous diversity of educational experiences and practices among women in America across several centuries and fill many gaps in our understanding. Yet this volume is far from complete. As a field we still know too little about women’s rhetorical practices in the colonial era and early republic; nineteenth-century elocution; twentieth-century and contemporary women’s rhetorical practices within a variety of public and especially professional spaces; the rhetorical practices of African American, Native American, Latina, and other minority women in many eras; and women’s rhetorical practices across a range of religious traditions. Moreover, we have much to learn about the persistence, development, and transformation of long-standing rhetorical genres and traditions, such as belletristic rhetorics, conduct manuals, and conversational rhetoric, as well as intersections among speaking, reading, writing, listening, and movement. We trust fellow scholars will identify what is most needed to more fully interrogate women’s rhetorical past and will put their collaborative oars into the conversation.

As for elocution, it can still embarrass our contemporary sensibilities in its theatricality and otherworldly perspectives. Nonetheless, if we do not pay