

**WOMEN DEBATING SOCIETY: NEGOTIATING DIFFERENCE IN HISTORICAL
ARGUMENT CULTURES**

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

Arts & Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

University of Pittsburgh

2010

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

ARTS & SCIENCES

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University of Pittsburgh, 2010

This dissertation explores the relationship between gender and argumentation, complicating narratives that cast debating as an exclusionary practice that solely privileges elite, educated, white men. Drawing on three case studies of women's participation in debate, I argue that debating societies functioned as venues for rhetorical education and performance. Each chapter aims to add to our understanding about debate within historical contexts, reveal insight about the women who debated, and develop or extend concepts within rhetorical and argumentation scholarship. The first case study traces the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society from 1865 to 1935. This community-based association balanced the desire to achieve ideal rational-critical debate with the need to accommodate and sustain involvement by "women of infinite variety," developing what I call an "intergenerational argument culture." The second case study explores the relationship between debate history and the history of rhetorical criticism by examining Marie Hochmuth Nichols's intercollegiate debate participation in Pittsburgh in the 1930's. Nichols's debate experience cultivated a sense of gendered rhetorical excellence and a sensibility toward criticism that she would later develop as a major figure in twentieth-century rhetorical studies. The final case study explores how the challenges of debating at a southern historically

black college in the 1950's influenced Barbara Jordan's rhetorical strategies and political career. Debating allowed Jordan to recognize the importance of viewing the body as a rhetorical resource in negotiating and sustaining access to exclusionary spaces. Though these women came from different socioeconomic, educational, racial, and geographical backgrounds, all used the vehicle of debate to challenge prevailing social norms. They not only honed their critical thinking, writing, speaking, and reasoning abilities through debate participation; they also used their experiences in unexpected ways as they negotiated difference along the intersecting axes of gender, race, class, age, ability, and citizenship. The final chapter argues that the dominant conceptual metaphor of argument-as-war is insufficient in capturing the complex dynamics between gender and argumentation. Instead, I offer an alternative of argument-as-travel, a more flexible metaphor that acknowledges the range of diverse participation in debate and accounts for the methodological choices involved in doing feminist rhetorical historical scholarship.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am greatly indebted to the programs and people that supported this project. A Frank and Vilma Slater/Scottish Nationality Room Scholarship and two Women's Studies Program Student Research Fund Awards at the University of Pittsburgh enabled me to travel to conduct the research necessary for this project, while an Andrew Mellon Predoctoral Fellowship helped the project come to fruition. Archivists and library staff, including Marianne Kasica at University of Pittsburgh, Grace Young at Carlow University, Lisa Renee Kemper at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Beth Howse at Fisk University, Bernard Forrester at Texas Southern University, Mandy Wise at the University College London, and Olive Geddes at the National Library of Scotland, were generous with their time and patience. I am thankful to Thomas Freeman, Howard Beeth, Dan Leavitt, Harriet Leavitt, Jane Blankenship, Joseph Wenzel, and Thomas Kane for telling me their stories as I worked to understand debate in historical contexts.

I was privileged to work with an all-star committee at the University of Pittsburgh. Committee members Jessica Enoch, Kathryn Thoms Flannery, John Lyne, and Ronald Zboray provided crucial insight and thoughtful feedback throughout the project. I am appreciative to them for our many lively conversations in graduate seminars, individual meetings, and the dissertation defense. Gordon Mitchell's passion for ideas brought me to Pittsburgh to begin with and continues to enrich my intellectual development. His keen eye for detail, curiosity, and belief in the power of debate were present at every stage of this project. It is an honor to be his advisee and friend.

The debaters and debate coaches at Oak Harbor High School, the University of Mary Washington, and the University of Pittsburgh inspired and challenged me to undertake this project in the first place, while conversations with fellow graduate students (especially my incredible graduate cohort), members of the Schenley Park Debate Authors Working Group (DAWG), my colleagues in the Women's Studies Program, Timothy O'Donnell, John Davis, Pete Simonson, Jean Ferguson Carr, Lester Olson, and Mary Zboray helped to incubate, articulate, and sustain it.

Michele Kennerly, thank you for your friendship and Skype conversations as we worked to achieve this and so many other milestones. Thora and Loki, thank you for making me take breaks and for cuddling up on my feet during cold Nebraska writing days. Dave, Debbie, Clint, and Matthew Woods, thank you for your love, encouragement, and support. You are the hardest working and most dedicated people I know, and you inspire me every day.

Damien Smith Pfister, thank you for being my friend, editor, constant interlocutor and partner in all things. You make it easy to see the very best potential of arguers as travelers and lovers.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Edna Pauline "Shorty" Woods, Pittsburgh's first papergirl, and my beloved grandmother.

1.0 INTRODUCTION: GENDERING DEBATE HISTORY

“To the young man ambitious of shining affairs, connection with a debating society is a necessity; it is to him a veritable intellectual gymnasium; a drilling-ground in which he acquires the power of marshalling his troops in regular order, of placing his forces in solid phalanx against those of the enemy. Here he will get practical knowledge of his own powers and considerable knowledge of those of others. His timidity will be lessened; his diffidence changed into manly self-confidence. If he have anything of the fire of genius in him, here it will show itself; here it will burst into flame; for it is in such encounters that dormant qualities are struck into life. As in the heat of battle, many a man, little suspected of heroic qualities, turns out a hero; so in the ardor of debate, many a man, little suspected of oratorical powers, turns out an orator. When the soul is once touched, or stirred into life, thoughts and feelings come rushing into the mind like a mountain torrent; utterance becomes a necessity, and speech flows naturally as breathing; then the man speaks, not merely with his tongue, but with every fibre of his body.” – Robert Waters¹

“What broke up the ladies’ debating society?” “The leading member was told to prepare an essay on the Yellow Peril. She did so, and the opening sentence read: ‘Yellow apparel is very trying to most complexions.’” — A joke circulated in early twentieth-century newspapers²

Why debate? What do debating societies have to offer? Few were able to answer that question with such fervor as the Scottish-born and New Jersey-based writer and educator, Robert Waters, in his 1892 book, *Intellectual Pursuits, or, Culture by Self-Help*. Debating societies, according to Waters, offer young men the ultimate in culture by self-help; they are, in his words, a training ground for intellectual heavy-lifting, a place to learn how best to engage in argumentative combat, and a forum for bringing out the hero-orator within. There were, at the time, few great men who did not receive some sort of argument and debate training along their road to success.³ A young man could not engage in a “more profitable exercise” than debate, and “no more

¹ Robert Waters, *Intellectual Pursuits; or, Culture by Self-Help* (New York: Worthington Company, 1892), 111-2.

² The joke was published under the headline, “Too Much for the Club” in the *New York Times* on November 23, 1904. I also found evidence that the joke circulated, appearing in the *Washington Star* and in the Wellington, New Zealand-based *Evening Post* with a series of jokes under the headline “Where Ignorance—” CIV, 25 (July 29, 1922): 17.

³ Waters, *Intellectual Pursuits*, 111.

excellent school” than a debating society. Should he choose to join, “mental awakening” and “intellectual development” were soon to follow.⁴ Men who debate call forth their inner genius.

Given this steadfast faith in the power of debating societies to cultivate intellect, eloquence, and reasoning ability, why is the Yellow Peril joke humorous? There is no faster way to kill a joke than to have to explain it, but in this case, it is worth doing. The wit in the joke illustrates dominant assumptions about women and debate at the time. First, the very idea of a ladies’ debating society may have struck some readers as funny. In an era when higher education was dominated by men, the idea that women may try to access the “manly self-confidence” offered by the “intellectual gymnasium” of a debating society was quite foreign.⁵ Second, even if readers were comfortable with the idea that women might also seek intellectual self-improvement, hilarity ensues when imagining them speaking about topics of a political nature, let alone an issue of international and racial concern. At the time, the “Yellow Peril” referred to the fear of the expansion of Asian countries, and a growing unease with the presence of Chinese and Japanese immigrants in western countries.⁶ If women were debating, the reigning cultural assumption was that they could only argue ‘frivolous’ topics regarding the home or personal appearance. Give a female debater a serious topic, and watch how fast she’ll turn it into a discussion of beauty and fashion tips! The success of the joke hinges on the incongruity of the situation: women and debate did not go together; neither did politics and personal appearance. Of course the ladies’ debating society broke up. Women who debate call forth their inner idiocy.

⁴ Waters, *Intellectual Pursuits*, 109.

⁵ Though Waters encourages young women to read fiction and join Shakespearean reading circles, he makes decidedly no mention of them in his discussions of self-help through debate.

⁶ Historians believe that the racist image of a “yellow peril” originated in European newspapers. Roger Daniels describes how fear of the yellow peril came to the US in the late nineteenth century as “the bogus specter of the invasion of the continental United States by an Asian army,” and discusses its use as a foundational part of anti-Asian propaganda. See his *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 39.

This dissertation demonstrates that despite some structural barriers and enduring assumptions about gender and argumentation, women and debate are *not* incongruous. What can we learn about debate by studying women's participation the activity? What can we learn about women by studying their involvement in debate? Historical debating societies are not only a "rather neglected forum for popular discussion," as historian Donna T. Andrew suggests, they are also an understudied site for examining gendered rhetorical education and performance.⁷ Though women were sometimes formally excluded or strongly discouraged from participating in debating societies, they found ways to debate and thus accessed the traditional skill set that Waters praises in the epigraph. They also used the activity to negotiate difference, hone their ideas and critical thinking ability, and craft rhetorical strategies for other forums of public address. This project brings forth varied women's perspectives that shed light on different modalities of debate experience. I offer an alternative historical account of debate through three case studies: the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society from 1865 to 1935, Marie Hochmuth Nichols at the University of Pittsburgh in the 1930's, and Barbara Jordan at Texas Southern University in the 1950's. These women came from different socioeconomic, educational, racial, religious, and geographical backgrounds, but all used the vehicle of debate to challenge prevailing social norms. Debate was not merely an activity or practice, but constituted a mode of cultural and rhetorical performance as they navigated their worlds.

This chapter sets the stage for the larger project. First, I provide a narrative history of three structural changes in debate which correspond to the project's case studies. The following section explores the relationship between women and argumentation as it has been theorized in

⁷ Donna T. Andrew, "Popular Culture and Public Debate: London 1780's," *Historical Journal* 39, no.2 (June 1996): 405.

rhetorical and communication scholarship. The final section details my research approach, which fuses insights from rhetorical history and feminist rhetorics.

1.1 STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE HISTORY OF DEBATE

The dominant history of debate is often cast as the domain of elite, privileged, educated, white men. However, throughout the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, women found ways to access the rhetorical fruits of debate and later drew from those skills in their academic, social, and political pursuits. Yet the experience of being a woman in debate also presented challenges that yielded other abilities beyond improved thinking, writing, speaking, and reasoning aptitudes that debate has traditionally been theorized as cultivating. Women used debating societies as forums for negotiating difference along the intersecting axes of gender, race, class, age, and citizenship, as they confronted exclusionary practices in their own lives. It is beyond the scope of this project to provide a comprehensive history of western debate.⁸ Rather, I focus on historical cases of women's participation in debating societies to explore the relationship between gender and argumentation. In order to understand how these cases fit into a broader trajectory, this section highlights the structural changes in and assumed value of debate participation in three phases: debate as a community activity, debating as an intercollegiate activity, and debate without discrimination. These phases function as communicative-cultural formations: roughly chronological, but are sometimes overlapping. I describe the presumed skill or set of skills

⁸ Because the dissertation deals with case studies in the United States and Scotland, there is a decidedly western bias to this overview of debate history. This is not to say that non-western debate histories do not exist. Scholarship on debate in Japan is representative of this trend: see Satoru Aonuma, "'Western' Forensics and Democratic Participation: an Alternative (H)istory of the Public Sphere in Early Modern Japan" (paper presented at the National Communication Association convention, San Diego, CA, November 23, 2008); Robert Branham, "Debate and Dissent in Late Tokugawa and Meiji Japan," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 30, no.3 (Winter 1994): 131-49; Carly Woods and Takuzo Konishi, "What Has Been Exchanged? Toward a History of the Japan-US Debate Exchange," in *Proceedings of the 3rd Tokyo Conference on Argumentation*, eds Takeshi Suzuki and Aya Kubuta (Tokyo: Japan Debate Association, 2008), 271-9.

presumed to be the driving force behind debate participation in each phase, and then preview the unexpected skill that women's participation in debate derived.

1.1.1 Debate as a Community Activity

The first communicative-cultural formation where debate played an instrumental role in public deliberation was the bourgeois public sphere of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries. In this phase, debate was assumed to animate and energize public life. The activity played a pivotal role in crafting and sustaining community. It was imagined to take place on a society-wide level, in which community-based social institutions hosted fora for the mingling of ideas and opinions. Jürgen Habermas's *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* provides an essential historical and theoretical account of this kind of citizen deliberation outside of the penumbra of the state. The essence of the ideal(ized) bourgeois public sphere was a belief in the powers of rational-critical debate, as Habermas terms it, to judge arguments. Social institutions such as coffeehouses, salons and table societies (*Tischgesellschaften*) in eighteenth-century Germany, Britain, and France were gathering places for "private people [to] come together as a public."⁹ Through reasoned debate, individuals could test ideas, form opinions, and hash out the issues of the day, thus creating their own claim to control of the public sphere as something distinct from state authority. These social institutions can be seen as historical predecessors to the debating societies of the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries.

Habermas argues that though they may have differed in size, composition, climate, style, and topic focus, these social institutions had commonalities: "they all organized discussion among private people that tended to be ongoing." One assumed norm of cohesion amongst these

⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 27-8.

groups was that status was bracketed, or disregarded, in order to sustain critical discussion. Habermas acknowledges that it was “not that this idea of the public was actually realized in earnest in the coffee houses, the *salons*, and the societies; but as an idea it had become institutionalized and thereby stated as an objective claim.”¹⁰ Feminist critics have pointed out the impossibility of this norm, troubling the distinction between public and private. As an alternative to a strict focus on the exclusionary public sphere of the privileged bourgeois, critical theorist Nancy Fraser urges the study of “nonliberal, nonbourgeois, competing public spheres.”¹¹ There is little doubt that women and people of color were sometimes formally excluded from public discourse and political activities. Yet some credit Habermas’s account of rich citizen-participation outside of state power as opening up a space to explore alternate paths to public participation.¹²

The value of debate in this iteration was not focused on the relative skills of the individual participant as a speaker or arguer. Instead, because the emphasis was on societal unity through argument, debate was seen as an exercise in citizenship. Early American civic culture similarly relies on a collective memory of rational-critical debate cultivated in taverns and coffee houses. Social historian Michael Schudson has questioned whether rational-critical debate ever actually existed in the American republic – it is difficult to know the substance of conversation in

¹⁰ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 36.

¹¹ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 115. For a cohesive overview of feminist critiques of the public/private distinction, see Seyla Benhabib’s “Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas,” in *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, ed. Joan B. Landes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 85-92.

¹² Mary P. Ryan, “Gender and Public Access: Women’s Politics in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, 197. Ryan’s work is representative of that potential in nineteenth-century American history, while social historians such as Leonore Davidoff have explored the nineteenth-century British context. See Davidoff’s “Regarding Some ‘Old Husbands’ Tales’: Public and Private in Feminist History,” in Landes, ed, *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, 164-94.

social institutions with any empirical certainty.¹³ Yet what we do know is that the U.S. experience was similarly populated with community-based associations for communicative encounter, such as lyceums and literary and debating societies. Drawing from Habermas and a burgeoning literature on counterpublics, Angela G. Ray reveals how the relationship between debate and citizenship functioned in the North American context. Community-based antebellum men's debating clubs provided "young British American Protestant men of the middling and professional classes" with opportunities to learn and perform the participatory citizenship functions of public performance.¹⁴ Perhaps unsurprisingly, these exercises functioned within an exclusionary model of citizenship, where "masculine gender customarily was articulated as an inflexible, defining feature of the citizen" and women participated only as audience members. Yet despite these rigid notions of masculine citizenship (and efforts to model elite citizenship for young white men of the lower classes), such clubs debated about issues concerning disenfranchised groups such as women, Native Americans, and African Americans. Ray argues that though these debates often served to re-entrench dominant opinions of the Other, the recurrence of these issues as legitimate topics for debate exposed the influence of counterpublic agitation on rational-critical debate and at least suggested that there was ground for a two-sided argument.¹⁵

Ray's study of antebellum men's debating clubs suggests how men used debate to negotiate citizenship and filter information in an increasingly diverse society. But what can be said about women's participation in debate as a community activity? Feminist historiographers have answered Fraser's call to study these alternate publics within "actually existing

¹³ Michael Schudson, "Was There Ever a Public Sphere? If So, When? Reflections on the American Case," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 143-63.

¹⁴ Angela G. Ray, "The Permeable Public: Rituals of Citizenship in Men's Antebellum Debating Clubs," *Argumentation & Advocacy* 41, no. 1 (Summer 2004): 13.

¹⁵ Ray, "The Permeable Public," 14.

democracy.” For the purposes of this project, I find it most useful to draw from scholarship that has sought to better understand inclusivity and diversity in public life by looking for rhetorical activity in unexpected places. Feminist scholarship pays attention to the gaps and silences in dominant historical accounts, thinking critically about how perceived differences may limit or open up an individual’s ability to engage in meaning-making. Most often, this involves refiguring dominant notions of what constitutes public participation and influence. Studies of women’s activities in the nineteenth-century United States, for example, have revealed how women bridged private and public life through reading, writing, recitation, teaching, lyceum lecturing, petitioning, and the formation of moral reform and literary societies.¹⁶ Similarly, women in Victorian Britain exerted their influence in the “semi-privacy of bedroom, parlour, or study” through writing, publishing, reading, and ‘pillow-talk’ in addition to organizing in more traditionally public spaces.¹⁷

Feminist rhetorical scholars have drawn attention to the necessity of studying non-traditional spaces and fora for rhetoric. Rhetorical fora are “any encounter setting which serves as a gathering place for discourses...a provisionally constrained context and an avenue of mediation among discourses that might otherwise be self-confirming, incommensurable, or

¹⁶ Scholars from English, History, and Communication have contributed to this burgeoning area of research. While it is not possible to note all of the work in this area, the book-length scholarship that most strongly influenced my thinking on the subject are Mary P. Ryan’s *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), Susan Zaeske’s *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women’s Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), Angela G. Ray’s *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005), Ronald J. and Mary Saracino Zboray’s *Everyday Ideas: Socioliterary Experience Among Antebellum New Englanders* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), Jacqueline Jones Royster, *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), Jessica Enoch’s *Refiguring Rhetorical Education: Women Teaching African American, Native American, and Chicano/a Studies, 1865-1911* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), Nan Johnson’s *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866-1910* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), and Lindal Buchanan’s *Regendering Delivery: The Fifth Canon and Antebellum Women Rhetors* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Davidoff, “Regarding Some ‘Old Husbands’ Tales’,” in Landes, *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, 179.

perhaps not even heard at all.”¹⁸ Nan Johnson suggests that we should look for women in the history of rhetoric not only in the “powerful public rhetorical space of the podium and pulpit,” but also in the parlor.¹⁹ My project takes Johnson’s point but asks a question that collapses the distinction she makes: What about those situations in which the podium was in the parlor? What about those private rhetorical spaces that serve as training grounds, or incubators, for skills that will later be utilized in “powerful public rhetorical spaces”? As these questions suggest, debating societies challenge and extend studies in feminist rhetorical history by suggesting possibilities for analysis of rhetorical fora falling somewhere in between domestic and public rhetorical spaces.

Though on face it may not seem very radical to claim that rational-critical debate occurred at a debating society, the preceding discussion of women’s access to public life reveals its complexity. In Chapter Two, my study of the Ladies’ Edinburgh Debating Society (LEDS) reveals that we can add debating to the list of activities that showcases the permeability of private and public life. The chapter details the rise of community-based debating societies in eighteenth-century English and Scottish associational culture, which can be roughly mapped onto Habermas’ account of the political functions of the public sphere in Great Britain. Within this history, despite differing degrees of formal exclusion, women tended to find ways into debating societies as audience members or as debaters themselves. I demonstrate how the all-female LEDS enabled its members to access the presumed advantages of citizenship through debate during this stage. In the act of argumentative engagement about public issues, they were able to better imagine themselves as citizens in Scottish society and increase their awareness of an international community. I theorize how LEDS debaters also learned how to be members of an

¹⁸ Thomas Farrell, *Norms of Rhetorical Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995): 282.

¹⁹ Johnson, *Gender and Rhetorical Space*, 14.

argument culture that needed to strike a delicate balance between encouraging rational-critical debate and encouraging diversity. The LEDS functioned as a social institution where members could gain the additional skill of negotiating ideological and identity-based difference.

To study women in debate during the late nineteenth-century serves the purpose of both documenting its existence as another “circuitous route” into public life, but also to see how they adopted and adapted the norms of rational-critical debate from more traditionally public settings.²⁰ Though debate as a society-wide practice still obtains as an (under-practiced) ideal even in contemporary public culture, another structural change in debating practices occurred when debating societies became institutionalized in college campuses in the United States.

1.1.2 Debate as an Intercollegiate Activity

In this phase, debating was seen as an educational, competitive, and co-curricular activity that became integral to early twentieth-century thought about higher education. The enduring notion that debate is dominated by the white, the male, and elite makes sense for this phase, since those same people made up the majority of university students. Beyond the community setting, intramural literary and debating societies found a home in North American colleges.²¹ The earliest evidence of the formation of a college-based club in is Harvard’s Spy Club, which formed in 1719.²² Students would gather to perform and observe rhetorical exercises such as spelling, declamation, and debating.²³ Literary society programs often included musical

²⁰ Ryan, “Gender and Public Access,” 218.

²¹ This is not to suggest that intramural debating societies replaced community debating societies, but is meant to represent a shift in focus as debate was institutionalized on college campuses.

²² Marie Hochmuth and Richard Murphy, “Rhetorical and Elocutionary Training in Nineteenth-Century Colleges,” in *History of Speech Education in America*, ed. Karl Wallace (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954), 153.

²³ David Potter, “The Literary Society,” in *History of Speech Education in America*, 242-257.

performances, skits, papers on current events and topics, and, of course, a debate that “concluded with a critic’s report, which was generally entertaining and always frank.”²⁴

As with the community-based societies in England and Scotland, women students at US colleges lobbied to be able to participate in debate. Many educational debates ignited as women became more prevalent on college campuses: will the presence of women distract male students? Should women have a separate curriculum more suited to their sex? What extracurricular activities should women students be excluded from?²⁵ In many cases, it was deemed improper for women students to speak publicly or to courses take with male students. Yet this is another area where women organized to gain access to debate. The case of Lucy Stone at Oberlin is representative of this initiative. Oberlin College was the first college in the United States to admit women for co-educational study in the 1840’s. Lucy Stone organized the first college debating society when she discovered that female students were precluded from speaking during in-class debates. The debating society first met secretly in the woods behind Oberlin’s campus, and Stone opened the first meeting with this rationale:

We shall leave this college with the reputation of a thorough collegiate course, yet not one of use has received any rhetorical or elocutionary training. Not one of us could state a question or argue it in successful debate. For this reason I have proposed the formation of this association.²⁶

²⁴ James Gordon Emerson, “The Old Debating Society,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 17, no. 3 (June 1931): 364.

²⁵ A number of books have been written on the entrance of women into higher education in the United States. See especially Willystine Goodsell, *The Education of Women: Its Social Background and its Problems* (New York: the Macmillian Company, 1924); Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Thomas Woody, *A History of Women’s Education in the United States* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966); and Rosalind Rosenberg’s chapter, “The Feminization of Academe,” in her *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 28-53.

²⁶ As claimed by her daughter, Alice Stone Blackwell, in her book, *Lucy Stone: Pioneer of Women’s Rights* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1930), 60-1.

As more and more women were admitted to co-educational colleges across the country, the pressure to form debating societies was palpable. Where they were permitted, women students debated in the classroom and created all-female literary and debating societies.²⁷

Yet the gradual entrance of women into higher education was not the only transformation of American university life at the time. The Morrill Act of 1862 and 1890, which established land grant institutions aimed at providing public university education to a broader swath of the American populace. Because of the shifting demography of college students, it became necessary to adapt the curriculum to better suit the changing face of American higher education.²⁸ New university courses and textbooks in English Composition were created to teach basics of written and oral communication. Though they continued to draw from the belletristic rhetorical tradition, these new instructional materials “were, in no way, theoretical works; they were books designed

²⁷ It should be noted that these statements are not without controversy. There has been a groundswell of historical studies by scholars in rhetoric and composition in response to Robert Connors’s argument that the entrance of women into higher education in the nineteenth-century forged the feminization of rhetoric, or the decline of oral rhetoric, argumentation, and debate in college curricula in favor of written rhetoric (*Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory and Pedagogy* [Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997]). Given my historical research, I tend to side with those critics of Connors who work to disprove this theory by pointing to situated historical moments of women’s involvement in and transformation in oral rhetorical activities. See, for example, Buchanan, *Regendering Delivery*, chapter two; Kathryn M. Conway, “Woman Suffrage and the History of Rhetoric at the Seven Sisters Colleges, 1865-1919,” in *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, ed. Andrea A. Lunsford (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 203-26; Lisa Mastrangelo, “Learning from the Past: Rhetoric, Composition, and Debate at Mount Holyoke College,” *Rhetoric Review* 18 (1999): 46-64; Susanne Bordelon, “Contradicting and Complicating Feminization of Rhetoric Narratives: Mary Yost and Argument from a Sociological Perspective,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 101-24. Given the mutual interest in the history of debate by rhetorical scholars from both composition and speech communication perspectives, this is an area of considerable intellectual overlap where additional research and conversation could be beneficial. Although my research in this project does not directly bear on American college curricula in the nineteenth-century, I envision my study of the Ladies’ Edinburgh Debating Society as functioning as an additional piece of evidence of women’s vibrant rhetorical activity the nineteenth-century, and my work on Marie Hochmuth Nichols and Barbara Jordan contributing evidence of women’s continued interest in argumentation and debate.

²⁸ Herman Cohen, *The History of Speech Communication: the Emergence of a Discipline, 1914-1945* (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1994), 13. Cohen’s book provides a history of Speech Communication rooted in the intellectual trends (beginning with elocution and moving through the development of rhetorical theory and criticism as distinct scholarly trajectories) and the intellectual history of the field. Edward Panetta makes the argument that contemporary debate programs can reconnect with the land grant mission through service-learning and outreach in his “Living the Land-Grant: A Service and Outreach Mission for the Contemporary Debate Program,” in *Arguing Communication and Culture*, ed. G. Thomas Goodnight (Washington D.C.: National Communication Association), 228-36.

specifically to meet a demand and they had as their objective the training of not completely literate students in the effective use of their language.”²⁹

As higher education spread and developed across the country in the nineteenth-century, there was an accompanying proliferation of literary and debating societies. According to Stanford speech scholar James Gordon Emerson, such societies were a centerpiece of campus life, an activity that students “looked forward to through the humdrum of study and recitation, the dessert to the intellectual meal, the frosting on the delectable cake of sociability.”³⁰

The eventual decline of these vibrant forums for discussion and debate cannot be precisely pinpointed. Emerson suggests a number of possible causes, including the broadened opportunities for entertainment in other aspects of American culture, the rise of specific courses dedicated to public speaking, and the creation of intercollegiate debate squads.³¹ Intercollegiate debating referred to contests arranged between two colleges on a “contract” basis, “whereby one college challenged another, the second accepted, and a contract setting forth the rules and regulations of the contest was drawn up and signed by both parties.”³² Early observers of this structural change traced the shift from intramural to intercollegiate debating to a desire for rigorous competition and more formalized logistical, evidentiary, and logical norms for debate.³³ Like the development of intercollegiate athletic competitions, intercollegiate debating was seen as “an intellectual sport” that “evoked public interest and a rousing display of school spirit” like

²⁹ Cohen, *History of Speech Communication*, 28.

³⁰ Emerson, “The Old Debating Society,” 363.

³¹ Emerson, “Old Debating Society,” 367-8.

³² L. Leroy Cowperthwaite and A. Craig Baird, “Intercollegiate Debating,” in Wallace, *History of Speech Education*, 260. They cite Ralph Curtis Ringwalt’s claim that the first intercollegiate debate was between Harvard and Yale in 1892, although there is evidence that intercollegiate debating between literary societies had occurred earlier. See Otto F. Bauer, “The Harvard–Yale Myth,” *The AFA Register* 11 (Winter 1963): 20.

³³ For an overview of this change, and the relative deficiencies of intramural literary and debating societies, see Jarrod Atchison and Edward Panetta, “Intercollegiate Debate and Speech Communication: Historical Developments and Issues for the Future,” *The SAGE Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, ed. Andrea A. Lunsford, Kirt H. Wilson and Rosa A. Eberly (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 319-20.

pep rallies and parades in honor of the debaters.³⁴ University debate matches between two schools evolved into triangular and quadrangular league debate competitions amongst geographically proximate universities in the early years of the twentieth-century. The inclusion of three or more schools meant that the teams could not simply decide on sides on a contract basis, as they had previously. Each university had to start preparing arguments on both sides of a question, or proposition, for debate.³⁵ Though this change allowed more debating to take place in triangular and quadrangular leagues, it also introduced the ethical question of whether students should be asked to debate against their personal convictions by preparing cases on both sides of a proposition. This ethical dilemma would become a perennial concern for debate theorists and practitioners throughout the twentieth century, and continues to be a theoretical issue for debaters

³⁴ Cowperthwaite and Baird, "Intercollegiate Debating," 263. The need to frame debate as both an intellectual and a competitive endeavor has long plagued the activity. In her examination of intercollegiate debate at Emory University, New York University, and the University of Chicago from 1900 to 1930, Claudia J. Keenan finds the comparison of intercollegiate debate with sports superficial because debate research was intense, challenging, and difficult for lay audiences to understand ("Intercollegiate Debate: Reflecting American Culture, 1900-1930," *Argumentation & Advocacy* 46 [Fall 2009]: 80). Indeed, this problem with translating insular debate practices and vocabulary coupled with financial concerns are two issues precipitating the rise of the tournament system of debating in the 1920's, where many schools would come together at a host campus. I can only resolve to say that the relative accuracy of the "sportification" of intercollegiate debate must have varied by college campus. My research at Oberlin College and the University of Pittsburgh suggests that on those campuses, debaters in the early-to-mid twentieth century were treated with great respect analogous to sports heroes of the day. At both of those schools, there were concerted steps taken to balance the specialization of intercollegiate debate with efforts to engage in public outreach through extension debating (and at Pittsburgh, even a community-oriented radio and television series). As chapter three will demonstrate, Marie Hochmuth Nichols took part in a number of community debating events at schools, churches, and civic organizations during her time as a debater at the University of Pittsburgh. As a researcher keenly interested in the metaphors that surround argumentation, I tend to try to avoid the sports metaphors that describe contemporary debate. Needless to say, in this historical context, connections between debate and athletics were exclusionary to women because intercollegiate athletics did not include women—the claim that debate functioned as an "intellectual sport" surely wasn't talking about the women's volleyball team. However, the comparison is useful in thinking about the way that early intercollegiate debate practitioners saw themselves as representatives of the school. This connection is so strong and enduring, in fact, that in 1958, the Director of Debate at the University of Pittsburgh, convinced the Assistant Chancellor of General Affairs and the Office Admissions to allow debaters to travel with the football team to Lincoln, Nebraska. The aim of these trips was to hold public debates at local high schools and recruit out-of-state students to the University of Pittsburgh. See Robert P. Newman to Bernard Adams, May 21, 1958, Box 24, Folder 55/1, Student Affairs Files, and William Pitt Debating Union Papers (1955-61), University of Pittsburgh Archives.

³⁵ Cowperthwaite and Baird, "Intercollegiate Debating," 265.

today.³⁶ Other central controversies to arise in intercollegiate debate include whether speeches should be written, the role of the judge, and the role of the debate coach, or faculty advisor.³⁷

The final controversy maps onto another important transformation in higher education at the time: the creation of speech communication as a distinct field of university study. Professors of public speaking, previously housed in Departments of English, began to come together as the Eastern Public Speaking Conference in 1910 and then as the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking in 1914.³⁸ Before this shift, professors of English, history, or economics tended to lend their expertise to help prepare debaters.³⁹ The issues of the *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* from 1915 to 1917 reveal the large extent to which the early speech field was entwined with debate. Because many speech professors were also debate coaches or faculty advisors, critical issues in intercollegiate debate practice appeared as scholarly articles in the field's flagship journal. For example, the University of Pittsburgh's Frank Hardy Lane explored the question of how much assistance an instructor should provide to a student debater in preparing for and performing in intercollegiate competitions, while Wisconsin professor J.M. O'Neill and William Hawley Davis of Bowdoin College exchanged opinions about whether debate was best seen as a game or as preparation for public life.⁴⁰ These discussions continued in

³⁶ See, for example, Richard Murphy, "The Ethics of Debating Both Sides," *Speech Teacher* 6, no. 1 (January 1957): 1-9; Ronald Walter Greene and Darrin Hicks, "Lost Convictions: Debating Both Sides and the Ethical Fashioning of Liberal Citizens," *Cultural Studies* 19 (2005): 100-126; and Eric English et al., "Debate as a Weapon of Mass Destruction," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (June 2007): 221-5.

³⁷ William M. Keith identifies these issues as central controversies over debate. See his discussion of them in *Democracy as Discussion: Civic Education and the American Forum Movement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 67-83.

³⁸ Cohen, *The History of Speech Communication*, 29-30.

³⁹ Cowperthwaite and Baird, "Intercollegiate Debating," 266.

⁴⁰ See Frank Hardy Lane, "Faculty Help in Intercollegiate Contests," *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 1, no. 1 (April 1915): 9-16; William Hawley Davis, "Is Debating Primarily a Game?" *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 2, no. 2 (April 1916): 171-79; J.M. O'Neill, "Game or Counterfeit Presentment," *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 2, no. 2 (April 1916): 193-197.

the journal's later iterations as the *Quarterly Journal of Speech Education* and the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*.

Another evolution in debating practice was a shift away from league debating to tournament debating in the 1920's. Instead of three to four universities assembling as in the triangular and quadrangular leagues, tournament debating enabled many universities to come together at a common campus. Whereas the league debates were conceptualized as improving the quality of civic discussion for a wider public, tournament debating increased the competitive stakes by creating a format that crowned a single, winning team at the end. Students could expect to travel to a tournament and debate many rounds against different opponents on both sides of the proposition, with the top teams from the preliminary rounds of competition moving on to elimination rounds where a winner was ultimately named. This system provided "opportunities for increased numbers of intercollegiate debates at minimum expense" but necessitated "significant changes in debating methods and techniques." Two person teams were preferred to larger team debating formats, and speech times were reduced in order to maximize the number of debates that could be held in a weekend. Rather than having to convince auditoriums filled with public audiences, tournament debating focused on persuading a single judge or a small panel of judges.⁴¹ The tournament setting allowed debating practices to become more specialized. Over time, this change increased entry barriers to debate through the creation of intricate, complex argumentation jargon. Where specialization exists, so too does the ability to exclude or regulate

⁴¹ Cowperthwaite and Baird, "Intercollegiate Debating," 274. Debaters and faculty advisors dealt with the question of whether debates should be decided by an audience (who may be swayed by their opinions on the proposition rather than which team did the better debating) by creating innovations such as the "non-decision" debate and the "shift-of-opinion" ballot, which asked audience members to register their feelings about a topic before and after the debate (Cowperthwaite and Baird, "Intercollegiate Debating," 272-3). The focus on audiences was renewed when universities across the country were exposed to Oxford style debating during international debating tours that date back to 1922. The British debaters focused on audience persuasion rather than debate as an intellectual sport. See A. Craig Baird's "Should American Universities Adopt the British System of Debating?" *Quarterly Journal of Speech Education* 9, no. 3 (June 1923): 215-22.

debaters that do not adhere to highly developed norms. Again, the question of whether debate should be viewed as an insular game or as preparation for public life came under consideration.

As with other structural transformations in the activity, intercollegiate debating introduced a number of changes that uniquely effected women debaters. Though all-women's colleges like Mount Holyoke and Wellesley debated each other during this time period, most evidence indicates that women debaters were not permitted to participate in intercollegiate debating in large numbers until the 1920's.⁴² As L. Leroy Cowperthwaite and A. Craig Baird note, "throughout the early years of intercollegiate forensic competition the appearance of women upon the public platform continued to be viewed with disfavor," yet by 1923, "college women, particularly in the Midwest, were debating along with men."⁴³ The gendered dynamics of intercollegiate debating arose generated many contexts: Should women and men debate the same topics? Should women debate men? How will the judges respond to women debaters? Do women employ different stylistic approaches to argumentation? How can we travel to debate tournaments with men and women debaters without risking impropriety? This is the world of intercollegiate debate that Marie Hochmuth Nichols encountered during her Depression-era participation in intercollegiate debating.

Chapter Three joins a small but growing literature that acknowledges the link—of both people and ideas—between intercollegiate debate and the field of Speech Communication. I examine rhetorical scholar Marie Hochmuth Nichols's involvement in debate as a student at the University of Pittsburgh and as a coach at Mount Mercy College. Nichols went on to play a pivotal role in developing rhetorical criticism in the field, writing landmark essays and providing

⁴² This is the consensus about women's participation in co-educational intercollegiate debating put forth in Cowperthwaite and Baird, "Intercollegiate Debating," 268-9, Keith, *Democracy as Discussion*, 62-3, and Atchison and Panetta, "Intercollegiate Debate and Speech Communication," 324.

⁴³ Cowperthwaite and Baird, "Intercollegiate Debating," 269-70.

leadership on a national level. In addition to acquiring the traditional skill set offered by this phase in debate history—speaking, writing, arguing, and research—debate served two other major functions in Nichols’s life and career. First, it allowed her to cultivate a number of relationships with people who would be her colleagues even after she formally ceased her involvement with debate. Second, it cultivated a spirit of excellence that she would later apply to rhetorical criticism.

As a woman debater at a time when intercollegiate debate was dominated by men, and as a woman rhetorician at a time when the field (and academia in general) was dominated by male rhetoricians, Nichols’s scholarly persona developed over time. The next section explores the final structural transformation addressed in the dissertation: efforts to uncover the value of debate for marginalized groups beyond the elite, all-white university contexts.

1.1.3 Debate without Discrimination

By now, it should be clear that historically, many structured outlets for debate excluded both women and people of color. For a number of reasons, debating societies have been seen as bastions of race, gender, and class privilege where status and finances determine access and success. As Jarrod Atchison and Edward Panetta write,

With hindsight, we can assess that some of the early problems with diversity were closely connected to the relative inaccessibility of higher education, but it is also important to remember that the first intercollegiate debaters were elite white young men who had received prior training at preparatory schools on their way to Ivy League institutions.⁴⁴

This most recent phase in debate history overlaps with many of the trends discussed in the intercollegiate debating of the early-to-mid-twentieth-century, but it is also best seen as an

⁴⁴ Atchison and Panetta, “Intercollegiate Debate and Speech Communication,” 324.

ongoing phase. It bridges the historical work of this dissertation with contemporary efforts to increase diversity in academic debate and bend the skills learned in debate toward social justice. Over the past twenty years, a number of scholars have identified how academic debate culture continues to be dominated by privileged white males and has persistently if sometimes unintentionally devalued the contributions of women and minority participants.⁴⁵ Yet despite this reality, self-reflection by the intercollegiate debate community also reveals theoretical and logistical efforts (some small and some radical) to make the activity more inclusive. Some debate theorists believe that in order to create an environment that both invites and sustains diverse participation, fundamental aspects, such as norms of delivery style, judge decision-making processes, and the “debate as a game” mentality of the activity need to change.⁴⁶ Others point to the creation of Urban Debate Leagues in the 1990’s, an educational movement aimed at bringing the activity to inner-city students, as evidence of what debate has to offer minority populations.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ The subject of diversity in debate has received much attention in scholarly journals aimed at an argumentation and debate readership. Representative publications in this area include Joseph P. Zompetti, “Personalizing Debating: Diversity and Tolerance in the Debate Community,” *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate* 25 (September 2004): 26-39; Jon Bruschke, “Debate Factions and Affirmative Actions,” *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate* 25 (September 2004): 78-88; Mike Allen et al., “Diversity in United States Forensics: A Report on Research Conducted for the American Forensic Association,” *Argumentation & Advocacy* 40, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 173-84; Pamela L. Stepp and Beth Gardner, “Ten Years of Demographics: Who Debates in America?” *Argumentation & Advocacy* 38, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 69-83.

⁴⁶ Under the direction of Ede Warner Jr., University of Louisville has been at the forefront of arguing for these changes in order to increase minority participation in debate. See Warner’s article, “Go Homers, Makeovers or Takeovers? A Privilege Analysis of Debate as Gaming Simulation,” *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate* 24 (September 2003): 65-80, for an explanation of some of the problems with the traditional debate model.

⁴⁷ Gary Alan Fine’s book, *Gifted Tongues: High School Debate and Adolescent Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), exposes some of the excesses of this dominant high school debate culture while Joe Miller’s *Cross-X: The Amazing True Story of How the Most Unlikely Team from the Most Unlikely of Places Overcame Staggering Obstacles at Home and at School to Challenge the Debate Community on Race, Power and Education* (New York: Picador, 2006) showcases a narrative of how debate allowed African American high school students in Kansas City to achieve success and overcome barriers in their education and home lives. A 1998 forum in *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate* demonstrates the potential benefits of urban debate leagues. See especially Melissa Maxcy Wade, “The Case for Urban Debate Leagues,” *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate* 19 (1998): 60-65. See also Richard Pineda and Chris Salinas, “Model Proposal: Increasing Latina/o Involvement in Policy Debate through Summer Debate Workshops,” *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate* 30 (September 2009): 114-29. Shanara Reid-Brinkley’s work demonstrates how despite their benefits, media representations of urban debate leagues operate within a narrow framework of racial stereotypes in which African American students are headed for disaster and are “saved” by debate. See her “The Harsh Realities of ‘Acting Black’: How African

In these cases, despite its history of exclusion, the activity is valued for its ability to empower marginalized groups and individuals. Beyond the skills offered by traditional debate participation, the activity also has the potential to “help students become critical consumers of knowledge, social critics, and agents of change.”⁴⁸

There is a historical basis for seeing debate as a tool of empowerment. In recent years, major strides have been made in recovering evidence of African American participation in the history of literary and debating activities. Scholars such as Elizabeth McHenry, Shirley Wilson Logan, Jacqueline Bacon, and Glen McClish have contributed significantly to our knowledge in this area by demonstrating how despite the exclusionary model of citizenship propagated in debate history, African Americans formed their own literary societies in the antebellum north and post-Civil War period.⁴⁹ In these instances, African Americans went about claiming and seizing a rhetorical education, acknowledging the value of literacy, speaking, and writing skills as a route to more equal treatment. Joining a growing literature on the rich history of debating at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) throughout the twentieth-century, actor and director Denzel Washington’s film, *The Great Debaters*, brought the story of debate at Wiley College in the 1930’s to a mass audience.⁵⁰ Chapter Four more fully explores the history of

American Policy Debaters Negotiate Representation through Racial Performance and Style,” (Ph.D. diss, University of Georgia, 2008), chapter two.

⁴⁸ Ede Warner Jr. and Jon Bruschke, “‘Gone on Debating:’ Contemporary Academic Debate as a Tool of Empowerment,” *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate* 22 (Spring 2001): 28. See also Gordon R. Mitchell, “Pedagogical Possibilities for Argumentative Agency in Academic Debate,” *Argumentation & Advocacy* 35, no.2 (Fall 1998): 41-60.

⁴⁹ See Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Shirley Wilson Logan, *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008); Jacqueline Bacon and Glen McClish, “Reinventing the Master’s Tools: Nineteenth Century African-American Literary Societies of Philadelphia and Rhetorical Education,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30, no.4 (Fall 2000): 19-47.

⁵⁰ *The Great Debaters*, DVD, directed by Denzel Washington (Chicago: Harpo Films, 2007). Other scholarship that has featured debating at HBCUs include David Gold, *Rhetoric at the Margins: Revising the History of Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1873-1947* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2008) and Marcus H. Boulware’s “Speech Training in the Negro College,” *Journal of Negro Education*, 16, no.1 (Winter 1947): 115-20; Evin Dyer draws upon artifacts uncovered in a private residence to tell the story of Charles

intercollegiate debate in the 1930's, 40's, and 50's, in which HBCUs created their own leagues but were often precluded from full participation in interracial debating with predominately white universities.

Access to debate by historically marginalized groups like African-Americans could be seen as part of a broader civil rights struggle over more equitable educational opportunities; but it was also seen as a particular modality that could equip marginalized rhetors with the skills to advance the broader agenda of civil rights and social justice. In this respect, Robert James Branham has shed light on two figures who used debate training to advance the civil rights cause: Malcolm X and Benjamin Elijah Mays. In his article, "I Was Gone on Debating: Malcolm X's Prison Debates and Public Confrontations," Branham discusses Malcolm X's widely-acknowledged skills as a public speaker and traces the ways that those skills were incubated and refined through formal debates conducted at the Norfolk Prison Colony where Malcolm X was held as a prisoner from 1960 to 1964.⁵¹ Branham examines the prison debates and then discusses X's later career as a public figure, in the process yielding valuable insight about a little-explored part of his biography. It also reveals tactics and stylistic considerations, like the development of certain metaphors to explain white oppression, deployed by Malcolm X as he translated his debate training into a strategy for social change toward civil rights. As he put it in his autobiography, "some way, I had to start telling the white man about himself to his face. I decided to do this by putting my name down to debate."⁵² Though they had different approaches to the cause, Branham also reveals how Benjamin Mays, a mentor to Martin Luther King, Jr. in the ways of nonviolence, used his debate training to advance civil rights. Mays began debating at

Florence, the African American student captain of the University of Pittsburgh's debate team in 1917. See "The Great Debater," *Pitt Magazine* (Summer 2008): 26-30.

⁵¹ Robert James Branham, "'I Was Gone on Debating': Malcolm X's Prison Debates and Public Confrontations," *Argumentation & Advocacy* 31, no. 3 (Winter 1995): 117-37.

⁵² Malcolm X, quoted in Branham, "I Was Gone on Debating."

Bates College in 1917, where he viewed speech and debate as opportunities to confront racist attitudes toward African Americans.⁵³ Later, as the president of Morehouse College, Mays used his background to engage in face-to-face debates about apartheid in South Africa with Ben Marais, in long distance debates through Pittsburgh newspapers with evangelist Billy Graham about the state of racism in the American south.⁵⁴ As the president of Morehouse College, he went on to create an environment that encouraged debate and free-flowing of ideas toward social progress.⁵⁵

Chapter Four combines a concern with diversity within debate and the way that debate can be used to promote social justice. I look to politician Barbara Jordan's participation in debate at Texas Southern University in the 1950's in which she faced discrimination as both a woman and an African American debater. My research demonstrates that Jordan, a gifted orator with a commanding presence from a very early age, was able to not only access but also enjoy considerable success in the predominantly white world of intercollegiate speech and debating competitions. This success propelled her toward her later career in law and politics, but more surprisingly, allowed Jordan to develop a strategy of bodily invention and adaptation that she deployed in other aspects of her public life. Previous accounts of Jordan's life may have attributed her rhetorical might to her training in debate but none have traced the connection to her distinctive bodily rhetorical style—an unexpected skill.

The history of debate is a history of change. Though this section has addressed the major shifts in debate, it is necessary to underline that the activity is not, and has never been, monolithic. For every historical claim that demonstrates the exclusion of women or people of

⁵³ Robert James Branham, "'Emancipating Myself: Mays the Debater,'" in Lawrence Edward Carter Sr., ed, *Walking Integrity: Benjamin Elijah Mays, Mentor to Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 81-109.

⁵⁴ Branham, "Emancipating Myself," 103-6.

⁵⁵ Branham, "Emancipating Myself," 108.

color, there are many examples of individuals subverting the dominant culture and seizing their own rhetorical educations. Along with the diversity of participants involved, the activity has involved different topics, styles, formats, and argument strategies. This projects aims to open up the possibilities for studying that evolution in historical contexts.

1.2 WOMEN'S WAYS OF ARGUING⁵⁶

Given the history I have just related, we can see how structural barriers and prevailing attitudes have prevented women, especially women of color, from fully participating in debate. What assumptions about gender and argumentation drive those historical divisions, and how are those assumptions enduring? One way to answer these questions is to look to the dominant metaphors that have characterized argumentation and debate in western culture. Metaphors allow us to understand concepts, to bring out “the thisness of a that, or that thatness of a this.”⁵⁷ We can recognize argumentation and its gendered baggage by acknowledging that it is most often figuratively expressed as verbal combat, violence, or war.⁵⁸ One need not look far to see violence in the language of debate—it is often a competitive enterprise, a win-lose situation which manifests in the language of sports and armed conflict. A debater is said to “marshal [their]

⁵⁶ This section title plays, of course, off of the idea of “women’s ways of knowing”—a phrase arising out of feminist epistemology that has led to theorizing in a number of different contexts (women’s ways of leading, women’s ways of talking, for example). While this formulation often draws upon the idea of essential difference between men and women, I am interested not in biologically or psychologically different ways of approaching argumentation, but rather, the attitudinal and conceptual barriers that suppose that women and debate are incongruous. Gendered identity, not biological sex, manifests in the power dynamics of language use and may be more accurately titled, “Gendered Ways of Arguing.” Yet given that I draw on the historical category of “woman” as an organizing term that served as the basis of exclusion in the history of debate, and that I like the ring of it, I shall leave the section title as is.

⁵⁷ Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 503.

⁵⁸ Lakoff and Johnson identify argument-as-war as a central conceptual metaphor in *Metaphors We Live By*, 4.

troops ...against those of the enemy... in the “heat of battle.”⁵⁹ As Phyllis Rooney suggests, one of the difficulties in transcending these violent metaphors is that “it is difficult to know how we might articulate the things we mean by these phrases” without them.⁶⁰ Given that it is so prevalent, and may often be accurate in describing our attitudes toward argument, why is this metaphor problematic?

As feminist critiques of argument and persuasion suggest, “argument as a process has been steeped in adversarial assumptions and gendered expectations.”⁶¹ If we accept that metaphors not only “structure our experience,”⁶² but “by organizing reality in particular ways... also prescribe how we are to act,”⁶³ the violence of argument metaphors can indicate problematic attitudes toward the stylistic norms of engagement, the end goal of debate, and those interlocutors that we engage in the process. On practical and theoretical levels, adversarial argument constrains women in three ways. First, it “disadvantages women because women cannot engage in aggressive modes associated with competence, power, authority, and so forth without encountering double binds or harmful stereotypes.”⁶⁴ Second, it figuratively constrains women because the metaphor is “significantly compelled...by the persistent depiction of the ‘man of reason’ as consistently battling aspects of unreason regularly constructed as womanly or

⁵⁹ Waters, *Intellectual Pursuits*, 111-2.

⁶⁰ Phyllis Rooney, “Philosophy, Adversarial Argumentation, and Embattled Reason,” *Informal Logic* 30, no.3 (2001): 211.

⁶¹ Catherine Helen Palczewski, “Argumentation and Feminism: An Introduction,” *Argumentation & Advocacy* 32, no. 4 (Spring 1996): 162.

⁶² George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 158.

⁶³ Sonja K. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Explanation and Practice* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1989), 189.

⁶⁴ Sylvia Burrow, “Verbal Sparring and Apologetic Points: Politeness in Gendered Argumentation Contexts,” *Informal Logic* 30, no. 3 (2010): 239.

‘feminine.’”⁶⁵ Third, the configuration of argument as violence either assumes male combatants fighting each other, or it creates a problematic attacker-victim relationship that is often gendered.

Can arguers escape the war metaphor that pervades debate in a way that revisions argumentation as a cooperative enterprise between two interlocutors aiming at mutual illumination? Late twentieth-century argumentation theorist Wayne Brockriede sought to do just this by complicating the traditional notion of argumentation as domination in his landmark article, “Arguers as Lovers.”⁶⁶ Brockriede replaces the war metaphor with a sexual one. This alternative metaphor is shocking to conventional attitudes that treat argumentation as war by other means. It is potentially offensive and thus meriting feminist intervention. For Brockriede, the ideal arguer treats their interlocutor as a lover: they share risk in a symbiotic relationship geared toward cooperative knowledge production like Socrates and Phaedrus or scientists in the lab. The lover sees their co-arguer as a subject and sees the process of argumentation as a social interchange that can transform how both arguers and audiences perceive an issue. There are, however, two other perspectives that Brockriede theorizes. Both of these attitudes toward arguing treat their interlocutors as objects, not subjects, and see the purpose of argument as victory instead of transformation. The first of these, the seducer, seeks to win assent through charm and beguilement. The seducer is the silver-tongued orator, resorting to “rhetrickery” and fallacy to convince an audience.⁶⁷ Paired with the seducer is—problematically—the argumentative rapist, who is willing to coerce and overpower their objectified interlocutors in order to gain the upper hand.

⁶⁵ Rooney, “Adversarial Argumentation,” 211.

⁶⁶ Wayne Brockriede, “Arguers as Lovers,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 5, no.1 (Winter 1972): 1-11.

⁶⁷ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: The Quest for Effective Communication* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

Brockriede suggests that a prime example of the “arguer as rapist” perspective is in intercollegiate debate: “the language is symptomatic: ‘We killed them last round.’ ‘We destroyed them.’ ‘We cut them down.’ In all situations, the rapist’s attitude toward co-arguers is contempt, his [sic] intent is to victimize, and the act itself, given one other ingredient, is rape.”⁶⁸

Brockriede’s language here is distasteful: he risks trivializing sexual violence by comparing it to communication surrounding an intercollegiate debate. It says something about not only intercollegiate debate but also about the academic culture of the 1970’s that a metaphor steeped in jarring sexual violence was so easily used as a schema for talking about argumentation. However, I include it here because it is representative of the problematic excesses of the violence metaphor that run throughout argumentation theory (even theory that explicitly tries to move away from such associations). More importantly, the problematic nature of this metaphor is indicative of the need for scholarly feminist intervention. “Arguers as Lovers” may be a relic that might be better left to gather historical dust, but this discussion of it serves to underline the need for an alternative metaphor to better capture debate practice that is more gender-sensitive, avoids conflict and violence metaphors, but yet captures how argumentation can expand the horizons of participants. One site for developing an alternative metaphor might be found by taking the experiences of marginalized debaters seriously. Can differences in who debates, how they debate, the topics of debate, or the format of debate move our metaphors away from violence and toward...something else? I suggest that the answer to this is yes, and develop an alternative metaphor grounded in travel in the Conclusion.

Brockriede is not alone in pointing to the figurative connection between communication and gendered violence in the 1970’s. Because persuasion is used as a way to change or dominate

⁶⁸ Brockriede, “Arguers as Lovers,” 6.

another person's way of thinking, radical feminist Sally Miller Gearhart sees it as inherently violent. Teachers of rhetoric are implicated in her critique because they "have been training a competent breed of weapons specialists who are skilled in emotional maneuvers, expert in intellectual logistics and, in their attack upon attitude and belief systems, blissfully ignorant of their violation of nature or her processes."⁶⁹ Gearhart offers a 'female' model of communication as an antidote to the violent underpinnings of traditional persuasion. She lays out a set of guidelines for interaction, including that participants must have no intent to enlighten or persuade; that while there are differences between participants, all should feel equal in power; that participants should recognize that there is a potential for disagreement; and that each participant must be willing to give up his or her position to others.⁷⁰ Given Gearhart's rejection of traditional argumentation and persuasion, it is not a huge stretch to imagine her interpretation of the history of debate. However, as some of the case studies will show, women in debate history were much more active in defining their own rules of engagement than previous accounts have led us to believe.

A lively intellectual discussion has ensued about the gendered implications of traditional argumentation in the wake of Gearhart's article. The literature on the subject has mushroomed, generating alternate models of argumentation have been embraced and revised, critiqued and reviled.⁷¹ Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin pay homage to Gearhart in their 1995 article,

⁶⁹Sally Miller Gearhart, "The Womanization of Rhetoric," *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 2 (1979): 197.

⁷⁰ Gearhart, "Womanization of Rhetoric," 198-99.

⁷¹ A special issue of *Argumentation & Advocacy* was dedicated to the issue; vol. 32, no. 4 (Spring 1996). For extensions and critiques, see especially Nina M. Lozano-Reich and Dana L. Cloud, "The Uncivil Tongue: Invitational Rhetoric and the Problem of Inequality," *Western Journal of Communication* 73, no. 2 (April-June 2009): 220-6; Jennifer Emerling Bone, Cindy L. Griffin, and T.M. Linda Scholz, "Beyond Traditional Conceptualizations of Rhetoric: Invitational Rhetoric and a Move Toward Civility," *Western Journal of Communication* 72, no. 4 (October 2008): 434-62; Trudy Govier, *The Philosophy of Argument* (Newport News, VA: Vale Press, 1999), 45-68; Richard Fulkerson, "Transcending Our Conception of Argument in Light of Feminist Critiques," *Argumentation & Advocacy* 32, no. 4 (Spring 1996): 199- 218; and M. Lane Bruner, "Producing

“Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric.”⁷² Rather than abandoning the term “rhetoric,” Foss and Griffin wish to reclaim and transform the idea of rhetoric to include three feminist principles: equality, immanent value, and self-determination. They offer the alternative model of invitational rhetoric, an “invitation to the audience to enter a rhetor’s world and see it as the rhetor does,” which considers and validates a variety of differing perspectives.⁷³ In a later attempt to clarify invitational rhetoric’s scope in the face of numerous extensions and criticisms, Jennifer Emerling Bone, Cindy L. Griffin, and T.M. Linda Scholz underline that invitation rhetoric does not equate persuasion with violence, as Gearhart does, and that it is meant to be a model of communication appropriate for some, but not all contexts.⁷⁴

This distinction is important because a 2000 *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate* forum engaged the question of whether contemporary intercollegiate debate is one context where invitational rhetoric could transform a competitive culture. Jeffrey Dale Hobbs et al. suggest that intercollegiate debate practices such as the focus on competition, verbal (rapid pace of speaking, big breaths) and non-verbal (eye contact with only the judge, impeding on the personal space of competitors, hand gestures, intimidating facial expressions) delivery norms, *ad hominem* personal attacks, stylistic ways of presenting arguments and evidence, the judge, and the tournament format make invitational rhetoric in this context difficult.⁷⁵ Yet they suggest if debaters were to shift their attention from competition to the exchange of ideas, they may be able to achieve some sense of “cooperative argumentation.” They go on to suggest how changes in

Identities: Gender Problematicization and Feminist Argumentation,” *Argumentation & Advocacy* 32, no. 4 (Spring 1996): 185-98.

⁷² Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric,” *Communication Monographs* 62 (March 1995): 2-18.

⁷³ Foss and Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion,” 5.

⁷⁴ Bone, Griffin, and Scholz, “Beyond Traditional,” 438-40.

⁷⁵ Jeffrey Dale Hobbs, et al., “Intercollegiate Debate as Invitational Rhetoric: An Offering,” *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate* 21 (2000): 79-83.

format, delivery style, cross-examination, and the role of the judge might make the activity more invitational.⁷⁶

While Hobbs et al.'s attempt to envision an invitational intercollegiate debate is fascinating, more directly relevant for our purposes are the forum responses from Foss and Griffin. Quite simply, Foss and Griffin see little possibility that intercollegiate debate may transcend traditional notions of rhetoric. Griffin states that she has never participated in campus debates because she is "uncomfortable with that kind of interaction."⁷⁷ She does go on to engage Hobbs et al. on the merits of their experiment, suggesting limitations with well-established aspects of contemporary tournament debating such as the presence of a judge ("if someone is evaluating us using an external criterion, how can we create an environment of safety, which is inherently nonjudgmental?") and the proposition or resolution for debate (" 'That the U.S. federal government should adopt a policy...' suggests that little freedom is available") inherently constrain its ability to be invitational.⁷⁸

More surprising, though, is Foss's response, which makes little effort to hide her contempt for intercollegiate debaters. She claims to know little about debate, yet confesses that she "inwardly groan[s]" when debaters enroll in her classes, assuming they will be "arrogant and talk way too fast."⁷⁹ Because she cannot comment on the intercollegiate debate context, Foss draws from another author who is highly skeptical of the benefits of debate: linguist Deborah Tannen. Tannen's 1998 book, *The Argument Culture: Moving from Debate to Dialogue*, has

⁷⁶ Hobbs et al, "Intercollegiate Debate," 86-92.

⁷⁷ Cindy L. Griffin, "Response," *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate* 21 (2000): 99. Jeffrey Jarman and Kelly M. McDonald also reach the conclusion that invitational rhetoric and intercollegiate debate cannot work together, arguing that Hobbs et al.'s efforts to marry the two violate central tenets of argumentation and debate. See their "Invitation Declined: A Response to Intercollegiate Debate as Invitational Rhetoric," in G. Thomas Goodnight, ed, *Arguing Communication and Culture* (Washington DC: National Communication Association), 205-11.

⁷⁸ Griffin, "Response," 101.

⁷⁹ Sonja K. Foss, "Response," *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate* 21 (2000): 95.

been the foil of many an argumentation scholar since its publication. The book sounds a familiar tune: there is too much hostility, competitiveness, and agonism in all pockets of our culture, ranging from the press to politics to education. “The war on drugs, the war on cancer, the battle of the sexes, politicians’ turf battles” – war metaphors are so pervasive in our language and such a defining aspect of the argument culture that the hardback cover of Tannen’s book shows an image of a bomb about to detonate.⁸⁰ According to Tannen, debate disconnects us from community and civic life, it creates an “atmosphere of animosity [that] precludes respect and poisons our relations with one another...the argument culture is doing more damage than good.”⁸¹ It is against this backdrop that Foss claims that intercollegiate debate propagates the argument culture by “teach[ing] skills that are antithetical to invitational rhetoric and to the achievement of a civil and humane world.”⁸²

This exchange (and invocation of the argument culture) is instructive for this project. I enter this conversation by suggesting that contemporary theorizing about argumentation and gender can be informed by studying historical cases of women in debate. While I make no claim that debate was invitational in these settings, the project complicates narrow claims about what is possible within the activity. A historically informed view of gender and argumentation must pay attention to the diverse ways that women have navigated the activity over time and in different settings.⁸³ While fully acknowledging the exclusion and marginalization that took place and continues to plague debate, my project questions whether enduring assumptions about the

⁸⁰ Deborah Tannen, *The Argument Culture: Moving from Debate to Dialogue* (New York: Random House, 1998), 4.

⁸¹ Tannen, *Argument Culture*, 25.

⁸² Foss, “Response,” 95.

⁸³ As Kathryn T. Flannery says, “the usefulness of historical work, as I see it, is not in finding any simply applications for the present so much as it is in complicating our understanding of current practice through a disruption of familiar genealogies.” See her “Shifting the Center of Gravity: The Rhetorics of Radical Feminist Pedagogy,” in *Teaching Rhetorica: Theory, Pedagogy, Practice*, ed. Kate Ronald and Joy Ritchie (Portsmouth, NH: Boyton-Cook Publishers, 2006), 48-65.

incongruity of women and debate may subvert or downplay difference rather than allowing individuals to deliberate about it.⁸⁴ It suggests that for some participation in debate allowed the opportunity to negotiate and redefine differences in ideologies and the intersections of identity-based affiliation. How can the dominant argument-as-war metaphor be complicated to characterize this view of gender and argumentation? This project will seek an alternative to the dominant argument-as-war metaphor that is rooted in the diversity of experience revealed through historical narratives of women in debate. The next section explains the methodological assumptions that went into the gathering and interpretation of those historical narratives.

1.3 ON STUDYING WOMEN DEBATERS: PROJECT HISTORY AND ORIENTATION

This project does not seek to provide a comprehensive history of women's involvement in debating societies. To claim to do so would be impossible, too easily tidying up a history in which women did not always leave immaculate records, or, had their records deemed unimportant and disregarded. Past published reports of women's debating societies have been limited to documenting and celebrating their existence rather than making connections to the broader narrative of the history of women's rhetorical activities or considering what they might tell us about gender and argumentation. As such, one of the challenges of a project of this kind is to make sense of a historical practice—women's involvement in debating societies—with a deeply imperfect record.

So what am I claiming to do? My aims are best expressed by explaining my decision to title the dissertation as I have. "Women Debating Society" serves two purposes. First, it plays on

⁸⁴ Lana F. Rakow and Laura A. Wackowitz have a useful discussion of downplaying vs. redefining difference in their book, *Feminist Communication Theory: Selections in Context* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2004), 19-22.

the idea of a “women’s debating society”—a common nomenclature for the all-female organizations for debate founded at the community level or on college campuses when the activity was segregated by sex. Second, the fact that such opportunities opened the door for meaningful social activism is punctuated in the title of my study, which underscores the subversive element of debate by repositioning women as agents of social critique and change. They were women debating society, engaging with the issues of the day through recurrent, ritualized rhetorical practice. The very fact that women were in debating societies challenged norms.

What do I mean by “Negotiating Difference in Historical Argument Cultures”? The previous sections have previewed the ways in which debating societies allowed women to confront ideological and intersectional differences in ways that they could not previously imagine. The decision to refer to these debating societies as “historical argument cultures” seizes the opportunity, encouraged by David Zarefsky, to avoid looking at *the* argument culture as a static and monolithic societal phenomenon. Instead, I look to the multiplicity of experiences that existed within historical argument cultures, in which women came together to gain a unique skill set through debate participation.⁸⁵

As will become clear throughout the chapters, this project joins many different and yet related interdisciplinary academic conversations in rhetorical history and feminist rhetorics. My research approach synthesizes methodological insights from each of these literatures. The first, rhetorical history, draws on the ways that “the melding of historical and rhetorical methodologies can contribute to an understanding of the complex latitudinal and longitudinal processes of social

⁸⁵ David Zarefsky, “What Does an Argument Culture Look Like?” *Informal Logic* 29.3 (2009): 296-308.

influence.”⁸⁶ Rhetorical history helps us to see historical research as not merely descriptive, but also evaluative and interpretive; it “tests theory and complements criticism,” acknowledging the ways that both rhetoric and history are social processes.⁸⁷ Feminist rhetorics has developed considerably since the earliest calls to “remap rhetorical territories” to include women in the history of rhetoric.⁸⁸ Thus, the growing literature on feminist rhetorical methods and methodologies has been instructive during the process of gathering and interpreting research for this project.⁸⁹ Such projects aim to recover and interpret “women rhetors and women’s rhetorics, making claims for their importance and contribution to the discipline, and, in so doing, regendering rhetorical histories and traditions.”⁹⁰

I wish to demonstrate how these different approaches coalesce in the project, making transparent the decisions that went into arrival at this research topic, and the gathering and interpretation of materials. Jacqueline Jones Royster calls for

⁸⁶ Kathleen J. Turner, ed., *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 4.

⁸⁷ Turner, *Doing Rhetorical History*, 2. Rhetoricians have long worked to articulate the ways in which a rhetorical perspective does not simply add to other knowledge fields, but through interpretation, is able to reveal new insights. John Lyne makes a similar point cogently for rhetoric and science: “The practical and interpretive moments of rhetoric need not be a dichotomy, if practice is understood to be ongoing and self-reflexive. . . . The rhetoric of science gets its most traction, I believe, when it looks at knowledge-in-relation, as externally contestable, which often means under contestation, whether because of different theoretical commitments, different methodologies, or differences in credibility of experts.” See his “Knowledge and Performance in Argument: Disciplinarity and Proto-Theory,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 32, no. 1 (Summer 1998): 3-10.

⁸⁸ Attempts to include women in the history of rhetoric can be traced back to early works such as Doris G. Yoakam’s “Pioneer Women Orators of America,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 23, no. 2 (April 1937): 251-9 and Lillian O’Connor’s *Pioneer Women Orators: Rhetoric in the Ante-bellum Reform Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954). Calls for additional efforts to recover women’s voices in this history came from Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s *Man Cannot Speak for Her: a Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric* (New York: Praeger, 1989) and Andrea A. Lunsford’s edited volume, *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995) amongst others. “Remapping rhetorical territories” is a phrase borrowed from Cheryl Glenn’s “Remapping Rhetorical Territory,” *Rhetoric Review* 13, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 287-303 and her book, *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1997), especially chapter one.

⁸⁹ See Part 2 of Lindal Buchanan and Kathleen J. Ryan, eds., *Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics: Landmark Essays and Controversies* (West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press, 2010).

⁹⁰ Buchanan and Ryan, *Walking and Talking*, xiii.

Researchers and scholars to articulate their own ideological standpoints systematically, not simply as a personal or professional flag to wave at a convenient moment but in support of ideological clarity; in recognition of how our viewpoints are implicated in scholarly presentation and representation; and also in support of 'humility' as we locate ourselves within the text as scholars, and thereby as people who have interpretive power.⁹¹

Royster's cue is particularly useful for those of us doing historical research that has potential to impact contemporary conversations and practices. As a researcher setting out to do a history of women in debate, it is important to note how I was drawn to the topic, and to acknowledge my own stakes within that history. It is simple to see how I might "locate [myself] within the text as [a] scholar." I was a woman intercollegiate debater who was gradually drawn to the study of women debaters. In the case of Chapter Three, I am a woman rhetorician studying a woman rhetorician (Marie Hochmuth Nichols). As a white woman participant in the world of academic debate in high school, college, and graduate school, I felt empowered by newfound skills in research, oratory, argumentation and the relationships I formed with my teammates. Like so many other debaters, I looked for women role models at the upper echelons of competition; I felt deflated as I encountered some of the excesses of the argument-as-war model of engagement. As a debate practitioner, I sought ways to settle these conflicted feelings. As I began to take courses on gender and language, and as I was exposed to feminist critiques of argumentation, it struck me that I was seeing features of these theoretical discussions enacted every weekend at debate tournaments. This experience piqued my academic interest; it also planted the idea that there must be a better way to reconcile these tensions between gender and argumentation.

My background as a debater also informs my general approach to historical research. Gordon Mitchell and colleagues argue that collaboration and co-authorship in academic research

⁹¹ Royster, *Traces of a Stream*, 281.

draws upon research habits learned in preparing for intercollegiate debates.⁹² Debaters are given a topic and throughout the course of a tournament season, learn to forage around in a wide variety of materials for different pieces of evidence to support arguments and positions—a skill set that positions them nicely to understand the dynamics of what Judith Halberstam calls a “scavenger methodology.”...us[ing] different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior.”⁹³ Debate teaches students to unearth research in the unlikeliest places for the purpose of being able to succeed within the contest round. Recently, debaters in intercollegiate competition have been pushing the boundaries of traditional research, expanding to visual and aural arguments in order to best make their case. Researchers must consequently expand their traditional “data sets” in order to do historical work on under-researched actors (women) within under-researched histories (argumentation and forensics).

In the case of this project, this meant combining published accounts of debate history with materials available at archival collections and where possible, oral history interviews. Within communication studies, scholars have reasserted methodological rationales for drawing on archival collections, thereby underlining the importance of using primary materials in research projects. Moya Ann Ball suggests that in doing archival research, we can become active rhetorical analysts because “instead of relying on the authority of secondary accounts, we are left

⁹² Gordon R. Mitchell et al., “The Debate Authors Working Group Model for Collaborative Knowledge Production in Forensics Scholarship,” *Argumentation & Advocacy* 47, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 1-24. On the connection between primary research and intercollegiate debate, see Gordon R. Mitchell, “Pedagogical Possibilities.” Regarding the competitive debate skill set’s portability to academic contexts beyond the competitive tournament grid, see the preface to Mitchell’s *Strategic Deception: Rhetoric, Science and Politics in Missile Defense Advocacy* (Michigan State University Press, 2000); and Gordon R. Mitchell and Takeshi Suzuki, “Beyond the ‘Daily Me’: Argumentation in an Age of Enclave Deliberation,” in *Argumentation and Social Cognition*, ed. Takeshi Suzuki, Yoshiro Yano & Takayuki Kato (Tokyo: Japan Debate Association, 2004), 160-66.

⁹³ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 13.

with primary sources that demand our making statements on our own.”⁹⁴ In the context of the history of speech communication, William Keith urges scholars to go beyond published accounts to include archival work.⁹⁵ More directly, Robert Littlefield argues for the necessity of archival research to recover forgotten elements of twentieth-century forensics education.⁹⁶

The benefits of including archival materials in historical research on argumentation and forensics are considerable. While useful insight can and should be culled from published accounts in journals, newspapers, yearbooks, biographies, and other secondary source materials, university and community-based special collections provide additional information that might otherwise be overlooked. In studying the history of debating societies, archival resources such as minute books, ballots, funding letters, speech texts, and personal correspondences fill in critical background information left out of published materials. Minutes from debating society meetings provide information about the topics debated, the arguments made, and the vote count at the end of debates. They also reveal moments where the debating societies connected with other civic groups and extracurricular associations. Speech texts provide critical information about the actual speeches made in debating societies, as well as the forms of evidence used to back particular arguments.

However, historical records of debating societies are rare, especially for those based in universities. Material from student-run debating clubs may not have been deposited in university archives, and materials are often simply misplaced or trashed with the turnover of students and debate coaches. This problem coincides with a similar predicament in feminist historical studies,

⁹⁴ Moya Ann Ball, “Theoretical Implications of Doing Rhetorical History,” in Turner, *Doing Rhetorical History*, 68.

⁹⁵ William Keith, “Crafting a Usable History,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 93, no. 3 (August 2007): 345.

⁹⁶ Robert S. Littlefield, “Gaining a Broader Focus: the Benefits of Archival Research Exploring Forensic Education and Activity in the 20th Century,” unpublished paper presented at the National Communication Association convention, November 16, 2007.

where researchers have noted the importance of looking for unpublished materials in non-traditional places.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, there are holes, gaps, and silences in documentation of women's debating activities, and even in places where archival materials are available, there are still limitations. It would be easy to get discouraged given the limitations in historical materials available for both the history of women and the history of debating societies. However, I tried to embrace Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan's spirit of curiosity in historical research, seeing the complexity of such research as a source of invention.⁹⁸

The decision to study the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, Marie Hochmuth Nichols, and Barbara Jordan was driven by a number of considerations, both lofty and logistical. After some frustrations and dead ends early on in the research process, I came to terms with the knowledge that I was not going to be able to tell the definitive history of women in debate. I then shifted my focus toward finding those representative cases of phases in debate history where there was a baseline of research material available. David Zarefsky argues for the value of case studies, stating that:

They suggest models, norms, or exemplars; they offer perspective by incongruity on the ordinary cases; they yield insights that may apply by analogy either to ordinary cases or to other extraordinary cases; and they sometimes yield a "theory of the case": a better understanding of an unusual situation important in its own right.⁹⁹

By exploring three different experiences with debating societies, I aim to illuminate previously obscured aspects of social identity construction and inform understanding of how rhetorical education and performance are contingent categories that manifest differently in specific historical settings. Conscious of ongoing debates about whether rhetorical analysis should focus

⁹⁷ Richard Leo Enos, "The Archaeology of Women in Rhetoric: Rhetorical Sequencing as a Research Method for Historical Scholarship," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 65-79.

⁹⁸ Gesa E. Kirsch and Liz Rohan, eds., *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 1-12.

⁹⁹ David Zarefsky, "Four Senses of Rhetorical History," in Turner, *Doing Rhetorical History*, 25.

on the great, well-known orators or the quotidian practices of everyday people,¹⁰⁰ I tried to select cases that would constitute a middle ground between these two poles, focusing on the lesser known rhetorical educations of well-known figures and also on some women debaters who history has largely forgotten, but who argued vigorously about the proper purpose and institutional status of their societies.

Each chapter aims to add to our understanding of a phase in debate history, uncover overlooked elements of women's rhetorical education and performance, and extend a conversation about an additional concept in rhetorical and argumentation scholarship.

Chapter Two, "'Women of Infinite Variety': The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society as an Intergenerational Argument Culture," explores the possibilities of studying a single debating society over time, adding to our understanding of the way that women created and sustained argument cultures. Finding and accessing nineteenth-century archival materials presented its own challenges. However, because the LEDS existed for seventy years, they left a paper trail over a greater span of time. When the Society dissolved in the 1935, the members took it upon themselves to publish a retrospective book and to donate their books of meeting minutes to the National Library of Scotland. A great variety of topics emerged in the debates of the LEDS, and it was possible to focus on a multitude of different themes in its history. Ultimately, though, the availability of such detailed meeting minutes of the club's business and debates and the club's diversity of members as a community-based organization influenced my decision to focus on the Society as an intergenerational argument culture.

Chapter Three, "'Your Gown is Lovely, But...' Marie Hochmuth Nichols and the Search for Excellence" seeks to add to our understanding of a well-known but understudied woman in

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of this question in the context of feminist rhetorical history.

the history of Speech Communication, extending a theory of gendered rhetorical excellence. Like so many other pivotal figures in twentieth-century Speech Communication, Nichols entered the field through participation in debate. However, as a female debater and debate coach she was provided unique experiences that she later funneled into her critical approach to communication scholarship. Materials from the University of Pittsburgh Archives, the William Pitt Debating Union, and Carlow College (formerly Mount Mercy College) allowed me to trace the contours of Nichols's participation in debate as a student and coach. Her personal papers, archived at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, provided access to her personal correspondence, research materials, syllabi, unpublished lectures, pamphlets, and unexpectedly, her poetry. After visiting the University of Illinois, I was able to find some personal connections to Nichols' colleagues and students. I located one of her mentees, Jane Blankenship, and through oral history interviews, was able to find out more about Nichols as a scholar, teacher, and leader in the field. Blankenship is a former debater and retired communication scholar herself, and the opportunity to connect with her was an unforgettable experience. Together, Nichols's published scholarship, archival materials, and oral history interviews provided me with a well-rounded view of her debate experience and later life as a scholar. Chapter Three shares this information, and with knowledge of Nichols's critical sensibilities and dedication to excellence, reconstructs an exchange between her and another former debater, the renowned rhetorical critic Edwin Black.

Chapter Four, "'The First and Only:' Barbara Jordan's Education, Embodiment, and Eloquence," explores the experience of HBCU debating in the 1950's and its connection to Jordan's later rhetorical success. Though much has been written about Jordan as a trailblazing African American lawyer and politician from the South, her rhetorical education in debate remains an untapped resource in gaining fuller understanding of Jordan's lived experience. In

visiting Texas Southern University, I was able to gain access to materials that helped me to tell a fuller story about Barbara Jordan's experience on the debate team there, including her personal papers, speech texts, video footage, and yearbooks. Most critical to my understanding of this period, though, was my oral history interview with Thomas Freeman, Jordan's debate coach. A professor at Texas Southern University for almost the entire time that the school has existed, Freeman provided insight into how debaters were recruited, how they practiced, and the experience of being one of the only HBCUs to travel to intercollegiate debate competitions. I argue that beyond the traditional skill set afforded by the activity, Jordan's challenges in debate and in her later political career are linked by her ability to transform her bodily appearance in the service of her rhetorical goals. This chapter contributes a theory of her embodied invention as she negotiated exclusionary institutions.

Together these chapters show women debating society from inside and outside debating societies—they demonstrate the historical richness of viewing women's debating societies as worthy of scholarly research work to complicate enduring assumptions about gender and argumentation. The conclusion chapter offers a provocation: that debate participation can be seen as a feminist rhetorical choice. I revisit central research questions driving the study, draw together common threads between the case studies, and suggest a path for new research on historical debating societies. I explore how these cases challenge former understandings of debate history, the history of rhetorical performance, and suggest an alternative to the dominant metaphor of argument-as-war.

2.0 “WOMEN OF INFINITE VARIETY:” THE LADIES’ EDINBURGH DEBATING SOCIETY AS AN INTERGENERATIONAL ARGUMENT CULTURE

Sometimes I dream that possibly some steadfast souls will develop and carry on our Society, handing it down to yet another generation busy with the problems of the twentieth century—perhaps even in 1965. If such there be, I would say to them, “Learn the lesson of progression truly, Do not call each glorious change decay.” Growth—development—is the healthy condition of life: stagnation—obstinate resistance to change—is death.

– Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair¹

Squinting into the future from the vantage point of 1935, Sarah Elizabeth Siddons (S.E.S.) Mair was nearly ninety years old when she was asked to reflect on the history of the Ladies’ Edinburgh Debating Society (LEDS). From 1865 to 1935, middle and upper class white women of Edinburgh met monthly in the parlor of Mair’s home to discuss and debate major political, social, and aesthetic topics of the day. While Sarah Mair is the only member who was present for the Society’s entire seventy-year duration, other members often remained active for many years, revisiting previously debated topics and continually refining their arguments.

The Ladies’ Edinburgh Debating Society overlapped geographically and sometimes concurrently with better known rhetorical theorists and practitioners. Prominent eighteenth-century Scots Hugh Blair, George Campbell, and Adam Smith lectured on belletristic rhetoric, which “sought to delineate and clarify aesthetic discursive qualities that affected listeners and readers.”² Such teachings were not only popular in Scotland, but also widely influential in Europe and the United States.³ Nineteenth century theorists were less likely to publish their

¹ Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair, “Foreword” in *Ladies in Debate: Being a History of the Ladies’ Edinburgh Debating Society, 1865-1935*, ed. Lettice Milne Rae (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1936), 7.

² Barbara Warnick, *The Sixth Canon: Belletristic Rhetorical Theory and Its French Antecedents* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 4.

³ Blair, Campbell, and Richard Whately’s writings served as primary textbooks in rhetorical education for early American university students (Nan Johnson, *Nineteenth-Century Rhetorical Education in North America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 19). Cohen suggests that the shift towards Land Grant

lectures than their eighteenth century predecessors, yet archival resources such as student lecture notes have provided contemporary scholars with a better sense of the rhetorical contributions of Scottish professors such as Alexander Bain and David Masson.⁴

This chapter seizes an opportunity to similarly elucidate an understudied aspect of Scottish rhetorical history. At first glance, it is not difficult to realize why contemporary students of rhetoric may have studied Hugh Blair and not Sarah Mair. An educational campaigner and suffragist, Mair fought for the right of women to gain access to formal university education in courses where rhetorical theory was being taught. She did not formally lecture as a professor of Rhetoric or English Literature. Yet Mair and other members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society created an environment for rhetorical education and performance where argumentation was taught, presented, critiqued, and reflected upon. Participants tested ideas and considered their gendered and socioeconomic roles in Scottish society. As the result of ongoing deliberation, the group organically arrived at norms for sustainable argumentative engagement.

Over its seventy-year tenure, the LEDS embraced the attitude towards change that Mair lauds in the chapter's epigraph. Rich archival materials document the group's activities. Early in the Society's existence, the focus was divided between the publication of a literary journal for women and the debates at the meetings. The journal, first known as *The Attempt* and later as the *Ladies' Edinburgh Literary Magazine*, provides insights into the argumentative activities of the LEDS because abstracts of the debates and future debate propositions were published for the

education in the United States called for an alternative to the rhetorical masterworks of theorists like Blair and Whately. He traces the creation of new instructional textbooks, including the English composition text and argumentation and debate handbooks, as attempts by faculty members to better meet the needs of the American student (*The History*, 13-15). For a discussion of the effect of Blair's work in Europe, see Don Abbott, "Blair 'Abroad': The European Reception of the *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*," *Scottish Rhetoric and Its Influences*, ed. Lynne Lewis Gaillet (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1998), 67-78.

⁴ Winifred Bryan Horner identifies this period as "the missing link" in the history of western rhetoric and education. She works to improve the accessibility of Scottish archives in her book, *Nineteenth-Century Scottish Rhetoric: The American Connection* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), 1-15.

benefit of the readership. The minutes at this time were very sparse, recording only the bare bones of the propositions considered and debated, motions passed, and other organizational business. Later, as the person occupying the Secretary position changed, so too did the level of detail included in recording the minutes. In 1880, members voted to abandon work on the journal and focus exclusively on debates. Subsequent meeting minutes then began to include descriptions of arguments made in debates, rebuttals, critiques of the performances, and vote counts declaring a victor.⁵ Whereas self-preserved club minutes serve the pragmatic purpose of documenting gatherings of women, they also, as Anne Ruggles Gere argues, “show clubwomen making their own history and defining their own cultural identity.”⁶ The decision to more thoroughly chart and describe the content of arguments made in debates marks an important shift in the history of the Society. Finally, an invaluable resource for rhetorical history lies in a commemorative volume published one year after the LEDS voted to dissolve. Lettice Milne Rae’s *Ladies in Debate: Being a History of the Ladies’ Edinburgh Debating Society* includes reflections from different generations of LEDS members, a participant list, and a list of every proposition debated.

Together, these archival resources span the years of the debating society’s existence and serve to contextualize these Edinburgh women’s rhetorical practices, including the evolution of arguments and people, within a single organization across time. Studying the LEDS presents opportunities to develop a Scottish rhetorical history that accounts more fully for everyday rhetorical performance in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. Drawing from argumentation scholars David Zarefsky and G. Thomas Goodnight to do so, this chapter

⁵ On December 2, 1882, a motion requesting that “the minutes include a short account of the debate” was formally adopted by the LEDS.

⁶ Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literary and Cultural Work in U.S. Women’s Clubs, 1880-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 2.

theorizes the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society as an "intergenerational argument culture." What rules or norms did the LEDS decide upon over the years to guarantee the sustainability of their argument culture? What is the value of intergenerational interaction in a debating society, and how does it relate to other, cross-cutting intersectional concerns? After placing S.E.S. Mair and the LEDS within the broader context of Scottish associational history, I then look to moments where the Society deliberately hashed out a vision of an ideal argument culture that accommodated all members. Finally, I explore how the LEDS negotiated ideological and identity-based difference in their argument culture. Ultimately, I argue that in crafting its own argument culture, the LEDS demonstrates the potential of cooperative argumentation to sustain debate and dialogue across difference.

2.1 "AN OMEN OF A BETTER AGE:" THE LEDS IN CONTEXT

The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society emerged out of and functioned within an expansive social milieu of voluntary clubs and associations in the United Kingdom. In order to understand the Society's motto, *auspiciu melioris aevi*, or "an omen of a better age,"⁷ it is necessary to first explore the importance of debating societies within English and Scottish history, and then locate Sarah Mair and the LEDS within a broader women's rights movement coalescing during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century.

2.1.1 Gender and Debate in English and Scottish Associational Culture

⁷ Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, "Literary Societies for Women" in *Feminism and the Periodical Press, 1900-1918, Volume 3*, ed. Lucy Delap, Maria DiCenzo, and Leila Ryan (New York: Routledge, 2006), no pagination. The article was originally printed in *The Englishwoman's Review* on July 15, 1902, pgs. 158-165.

In the early to mid-eighteenth-century, associational culture primarily took the form of informal drinking, dining, or hobby clubs, dominated by adult males of the middle classes, although “this adaptable and flexible form of social institution could never and was never limited to this group.”⁸ In London, debating societies became more structured and experienced a boon as a form of “rational entertainment” in the mid-to-late eighteenth-century. Public debates took place up to fourteen times a week, with some events drawing over one thousand audience members.⁹ The shift from an “alehouse culture” full of beer, urination, yelling, fighting, and blasphemy to more formal debates temporarily boded well for women wishing to watch the events.¹⁰ Well-known clubs such as the Robin Hood Society originally allowed women to attend the debates for free (men paid a fee to attend), but soon thereafter mixed sex audiences were seen as an untapped economic opportunity.¹¹ In a short-lived venture in 1752, Robin Hood entrepreneurs attempted to create space appropriate for high class and high paying women audience members, “an attempt towards the Introduction of a new rational Entertainment [consisting of] an occasional Prologue...a Pangyrick...Propositions...to be debated, to conclude with an Occasional epilogue; the whole interspersed with several grand Concertos, Overtures, and Full Pieces of Music.”¹² This attempt to “feminize” an otherwise masculine and gritty debating activity was not met with

⁸ R.J. Morris, “Clubs, Societies, and Associations,” in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950, Volume 3: Social Agencies and Institutions*, ed. F.M.L. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990), 395. Morris notes that prior to 1780, “there was a brief glimpse of collective female action in the public sphere before the flood tide of evangelicalism swept the gender frontier back into the private and the domestic.” For example, The Original Female Society held a festival in 1775 in Litchfield, England (397). See also John Money, “Taverns, Coffeehouses, and Clubs: Local Politics and Popular Articulation in the Birmingham Area, in the Age of the American Revolution,” *Historical Journal* 14, no. 1 (1971): 15-47.

⁹ Mary Thale, “Women in London Debating Societies in 1780,” *Gender & History* 7, no. 1 (April 1995): 5.

¹⁰ Mary Thale, “The Case of the British Inquisition: Money and Women in Mid-Eighteenth Century London Debating Societies,” *Albion: a Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 32.

¹¹ Trevor Fawcett, “Eighteenth-Century Debating Societies,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 3, no. 3 (September 1980): 216-229. For an additional account of the Robin Hood Society, see Mary Thale, “The Robin Hood Society: Debating in Eighteenth-Century London,” *London Journal* 22 (1997): 33-50.

¹² Advertisement for an event held on February 20, 1752, in the *General Advertiser*, quoted by Thale, “The Case,” 34-5.

much success, likely due to the high price tag of admission. By 1780, women's participation in debate found new venues in four all-female debating societies in London: La Belle Assemblée, the Female Parliament, the Female Congress, and the Carlisle House Debates for Women.¹³

The development of club culture in Scotland roughly maps onto German critical theorist Jürgen Habermas' broad sketch of the political functions of the public sphere in Great Britain.¹⁴ Philosophical, literary, and debating societies became mainstays of university and community life in Scotland's "Age of Improvement." As R.J. Morris explains, Scots, and particularly citizens of Edinburgh, were forced to adapt to a number of changes in the eighteenth century including the spread of capitalism and the loss of an Edinburgh-based governing body. The mushrooming of associational culture at the time can be traced to the ability of voluntary societies to create a space of experimentation and adaptation, a "means of asserting status for those outwith the established institutions and networks of state power."¹⁵ It is difficult to fully chart their participation in such societies, but archival material and press reports suggest that at least some of the groups, such as the Speculative Society of Dundee and the Pantheon Society, admitted women as audience members as early as the 1770's.¹⁶

While previous historical studies of speech education tend to distinguish between rhetorical theory and rhetorical practice,¹⁷ debating societies were so prominent in eighteenth and

¹³ Historians Donna T. Andrew and Mary Thale have been at the forefront of recovering this aspect of gender history in England. See Andrew's, "'The Passion for Public Speaking': Women's Debating Societies," in *Women & History: Voices of Early Modern England*, ed. Valerie Frith (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1995), 165-88 and Thale's "Women in London," 5-24.

¹⁴ See Habermas' "The Model Case of British Development," in *Structural Transformation*, 57-66.

¹⁵ Morris, "Clubs, Societies, and Associations," 400.

¹⁶ For more on these societies, and a discussion of the reaction to women's attendance at debates, see Davis J. McElroy's still enduring study, *Scotland's Age of Improvement: A Survey of Eighteenth-Century Literary Clubs and Societies* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1969), 91-2.

¹⁷ Here, I am thinking of Wallace's *History of Speech Education in America*, which includes separate chapters on "English Sources of Rhetorical Theory" and "English Sources of Rhetorical Practice." Given the overlapping and permeable boundaries between theory and practice—debating societies generated theory, and theoretical teaching referenced debating societies—I prefer the term "rhetorical performance."

nineteenth-century Scotland that they received treatment in formal lectures and literary works. In his famous *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, Scotland's preeminent rhetorical theorist, Hugh Blair, discusses the merits of debating organizations that allowed young male students to continue their studies by privately training for later public life. He claims that these societies facilitated better command of speaking, facility with expression, and a "copia verborum which could be acquired by no other means..."¹⁸

However, for Blair, the utility of debate only extends to elite, university-educated men. He shows little restraint in expressing his distaste for the more democratic organizations that functioned outside academia:

As for those public and promiscuous societies, in which the multitudes are brought together, who are often of low stations and occupations, who are joined by no common bond of union, except a rage for public speaking, and have no object in view, but to make a show of their supposed talents, they are institutions of not merely a useless, but of a hurtful nature. They are in great hazard of proving seminaries of licentiousness, petulance, faction, and folly. They mislead those who, in their own callings, might be useful members of society, into phantastic plans of making a figure on subjects, which divert their attention from their proper business, and are widely remote from their sphere in life.¹⁹

Blair's use of the phrase "promiscuous societies" exhibits his classist assumptions about proper spheres of work, creating a clear division between those elite and educated men who could benefit from training in argumentation and the uneducated masses who were incapable of self improvement and would only treat such associations as entertainment. Though commonly taken to refer to mixed sex gatherings in the nineteenth-century, the word "promiscuous" referred to a group "of mixed background, wealth, and education but had nothing to do with the presence—or

¹⁸ Hugh Blair, "Means of Improving Eloquence," *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (New York: James and John Harper, 1826), 344.

¹⁹ Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, 344.

absence—of women auditors” in Blair’s time.²⁰ The idea that women would take part in debates was not a subject that needed to be explicitly discussed, given that he supported only those “academical associations” that would allow students to further explore university course material with the end goal of being “manly, correct, and persuasive.”²¹

By the late nineteenth-century, as women enrolled at universities in greater numbers, the idea that only men could speak in debating societies began to erode. In many cases, this was a matter of semantics as academic institutions adapted to the presence of women. In November 1878, for example, the president of the Men’s Debating Society at the University College London wrote to the president of the university to inquire if women could be admitted to the organization. The Society’s rules stipulated that members must be “current or former students.” The matter in question was whether women fell under the university’s definition of “students.” The issue was circumvented when the women students founded their own society in December 1878.²² University women’s debating societies flourished at a number of elite universities in Great Britain, including the women’s colleges at Oxford and Cambridge.²³ As Carol Dyhouse notes, the formation of these societies was significant because it was a strident step away from the “feminine modesty and propriety” taught at Victorian girl’s schools.²⁴

²⁰ Susan Zaeske, “The ‘Promiscuous Audience’ Controversy and the Emergence of the Early Women’s Rights Movement,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995): 192-3.

²¹ Blair, 344.

²² J.W. Thompson to Lord Belper, November 25, 1878, University College London: Debating Society Minute Books, MS ADD 78, A.1, Special Collections, University College London. Carol Dyhouse reviews other developments in the Women’s Debating Society at University College London in *No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities, 1870-1939* (London: UCL Press Limited, 1995), 206-8.

²³ For more on these societies, see Sarah Wiggins, “Gendered Spaces and Political Identity: Debating Societies in English Women’s Societies, 1890-1914,” *Women’s History Review* 18.5 (November 2009): 737-52; L. Jill Lamberton, “Claiming an Education: The Transatlantic Performance and Circulation of Individual Identities in College Women’s Writing” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2007), chapter four.

²⁴ Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex?*, 206.

This was a time of shifting views about education for girls in Scotland, too, as schools began to include Latin and mathematics in addition to foreign languages, literature, classics, and subjects designed to enable a girl to run her own home as a married woman, such as cookery and sewing. Many girls enrolled in parish schools (which physically separated boys and girls on playgrounds and entrances).²⁵ In the 1870's, two institutes for girls were founded in Edinburgh: George Watson's Ladies' College and the Edinburgh Institute for Young Ladies.²⁶ Although women were not yet allowed to attain university degrees, news of women's colleges in London, Oxford, and Cambridge had traveled to Edinburgh, and the seed of possibility was planted by the time LEDS was founded in 1865.²⁷

2.1.2 Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair and the LEDS, 1865-1935

The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society was founded as the Edinburgh Essay Society in 1865. Sarah Mair had completed her schooling, and sought to create a "small literary circle" with her former classmates, all eighteen- or nineteen- year old Edinburgh women. On an afternoon stroll in Portobello with her father, Major Arthur Mair, she asked his permission to hold meetings of the Society in the family's parlor.²⁸ While this request might have been met with caution or suspicion by other patriarchs of the time, Arthur Mair had a history of supporting women's access to wider forums for public speaking. One of Mair's earliest memories was of "seeing [her] father handing a lady on the platform to make a speech at a meeting" which was an anomaly at the time: "those were dear, old-fashioned days, and though we have passed on to a freer and

²⁵ Rosalind K. Marshall, *Virgins and Viragos: A History of Women in Scotland from 1080 to 1980* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1983), 254.

²⁶ Marshall, *Virgins and Viragos*, 258.

²⁷ Beatrice W. Welsh, *After the Dawn: A Record of the Pioneer Work in Edinburgh for the Higher Education of Women* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1939), 1.

²⁸ Lettice Milne Rae, *Ladies in Debate: Being a History of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, 1865-1935* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1936), 16.

more independent life and step on and off platforms as naturally as we enter a drawing-room, still we may indulge a light sigh and loving thought of ‘the tender grace of a day that is dead.’”²⁹

In fact, Sarah Mair came from a long lineage of people who challenged norms about the role of women in public life. She was said to physically resemble her great-grandmother and namesake, Sarah Kemble Siddons, an illustrious stage actor of incomparable fame and talent in late eighteenth century England. Not only did Siddons cross gender barriers in her public theatre performances (sometimes while visibly pregnant), but she also appeared as a model in Gilbert Austin’s *Chironomia* and Henry Siddons’s *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action* demonstrating the ideal form of bodily comportment and gesture promoted by the British elocutionary movement.³⁰ Sarah’s mother, Elizabeth Mair, was also theatrically gifted, though she was not in the habit of performing publicly until it became a necessity. When the family lost their fortune in railway shares, Elizabeth held dramatic readings of Shakespeare in her drawing-room to make extra money.³¹ Sarah was the youngest of five children; she had three sisters, Frances, Harriot, and Elizabeth, and one brother, Colonel William Crosby Mair. Her sister-in-law was Mary Louise Wordsworth, granddaughter to William Wordsworth. Though her mother, sisters, and nieces sometimes participated in the LEDS, Mair was the founder, clear leader, and sole unwavering member.

As a member from age nineteen to age eighty-nine, Mair’s life was inextricably entwined with the history of the LEDS. Yet it is necessary to stress that she is an important figure in Scottish women’s history in her own right, and that she was active in many organizations that were outgrowths of LEDS debates and discussions. Mair’s activism extended to a number of

²⁹ Mair, “Foreword,” 9.

³⁰ Lindal Buchanan, “Sarah Siddons and her Place in Rhetorical History,” *Rhetorica* 25.4 (Autumn 2007): 413-34.

³¹ Rae, *Ladies in Debate*, 15.

causes including the Edinburgh Ladies' Educational Association, St. George's School for Girls, the Hospital for Women and Children at Bruntsfield, and the Society for Equal Citizenship.³² She was forever a champion for women's right to vote, right to education, and right to medical accreditation. For these combined efforts, and especially her work as an education campaigner, Mair was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws (LL.D.) degree from the University of Edinburgh in 1920, and was named a Dame of the British Empire (D.B.E.) in 1931. Upon receiving the LL.D., Mair joked that though she had not earned the degree through formal scholarship, she had certainly "Lived Laborious Days" in the pursuit of women's rights.³³

Edinburgh women's access to and attitudes toward education and forums of public address changed dramatically between 1865 and 1935. In *Ladies in Debate*, Mair reflects on the scope of these changes:

Starting in early Victorian days and travelling on into this Neo-Georgian age, I have watched and, to a small extent shared in, what may almost be called the Awakening of Woman. Not for a moment would I suggest that women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were inferior intellectually to those of the present day. Indeed, the quiet sheltered homes of those earlier days produced many well-read women, whose minds were enriched by their love of literature and art. But their type was rather the exception than the rule, and the rank-and-file girl's life was apt to be somewhat pointless, even a 'blind alley.' But about the middle of last century, a spirit breathed on the quiet waters and roused certain women to realise that their brains were not given them merely to pilot them through a narrow round of more or less graceful trivialities.³⁴

Mair's recollection charts the "Awakening of Woman" and eventual embrace of the "New Woman" at the end of the nineteenth-century. For most of the middle and upper class Edinburgh women that populated the LEDS, life was characterized by home-oriented leisure instead of domestic labor. It was common for households in Victorian Scotland to employ "a fleet of

³² Mrs. Arnott, "Memories of the Crowded Years," in *Ladies in Debate*, 62.

³³ Rae, *Ladies in Debate*, 15.

³⁴ Mair, "Foreword," 7-8.

female servants” coordinated by the women of the house, who traded cooking and cleaning for more pleasurable tasks such as reading, sewing, and charitable organizing.³⁵ Reading in literature and arts was encouraged for women, but was couched as a means of personal improvement rather than scholarly achievement.³⁶

During this period, Edinburgh women experienced relative freedom compared to their continental counterparts. They could walk around the city on their own without fear of molestation (except, perhaps, for the odd Scotsman who had had too many pints to drink).³⁷ Nearly every step in the transition to “New Woman”-hood—from the merits of women riding bicycles to smoking—was considered and debated by the LEDS. Certain members were known for bewailing the new attire and behaviors that came along with this shift in women’s roles, while others firmly embraced the change. During a general discussion in 1899, for example, each LEDS member was asked to name their favorite heroine from history, romance, or real life. Sarah Mair declared the New Woman to be her favorite—“whose delightful combination of masculine sense, vigour, and public spirit...entitle her to that place.”³⁸ By 1935, opinion had shifted so dramatically in favor of the “cigarette-smoking, bare-legged girl that tramps the Scottish country in shorts and sweater” that Mair suggested that members even be allowed to smoke during debating society meetings.³⁹

The Ladies’ Edinburgh Debating Society is sometimes mentioned, but rarely explored, in histories of Scottish women’s participation in movements for suffrage, education, and

³⁵ Marshall, *Virgins and Viragos*, 247.

³⁶ Kate Kelman, “‘Self-Culture’: The Educative Reading Pursuits of the Ladies of Edinburgh, 1865-1885,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 36.1 (Spring 2003): 59-75.

³⁷ Siân Reynolds, *Paris-Edinburgh: Cultural Connections in the Belle Époque* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 167.

³⁸ Minutes of the Ladies’ Edinburgh Debating Society, June 3, 1899, MS 1727, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland (hereafter cited as Minutes of the LEDS).

³⁹ Rae, *Ladies in Debate*, 13.

healthcare.⁴⁰ Beyond its function as a site for rhetorical education and performance, the group also inspired Edinburgh women to create spin-off groups dedicated to activism. For example, the Edinburgh Ladies' Educational Association (ELEA) developed out of Mary Crudelius's appeal for assistance at a LEDS meeting. The ELEA went on to create separate women's courses at St. George's Hall—university-level courses for women taught by male professors sympathetic to the cause, such as David Masson, rhetoric professor at the University of Edinburgh—a training college for women teachers, and St. George's High School for Girls.⁴¹ An entire study could be dedicated to tracing the various activist efforts and achievements of the LEDS membership; there is much more to say about Sarah Mair and the LEDS's rightful place in Scottish history. The next section explores what actually happened inside of women's debating society meetings by examining deliberations on club business and its debates. Leaving the members' community activism for another project, this angle of analysis lends insight into the internal norms and practices of the Society.

2.2 THE LEDS AS AN INTERGENERATIONAL ARGUMENT CULTURE

Beyond Sarah Mair, the membership roll for the LEDS was comprised of a number of well-known women who went on to pursue a variety of positions in public life, including education campaigner Mary Crudelius; Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, Shakespearean scholar and mother to Marie Stopes, promoter of birth control in the UK; the poets Jeanie Miller Morison, Maria Bell

⁴⁰ See, for example, Elizabeth Crawford, "Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair," in *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, 1866-1928* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 365-6, and Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex?*, 209.

⁴¹ See Welsh's *After the Dawn* and Nigel Shepley's *Women of Independent Mind: St. George's School, Edinburgh, and the Campaign for Women's Education, 1888-1988* (Edinburgh: St. George's School for Girls, 1988) for more detailed histories of the educational campaign.

and Margaret Houldsworth; and Dame Louisa Lumsden, LL.D., headmistress, pioneer in the women's movement, and the first person to introduce lacrosse to Scotland. There were also members whose worldviews were inextricably connected to their family backgrounds. Flora Masson, for example, was the daughter of rhetorician David Masson, an editor of his works and an author in her own right. Grace Wood was the granddaughter of Thomas Chalmers, the preacher, mathematician, and Scottish Malthusian. At one LEDS discussion about favorite hobbies, Wood "pleaded guilty to having a hobby for *Infanticide*, on the grounds that man was not a desirable product and that his existence on earth should, if possible, be put to an end!"⁴²

While it certainly included people who would go on to be influential figures in women's rights, education, and literature, and members of prominent Edinburgh families, the Society also hosted many members who were not renowned in public life. The club's member roll was filled with the names of women whose influence was focused on their immediate families and communities. These women may not have been well-known during their lifetimes, and certainly have been forgotten in the vast history of Scottish associational culture. Membership in the LEDS was, in itself, a way to gain more widespread recognition and cultivate a network of homosocial bonding on personal issues. The club's minutes noted when a member was sick or had a loss in the family. Many members remained active in debates until they died, and the club's minutes marked their passing. Typical of this kind of acknowledgement are these words about Adela Dundas, entered into the minutes on May 7, 1887: "Miss Dundas has been a member of the society for many years and one of its most efficient and interested supporters. Her charming papers were among the very best read at its debates, and her personal gentleness, courtesy and kindness endeared her to all its members. Her memory will ever linger among us

⁴² Rae, *Ladies in Debate*, 32

like the remembered sweetness of a woodland flower.”⁴³ Even if their social interactions were limited in other spheres of activity, the debating society documented and valorized the contributions of its members.

My contention is that the secret to the success and longevity of the LEDS was its ability to balance the needs and perspectives of “women of infinite variety.”⁴⁴ As a community-based group, the LEDS avoided a problem identified in B. Evelyn Westbrook’s study of the antebellum Clariosophic Society of South Carolina College: attitudinal and aspirational homogeneity. Because members of the Clariosophic Society were all “privileged white males who expected to become lawyers, ministers, or politicians,” efforts toward “imagining and representing minority perspectives” fell short.⁴⁵ Westbrook concludes that the club was limited in its ability to test members’ ideas, challenge previously held beliefs, or engage in meaningful social critique. This very issue is explained by long-time LEDS member Helen Neaves as she compares college and community-based debating societies:

I have had a slight experience of college debating societies, and without detracting from their merits and usefulness, I think the fact that the members live under the same roof and have the same ends in view, limits their sphere of action. In our Edinburgh Society the members represented widely different interests. We had among us women who had travelled far afield, women who had devoted themselves to education; others had taken up social work among the poor. There were also, amongst us, married women, the wives of professional men who could speak from experience on the upbringing of children; there was also a sprinkling of sports-loving young women who could put in a word for physical fitness.⁴⁶

To Neaves, this mix of perspectives was unprecedented. Having members with a wide variety of experiences and perspectives better facilitated the ability to imagine and represent the multiple

⁴³ Minutes of the LEDS, May 7, 1887, MS 1726. Adela Dundas came from a prominent Edinburgh family, and was a talented artist in her own right.

⁴⁴ Rae, *Ladies in Debate*, 42.

⁴⁵ B. Evelyn Westbrook, “Debating Both Sides What Nineteenth-Century College Literary Societies Can Teach Us about Critical Pedagogies,” *Rhetoric Review* 21.4 (2002): 353.

⁴⁶ Helen Neaves, “Down the Vista of Years,” in *Ladies in Debate*, 51.

sides of a debate proposition. In a historical period where the question of whether women should be able to engage in public speaking activities was met with considerable suspicion, this range of perspectives made for significant moments of self-reflection. There were members willing to defend both sides of questions about women's right to education, the franchise, and role in parenting. A debate about whether women should play field sports in 1877, for example, made for a "lively" post-debate discussion amongst members. A vote at the end of the discussion revealed that a strong majority (19 to 6) were against the idea.⁴⁷

It is precarious to claim that the LEDS was a bastion of group-based diversity by contemporary standards. By all accounts, members were "well-bred" white women of Edinburgh, and new members had to be sponsored and invited into the Society. Yet because women were prevented from taking part in many forums for public speaking and debate, the Society's monthly meetings brought together "...a never-failing band of women—young, old, middle-aged, of many varied types and dispositions, of all shades of views (political, philosophical, social, theological)—of literary, scientific and artistic tastes, but all united by a love more or less developed of the True, the Good, the Beautiful."⁴⁸

The very founding of the LEDS was rooted in the idea of creating a community-based space for gendered rhetorical difference. G. Thomas Goodnight suggests that when different generations unite in shared activity, there is a potential for "productive counterpoise" in which each generation "may inform the other, abstracting from history principles of prudent conduct even while adding to history the fresh vigor of optimism and progress."⁴⁹ "Generation" refers not

⁴⁷ Minutes of the LEDS, October 19, 1877. MS 1725.

⁴⁸ Rae, *Ladies in Debate*, 19.

⁴⁹ G. Thomas Goodnight, "Generational Argument," in *Argumentation: Across the Lines of Discipline, Proceedings of the Conference on Argumentation 1986*, ed. Frans H. van Eemeren, Rob Grootendorst, J. Anthony Blair, and Charles A. Willard (Dordrecht-Holland: Foris Publications, 1987), 140.

only to difference in age but also groups sharing temporal space with other groups.⁵⁰ In this section, I study how the LEDS incubated intergenerational interaction and negotiated difference on two levels.⁵¹ First, there were different generations of debaters in the LEDS, based not on age, but on their past experiences with public speaking and debate. I explore how the Society, through acts of deliberation and regulation, created an argument culture that catered to both experienced and novice debaters. Second, generational perspectives coalesced for LEDS members around life experiences (at times linked to identity-based affiliations such as gender and age), which affected their ability to draw on personal experience as evidence in debate. I chart how the debaters responded to topics about difference—age, race, class, and gender—by invoking their own experiences and group-based commitments.

2.2.1 Crafting an Argument Culture: The LEDS and Debates about Debate

As noted in Chapter One, the term “argument culture” is most closely associated with a book by Deborah Tannen carrying the same name. The argument culture, according to Tannen, is a monolithic American tendency toward adversarial argument for argument’s sake, which manifests in reporting, legal discourse, politics, and education. Under such conditions, public discourse tends to become polarized, exclusionary, and sexist. A number of scholars have added texture to Tannen’s diagnosis by demonstrating alternative possibilities within a culture that

⁵⁰ Here, Goodnight draws from Mannheim’s notion of “generational units” where people occupying the same spatiotemporal location are marked by opposition. Goodnight says such arguments “define the domain of disagreement to be taken seriously” (138).

⁵¹ These axes of generational thinking (life experience, and argument experience) emerged as a theme in the LEDS minutes. The term *generational* usually connotes age-based attitudes, and this can be problematic. Lisa Marie Hogeland points out this problem in the context of feminist waves—attitudes toward feminism are often cross-cutting across age groups, and it is frustrating to be grouped into second or third wave feminism based solely on when a person was born (“Against Generational Thinking, or, Some Things Third Wave Feminism Isn’t,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 24.1 [Spring 2001]: 107-21). Goodnight’s approach also works against an overly simplistic grouping of people by age.

continues to use argument as an important means for fleshing out public issues.⁵² The ensuing conversations about the role of argument in society have attempted to address Tannen's concerns while simultaneously affirming cooperative or constructive argumentation as a pragmatic tool of personal empowerment.⁵³ How might we move from societal declarations about *the* argument culture to those actual moments when *an* argument culture articulated and negotiated communicative norms? The best way to balance these competing concerns is to study those models of successful argument cultures to identify the distinguishing characteristics of forums that achieved sustainable debate and discussion.

What does an argument culture look like? David Zarefsky has addressed this question by identifying a rough taxonomy of the features of an argument culture: they recognize the importance of audience, acknowledge and embrace uncertainty, value conviction, focus on justifying one's claims, are fundamentally cooperative enterprises, and involve self-risk on the part of the participants.⁵⁴ He stresses that these features are meant to be descriptive rather than prescriptive or necessary conditions, leaving it to other scholars to identify moments where actual argument cultures coalesce. Here I take up that call by examining the Ladies' Edinburgh

⁵² Gordon R. Mitchell takes Tannen's critique as a starting point to explore role-play simulation as an alternative approach to modeling public argument in the classroom in his "Simulated Public Argument as Pedagogical Play on Worlds," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 36, no. 3 (Winter 2000): 134-51. Gerald Graff takes exception to Tannen's sense of academic as ritualized combat in "Two Cheers for the Argument Culture," in *Clueless in Academe: How School Obscures the Life of the Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 83-95. Takuzo Konishi and I develop the idea of "international argument cultures" to better understand intercultural argumentation between debate communities during international debate tours in "What Has Been Exchanged?: Towards a History of Japan-US Debate Exchange," *Proceedings of the 3rd Tokyo Conference on Argumentation*, ed. Takeshi Suzuki and Aya Kubota (Tokyo: Japan Debate Association, 2008), 271-9.

⁵³ The need for a more constructive approach to argumentation is particularly apparent in pedagogical settings. B. Evelyn Westbrook reviews various critiques of using debate as a pedagogical tool in the writing classroom in her "Debating Both Sides," 340-1. The idea of cooperative argumentation in the classroom has gained salience through works such as Josina Makau and Debian Marty's textbook, *Cooperative Argumentation: A Model for Deliberative Community* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2001) and Irwin Mallin and Karrin Vasby Anderson's "Inviting Constructive Argument," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 36, no. 3 (Winter 2000): 120-34.

⁵⁴ Zarefsky, "What Does an Argument Culture Look Like?," 298-303.

Debating Society's deliberations about and performances of the best conditions for women's debate.

As it worked to sustain itself as an argument culture, the LEDS constantly engaged in 'debates about debates.' Most often these fell into the category of club business, where a member would propose a change in the Society's operating procedure or comment on their vision of improving the quality of the debates and then propose a motion for consideration by other members. Occasionally, there were formal debates, where members actually defended sides of a proposition about communicative norms and the value of the very activity they were engaging in. Debates about debate, whether in the former or the latter form, took place regularly over the LEDS's seventy-year existence. Despite these ongoing changes, a deep sense of tradition and unwavering dedication to what they theorized as good deliberative practices was pervasive in the recollections of the members. They felt that the Society was "the home of Tradition, for the rules laid down in the infancy of the Society were strictly adhered to through its prime and the 'rigour of the game' was never relaxed."⁵⁵ In other words, though there were motions to adjust debate practice as the Society worked to accommodate a variety of different backgrounds, the basic dedication to debate excellence remained over the years.

An argument can be made that the LEDS met each of the features of an argument culture laid out by Zarefsky. Yet, I consider the more intriguing point of exploration to be the concerted efforts made to encourage participation within a historical organization dedicated to providing marginalized speakers with a site of rhetorical education and performance. These moments of reflection were aimed at creating an environment that balanced an ideal (traditionally masculine) vision of rational-critical debate where arguments could be tested with a supportive

⁵⁵ Mary Paterson, "Impressions of Two Late-Comers," in *Ladies in Debate*, 66-67.

organizational ethos that mentored women with little past experience in debate. Accordingly, the best way to extend and develop Zarefsky's notion of an argument culture is to demonstrate how this argument culture adapted to the unique demands and constraints of bringing together women and debate in its time. Most important from this perspective is the way that the LEDS was fundamentally a cooperative enterprise. How did the LEDS refine and adapt the rules and norms of debate in order to accommodate members with little debate experience? Are these moments of reflection examples of what we might term a cooperative argument culture? I address these questions by first describing the basic rules and procedures laid out by the Society, which were established when they made the decision to focus on debates rather than essay writing. I then detail the logistical and substantive club deliberations aimed at improving the quality of the debates. Finally, I discuss efforts to mentor novice debaters and encourage more widespread participation by all members of the Society.

The basic rules and procedures of the Society remained relatively steady over the years. From its inception, the LEDS met in the Mair family drawing room at eleven o'clock in the morning on the first Saturday of every month.⁵⁶ During each gathering, they would discuss club business, chose a proposition to debate for the next meeting, listen to the debate of the day, and then take a vote to chart which side of the proposition had garnered the most support. Each month, the Society would generate three possible propositions for each subsequent meeting, and would decide on a suitable choice based on their interest in the topics and ability to get members to agree to support either side of the question. The process of choosing propositions and debaters "were as little to be missed as the debates themselves" because "views and preferences were

⁵⁶ Excepting the summer months, when the Mair family summered abroad. Over the years, the Mair family lived at 29 Abercromby Street, 25 Heriot Row, and finally at 5 Chester Street in Edinburgh.

frankly and controversially expressed.”⁵⁷ The range of topics debated by the LEDS was vast. During any given year in the Society’s history, one might equally expect to hear a debate on a proposition like “should art represent only the beautiful?” or “should our government send out another Arctic expedition?”⁵⁸ Like many public speaking classes taught today, the only propositions explicitly forbidden by the Society were those of a religious nature or those dealing overtly with party politics. Even so, this regulation was adhered to only in the proposition wording—it was quite impossible to outlaw reference to religion and party politics invoked as argumentative analogy during the course of a debate.

One logistical shift that was significant in charting the Society’s self-image and focus was the Society’s name changes. Mair remarks that the group’s early name, the Edinburgh Essay Society, was a touch hubristic. She admits that “it was perhaps characteristic of this group of feminine literary aspirants to ignore the fact that men had already established literary societies in Edinburgh.”⁵⁹ Despite Mair’s opposition, the Society voted to change the name to the Ladies’ Edinburgh Essay Society in 1867.⁶⁰ These early names reveal the Society’s primary focus on writing for, editing, and publishing their journal, *The Attempt*. In 1872, the group’s name changed to the Ladies’ Edinburgh Literary Society, and in 1874, *The Attempt* became *The Ladies’ Edinburgh Magazine* as they attempted to increase circulation under a new, more

⁵⁷ Mary Paterson, “Impressions of Two Late-Comers,” 66-7.

⁵⁸ Minutes of the LEDS, March 1, 1879, April 6, 1879, and May 5, 1877, MS 1725.

⁵⁹ Mair quoted in Rae, *Ladies in Debate*. 19.

⁶⁰ Minutes of the LEDS, December 7, 1867, MS 1723. Lettice Milne Rae gets quite creative in her rationalization of this name change decision, suggesting that it was “surely singularly appropriate for the Society—not so much on account of their sex, but rather because of the origin of the word—Lord is a contraction of the Saxon *hlaford*—the loaf author or bread-earner, Lady is the Saxon *hlaf-dig*—the bread-dispenser. In the Society, did she not dispense to her sisters ethical bread, food for the mind, first earned for her by the Lords of Creation, otherwise Man, in the form of ideas and government, public opinion and knowledge of all kinds?” (19). Anne Ruggles Gere notes that clubwomen in the United States from a variety of different social backgrounds tended to use “women” instead of “ladies” in their club titles. She surmises that this is “because *lady* had long indicated higher class position, and *women* echoed the term *new woman*, which connoted social change,” *Intimate Practices*, 7.

commercial publisher.⁶¹ Debate was always a fixture of the group's meetings, and members had the opportunity to submit "really able thoughtful papers on the topics of debate" to be published in *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*.⁶² Yearly summaries of the topics debated were published in the magazine alongside reports of the major trends or policies regarding debate performance and etiquette. However, as time went on, the success of the magazine continued to decline and so debating gradually became a more important focus of the Society. During the final meeting of 1880, Mair proposed a motion that the Society "devote its energies to the debates, and that efforts be made to enlarge the society—that several presidents be elected to manage the debates and that the rules regarding them be revised."⁶³ In 1881, the group marked this shift by changing their name to the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society and adopting a new set of rules.⁶⁴

The rules adopted on February 5, 1881 marked this final name change and laid out the expectations for club membership, participation, and leadership roles. At this time, the LEDS generated a document detailing the newly adopted regulations:

- I. The Society shall be called 'The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society'.
- II. The Society shall meet on the first Saturday of each month (August, September, and October excepted) at 11 o'clock am for the conduct of debates.
- III. The members shall pay an annual subscription of half a crown.
- IV. Nine members shall constitute a quorum.
- V. Ladies wishing to be members of this Society shall be admitted on being proposed by one member and seconded by another, and on subscribing the laws.
- VI. Members, on withdrawal, shall send notice, in writing, to the Secretary.

⁶¹ Minutes of the LEDS, March 2, 1872, MS 1723. Kelman explores the group's venture into print culture in more detail. The Society discussed several options for their decision to change the name of the journal, and even considered calling it *Margaret's Magazine* before settling on *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* (Minutes of the LEDS, November 7, 1874, MS 1724).

⁶² Minutes of the LEDS, January 3, 1880, MS 1726.

⁶³ Minutes of the LEDS, December 4, 1880. MS 1726.

⁶⁴ Minutes of the LEDS, February 5, 1881, MS 1726.

- VII. Three presidents, a secretary, and a treasurer shall be elected annually in December. Three only of these office bearers shall be eligible [sic] for immediate re-election.
- VIII. The Presidents shall take it in turn to preside at the monthly debates of the society.
- IX. The Secretary shall read the minutes of the Society, call the roll, send any necessary notices to the members, and take the vote on the debate.
- X. The Treasurer shall receive the annual subscriptions of the Members, and read the accounts to the Society.
- XI. The Presidents, with the help of the Secretary and Treasurer, shall submit, for the consideration of members, in January, a list of subjects proposed for debates during the ensuing year, which list shall be printed and circulated among the members.
- XII. All debates shall be opened in the affirmative, and replied to in the negative, by two members previously appointed. Their speeches may be written or spoken; and each shall, when it is possible, be provided with a seconder.
- XIII. After the debate has been opened by the proposers and seconders, all members shall be invited to take part in the discussion, at the close of which, the first speakers shall have the right of reply.
- XIV. All members may vote who are present at the division. Should any member be obliged to withdraw before the division, she may leave her vote in writing with the Secretary, provided she has heard the entire opening speech or paper on each side.
- XV. Members having undertaken to open a debate, and failed to do so, either in person, or by sending a written paper to the President, shall (unless they provide a substitute) be fined in a sum of five shillings.
- XVI. Members shall be allowed to introduce lady visitors at the debates, but such visitors shall not be allowed to address the meeting or give a vote.⁶⁵

These stipulations served as an articulation of the norms envisioned by the Society as it shifted its focus from literary publishing and toward its own ideal of rational-critical debate. There is evidence that these rules were taken quite seriously: the LEDS minutes document that they were unable to hold a debate in November 1889 because “a very distinguished and valued member having failed to prepare a paper on the subject of women’s political associations paid the fine (five shillings)” according to the laws of the Society. The Secretary then added that it was an “incident on which comment is superfluous.”⁶⁶ A bit of archival sleuthing reveals that the

⁶⁵ Minutes of the LEDS, February 5, 1881, MS 1726.

⁶⁶ Minutes of the LEDS, January 4, 1889, MS 1726.

distinguished member was the much-revered Sarah Mair, who despite being the founder and president, paid the fine, emphasizing that no one was exempt from the regulations of the LEDS.

The 1881 document served as a backdrop for subsequent proposals to change Society procedures. Over the years, various members sought to improve the quality of the debates by regulating particular logistical or stylistic preferences. The first genre of proposed changes sought to legislate how speakers performed. Motions determined speaking times for speakers (twenty minutes for first speakers and ten minutes for second speakers), post-debate discussion, and the ideal style of delivery in debates.⁶⁷ During the April 1886 meeting, Mair proposed a measure that would require speakers to stand rather than sit during the post-debate discussions. Adela Dundas moved the motion, and then added an amendment that required debaters to speak rather than read their papers. The motion and amendment passed with eighteen votes of support and three votes against.⁶⁸ Although this was the first time that the Society voted on whether members should read their speeches or not, it was not the first time that it arose as an issue. In an 1878 edition of *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*, the summary of debates for the year noted that while some members were skilled at speaking without notes, their experience had shown that writing out debate speeches in advance was still advised, at least for the first two speakers because it allows “closer reasoning and more orderly information than even very good extemporaneous speaking, unless where it rises into oratory.”⁶⁹ What precipitated the change in perspective about reading speeches almost ten years later? It is difficult to pinpoint the exact motivation for this change, but a likely explanation is that as the Society placed a more exclusive focus on debate, they became more skilled at and interested in the premium that unscripted

⁶⁷ Speech times were decided at the November 2, 1895 meeting.

⁶⁸ Minutes of the LEDS, April 3, 1886, MS 1726.

⁶⁹ Ex Cathedra (pen name), “Debates of the Ladies' Edinburgh Literary Society,” *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* IV (1878): 45.

speeches placed on extemporaneous delivery tactics. Two years after Adela Dundas's amendment to require speakers to speak rather than read their speeches, her sister Louisa clarified with another motion in which rebuttalists (known as "seconders") also must strive for extemporaneous delivery.⁷⁰ She argued that this approach would save time, because papers from second speakers were often redundant, repeating points made by the first speeches. If seconders were tasked with listening to the first speeches and then thinking on their feet to further the development of the debates, the overall quality would improve. Although Louisa Dundas's motion was seconded, an amendment that augmented the motion so that seconders could still have the choice of whether to speak or read was ultimately adopted.⁷¹ The issue seemed relatively settled until much later, when almost all of the previous members who had weighed in on the topic had cycled through the Society. In 1934, one year before the LEDS dissolved, momentum for the debates was beginning to subside. Members requested to return to reading papers, but Mair once again affirmed the power of the collaboratively created regulations, expressing her opinion "that the Society should keep to its constitutions and continue to be a debating society."⁷²

Another issue of interest for club deliberations was whether or not to keep the LEDS as a women-only group. Perhaps because the members had themselves been excluded from so many forums for public speaking, the Society never seriously considered the idea of welcoming men as permanent members in the group. Instead, the controversy was about whether the Society should host mixed sex audiences—should men be allowed to come to the meetings as visitors or audience members observing the debates? In 1877, *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* included a

⁷⁰ Minutes of the LEDS, January 6, 1888, MS 1726.

⁷¹ Minutes of the LEDS, March 2, 1888, MS 1726.

⁷² Minutes of LEDS, May 5, 1934, MS 1733.

reference to a Ladies' Debating Club in London that admitted men as visitors who could participate in the debates once a year. Mair's comment on this practice was that it seemed "a rather daring act" but accordingly to all accounts, "these mixed debates have been very successful."⁷³ Perhaps inspired by this, Louisa Dundas gave notice of her 1886 proposal "that the Society in future should not be limited to ladies."⁷⁴ Since she gave notice of the motion at the June meeting, the LEDS did not have a chance to discuss the issue until they reconvened in November. The motion was debated, with most members agreeing that gentlemen could be considered as visitors but not as members of the Society. However, they did not come to a resolution that satisfied a majority of the members, and because the attendance was low, further deliberation was stalled until the next meeting.⁷⁵ Dundas could not make the December meeting, and it seems that because she was not present to propose the motion again, the issue was dropped. The topic was not reintroduced until six years later, when the ever-persistent Louisa Dundas gave notice of a new motion to keep the LEDS in line with societal thinking: "that, the Edinburgh University having decided to admit women to its classes, the Ladies Edinburgh Debating Society should reciprocate by admitting gentlemen, as visitors, to its debates."⁷⁶ When the LEDS addressed the issue in their November 1892 meeting, a lively discussion ensued. They resolved to continue on as they had, without male visitors. According to the LEDS minutes, the main reason behind this decision was that men already had access to many societies, and that they should "be excluded from at least one paradise."⁷⁷

⁷³ Sarah Mair, "Stray Notes," *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* III (1877): 384.

⁷⁴ Minutes of the LEDS, June 5, 1886, MS 1726.

⁷⁵ Minutes of the LEDS, November 6, 1886, MS 1726.

⁷⁶ Minutes of the LEDS, May 7, 1892, MS 1726.

⁷⁷ Minutes of the LEDS, November 5, 1892, MS 1726.

Beyond these logistical concerns, LEDS debaters occasionally turned their attention to more substantive concerns about communicative norms and expectations. An 1871 debate, for example, found that most members believed appeals to logic were a better argumentative tactic than appeals to emotion.⁷⁸ The status of the art of conversation was the focus of a LEDS debate in 1903, in which four debaters drew from an assortment of examples to support the different sides of the question, “is the art of conversation dying out?” The first affirmative speaker, Miss Landale, argued that the art of the conversation was dying compared to historical accounts of French salons. In her estimation, conversational quality was suffering because although there was much study of recitation and speaking techniques made popular by the Elocutionists, there was little emphasis placed on how to be a good listener. On the negative side, Mrs. Melville argued that these recollections of the good old days of quality conversation were subject to revisionist history. She suspected that such nostalgia was rooted in a taste for the manners of the past rather than a superior approach to communication, and predicted that in fifty years, others would look back on their own conversations as ideal. The seconder for the affirmative side suggested bemoaned the specialization of conversation, where individuals felt that they could not speak on general topics but only on their particular hobbies and interests. The negative side’s seconder gave a very short speech protesting Miss Landale’s point about good listening habits, insisting that good listeners could ruin conversations with their “stony stares.” At the end of the debate, observers of the debate were split on the status of the art of conversation. Twelve votes were cast in favor of the affirmative, thirteen were cast for the negative, and three members declined to vote.⁷⁹ The arguments made in these debates were not explicitly connected to the debate practice within the Society. Members, even those who did not directly take part in the

⁷⁸ Minutes of the LEDS, February 4, 1871, MS 1723.

⁷⁹ Minutes of the LEDS, February 7, 1903, MS 1728.

debates, collaborated on a vision of ideal communication. Through argumentative encounter, they reflected on the best practices for their argument culture.

The question that most directly bore on their debate practice was “does the habit of debate induce in the debater exaggerated and one-sided views?”⁸⁰ The LEDS decided that rather than hold a formal debate on the topic, they would allow each of the eighteen members attending the meeting to express her opinion on the subject. As if determined to perform the open-mindedness that membership in LEDS provided, they expounded on a variety of different perspectives on the topic. Many members acknowledged the possibility that debate could lead to exaggerated or one-sided views, but thought that this likely occurred amongst the young and in personal arguments rather than formal debates. The “genial atmosphere of a debating society” guarded against this danger, because ritual argumentation and the friendship amongst the members promoted “tolerance and understanding of other people’s views.”⁸¹ Some members, such as Miss Barry, thought that this broad-mindedness could be a liability, in that it made it difficult to form an opinion on a topic. Others thought that this could be a problem for audience members observing debates, but not for speakers. Sarah Mair argued that in having to prepare for a debate, debaters became aware of the arguments on both sides of the controversy, and were more likely at the end of the debate to have a fair reason for settling on an opinion.⁸² After each member had said their piece, a vote was taken. Only two members voted affirmative, while the other sixteen felt confident that debate, on balance, did not lead to exaggerated or one-sided

⁸⁰ This proposition articulates an enduring issue for those involved in debate. As Chapter Three details, mid-twentieth century debate scholars and practitioners in the United States dealt with some of these very issues as they turned their attention to the question of whether collegiate debaters should switch sides and debate against their convictions.

⁸¹ This was Mrs. Bartholomew’s phrasing in response to the proposition.

views.⁸³ One wonders what would have happened had the majority voted affirmative since a cornerstone of the LEDS argument culture was a belief that testing ideas and justifying claims was a useful practice.

The final strand in my exploration of the LEDS's argument culture is their efforts to encourage participation by younger and less experienced generations of debaters. Even before the Society made the formal move to focus exclusively on debate, they noted the need to not only recruit but also support novice debaters. In 1876, Adela Dundas wrote the yearly summary in *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*. Imagining that some readers of the magazine may be critical of the practice, she attempted to articulate the value of debate, stating that the Society valued in "all persons to be required to think, to fix their minds upon any one topic, and to study it from all point of view...to be forced to put one's thoughts clearly before others and to state why one holds this rather than that opinion." Adding that greater participation by younger debaters would enhance these benefits for the whole Society, Dundas urged her fellow members to think about how they might attain that goal.⁸⁴ Yet how does any argument culture nurture inexperienced participants into an activity known for being competitive and hostile? In their effort to answer this question, LEDS members coordinated concerted efforts to accommodate novice debaters in three areas: atmosphere, evidence, and topic and speaker selection.

The LEDS worked to achieve an atmosphere of competition, quality argumentation, and the reflection on ideas. However, it was also an approachable atmosphere where mentoring could take place.⁸⁵ As Zarefsky puts it, "an argument culture is one in which, despite its adversarial

⁸³ Minutes of the LEDS, May 2, 1925, MS 1732.

⁸⁴ A.D. (Adela Dundas), "Debates of the Ladies' Edinburgh Literary Society," *The Ladies Edinburgh Magazine*, II (1876): 20.

⁸⁵ Goodnight and Mitchell suggest that debating societies engage in Henry Jenkins' notion of a "participatory culture" in which members are encouraged to participate, and where more experienced members informally mentor novice participants. See their "Forensics as Scholarship," 81.

character, argumentation is fundamentally a cooperative enterprise,” in which the seemingly hostile elements contribute toward a shared goal.⁸⁶ Sarah Mair, the perennial president and role model for LEDS debaters, was the person who set the tone for nurturing new generations of debaters. As Lettice Milne Rae recalled, Mair

had infinite understanding and patience with those not thus endowed and could inspire confidence in the shyest and most awkward of what might be truly called ‘maiden speakers.’...For not only did she exercise a supreme attraction for women of abler intellect and higher literary and intellectual attainments than her own, but she had the power, too, of drawing forth latent or unsuspected talent in what appeared on the surface very unpromising material.⁸⁷

Mair’s leadership set the tone for an atmosphere of supportive yet challenging debate education and performance. Especially early in the Society’s existence, this was quite a revolutionary innovation for young women. In contrast to dominant Victorian ideas about the necessary containment of women, the LEDS provided an open space to test ideas however “crude and imperfect.” Helen Neaves stresses that inexperienced debaters were simultaneously trusted with a forum for free-thinking but also had to consider that there were always more experienced members to reign them in when necessary. Experienced generations of debaters within the LEDS “naturally had it in their power to controvert [their] rash assertions, and it was undoubtedly one of the benefits conferred by the Debating Society that one had to prepare one’s brief with care and circumspection if one wished to avoid a crushing defeat.”⁸⁸ With the freedom to test ideas came the freedom to be tested by the superior acumen of a fellow LEDS member.

Members were valued for what they brought to the topics, whether it was knowledge learned in experience, books, or travel. Thus, another innovative way that the LEDS accommodated the different levels of experience present in the Society was by valuing

⁸⁶ Zarefsky, “What is an Argument Culture?,” 301.

⁸⁷ Rae, *Ladies in Debate*, 22.

⁸⁸ Neaves, “Down the Vista,” 50-1.

alternative forms of evidence. The ways in which members used identity-based personal experience as evidence will be discussed in detail in the next section. However, that is not the only non-traditional debate evidence that was used. Whereas traditional debate evidence may include a quotation or a statistic from a scholarly book or journal, LEDS debates were peppered with visual and hypothetical images, experiences, and illustrative talents. Propositions dealing with different geographical locations and cultures were made tangible through various members' travel tales. An 1871 debate on the superiority of German music over Italian music included vocal illustrations by both sides of the proposition.⁸⁹ When debaters felt intimidated by a philosophical topic like "is pain a necessity?" they could always fall back, as the speakers did in an 1889 debate, on poetry to help them to express their arguments.⁹⁰ By permitting alternative forms of evidence, the LEDS worked around certain barriers to debate participation, such as access to research materials and inadequate educational training.

Inevitably, though, there were moments in the Society's history when inexperienced debaters were loathe to volunteer to participate despite the resources that unique kinds of evidence afforded them. Mrs. Stitt describes her experience as an over-eager contributor at her first LEDS meeting:

...from a back seat my first question was lightheartedly asked and quite properly met with a kindly but firm suppression. The lesson was taken to heart, 'Do not say anything at all if you are not prepared to follow with an intelligent reason.' The hoped-for education had begun, and Ignorance hung its horrid head while the feeling of inferiority became almost worm-like.⁹¹

This anecdote demonstrates how the LEDS balanced two argument culture features suggested by Zarefsky: cooperation and justification. They encouraged participation by new members, such

⁸⁹ Minutes of the LEDS, April 1, 1871, MS 1723.

⁹⁰ Minutes of the LEDS, May 4, 1889, MS 1726.

⁹¹ Stitt, "Impressions of Two Late-Comers," 68.

that Stitt felt comfortable enough to speak. The LEDS maintained a welcoming atmosphere and was a fundamentally cooperative enterprise. Although Stitt felt embarrassed and inferior after her comment, it was not because other members had ridiculed her. Instead, Stitt's experience suggests that the Society placed an emphasis on justifying one's claims.⁹² Her education in argumentation began that day, when fellow club members did not just allow her to get away with an inadequate contribution, but kindly held her responsible for reasoned interactions. They acculturated new members through careful mentoring balanced with a performance of their dedication to quality debate and discussion. Stitt, upon reflection, came to that conclusion on her own. Although the LEDS was intimidating and foreign to a newcomer,

What might have seemed to me too lofty in thought and speech, was it not to help us become less selfish and more useful members of the community? There was no place in that room for flippancy or cheap wit. The debates, which even in my unregenerate days had been a pleasure and a delight, had they not always advocated noble and true causes? And in giving us many new lines of thought, had they not taught us that there are always two sides to a question?⁹³

Stitt acknowledged that it was all done with the goal of making her a better debater, thinker, and member of the argument culture.

One obstacle that the LEDS encountered in convincing new generations of debaters to participate was that certain debate propositions were obscure, abstract, or lent themselves to highly specialized knowledge of the topic. For a debating society that sought to serve a group of "women of infinite variety," there was a perpetual pull between those debaters who saw the forum as a place to explore topics of global, theoretical, and philosophical importance, and those who felt only prepared to debate topics that bore directly on their lives in Edinburgh. How could inexperienced debaters be encouraged to participate in debates if the club decided to indulge the

⁹² Zarefsky, "What Does an Argument Culture Look Like?," 301.

⁹³ Stitt, "Impressions of Two Late-Comers," 68-9.

wishes those who wanted the debates to cross intellectual frontiers? A series of proposals and deliberations in 1870 demonstrates the contours of this matter.

At several LEDS meetings in 1869, debates had to be cancelled because even though the group had decided on a topic, they had trouble getting members to volunteer to represent each side of the proposition. In response, Miss Seton moved “that a law be passed which shall render compulsory the conducting of debates by all members of this society in turn” at the first meeting of the year in 1870. This motion was seconded by Miss Yule. Not wanting to force people to debate against their better wishes, Miss Dunlop moved an amendment “that a list be made of members who would volunteer to conduct a side in a debate whenever called upon to do so.” Sarah Mair seconded the amendment. In February, Dunlop’s amendment was chosen over Seton’s original motion.⁹⁴ The amendment represented the Society’s belief that no one ought to be forced to debate when she is unprepared in skill, background knowledge, or research. It temporarily solved a problem in speaker selection. However, it did not address the issue of how to craft a proposition that would encourage voluntary participation.

In June of the same year, the issue of topic selection came to a head. Although Dunlap’s amendment succeeded in allowing the LEDS to schedule debate topics and debaters for the winter months, the group could not agree on a topic for the July debate. The three topics under consideration were: “have we a sense of beauty independent of other sources of pleasurable sensation?”, “is allegory an interesting and effectual mode of conveying secular instruction?” and “have we a natural consciousness of right and wrong?” Members objected to each of the subjects as being too abstract, and too difficult, to debate. After much deliberation, the Society decided that they should hold a debate on a topic of current interest that was a little closer to the

⁹⁴ Minutes of the LEDS, January 8, 1870, February 5, 1870, MS 1723.

ground: “has the British government of India been beneficial to the natives of India?”⁹⁵ This adjustment has the pragmatic result of locating members interested in taking each side of the debate for the July debate. It also sent a message to members, who might have been intimidated by the more abstract debates proposed in June, that the Society sought variety in topic selection. This same message was communicated seven years later in *The Ladies’ Edinburgh Magazine*. In the summary of the year’s debates, it was noted that although some members struggled with philosophical topics, the group decided that they had yielded some very interesting debates. They decided to try to balance philosophical topics with practical topics because “variety is pleasing.”⁹⁶ In 1880, Mair intervened into the normal topic selection process to better accommodate members who had not yet volunteered to debate. She claimed that they need not volunteer to speak on “deep philosophical subjects” and proposed her own list of simpler subjects to spark the interest of inexperienced debaters.⁹⁷

Having only recently shifted to focus exclusively on debates, the Society once again struggled with speaker selection for the debates in 1883. This time, the problem was more specific than the 1870 deliberations—the Society had plenty of members willing to be the second speakers, but had a shortage when it came to attracting volunteers to give the opening speeches in the debate. Louisa Dundas proposed a motion to form a committee that would, “in consulting upon measures, and framing rules...meet and obviate this difficulty.” Dundas believed that “new members were scared by an imaginary idea that they must open the debates with long and elaborate papers—whereas the papers need not be long and would often be better if simplified.” Here, she both diagnosed the problem and also set out a vision for better debates. Dundas cast

⁹⁵ Minutes of the LEDS, June 4, 1870, MS 1723.

⁹⁶ “Debates of the Ladies’ Edinburgh Literary Society,” *The Ladies Edinburgh Magazine* III (1877): 33.

⁹⁷ Minutes of the LEDS, March 6, 1880, MS 1726.

the issue as a way of “equalizing” or sharing the work load as a courtesy to other members, so that the Society would not turn into a forum where a small number of skilled performers debated each week and all other members continually composed the audience.⁹⁸

The motion was passed at the April meeting, and a Committee on Rules for Debate was formed. Later that month, the Committee called a special meeting where they generated the following new rules for consideration by the whole membership:

- 1) That there should be Honorary members, not more than 20 at a time, who on payment of a double subscription (5/) should be exempt from opening debates; these members were not to have the privilege of introducing visitors.
- 2) That the time for arranging the debate in the ordinary way shall henceforth not exceed ten minutes.
- 3) That in default of voluntary speakers, the President shall (after ten minutes have collapsed) call upon the ordinary members in turn to provide for the opening of a debate—by speaking or writing.
- 4) That any member so called upon must take the part assigned [or find a substitute] or pay of fine of 2/6?, 5/?⁹⁹
- 5) That any member who has once been called upon from this manner should be exempted from speaking again for a year.
- 6) That no member shall be so called upon for three meetings after her entrance to the Society.

The Committee further recommended that the President shall keep the reserve list of subjects at hand on such occasions and that if any member compelled to take part in a debate should object to the subjects in the printed list, she may be allowed to choose from the reserved list or to suggest an entirely new subject, approved by the Society. The debaters being drawn by lot, the affirmative and negative sides to be left to themselves to decide.¹⁰⁰

Although these proposed regulations could be faulted for giving certain members a way out of ever speaking in debates, the Committee believed that doubling the fees would deter a great number of them from doing so. They aimed to more evenly distribute the debating load amongst ordinary members by exempting them for the rest of the year. Rule #6 was an important step in

⁹⁸ Minutes of the LEDS, March 3, 1883, MS 1726.

⁹⁹ Transcribed directly from the Society’s minutes. The Society does not seem to have decided on a reasonable fine, or if they did, it was not recorded in the meeting minutes.

¹⁰⁰ Minutes of the LEDS, April 27, 1883, MS 1726.

ensuring that new generations of debaters had time to acclimate to the argument culture before they were called on to carry out a debate.

The full membership deliberated about these proposed rules in the May 1883 meeting. Sarah Mair explained the impetus behind each rule, suggesting that they grew organically out of various grievances the Society had voiced in terms of finding suitable topics and speakers. Miss Oswald made a speech

against the whole movement as a radical, not to say revolutionary one, that no amount of legislation would make good speakers out of those whom nature had not qualified to the task; and that if incompetent speakers were annoyed by being compelled to speak, the listeners would equally be forcibly [annoyed] having to listen to them.

Despite her impassioned speech, only four members supported her. Mair then stepped in again to explain some the rules, suggesting that they were designed to quell some of Oswald's concerns. She stressed that the measures did not disturb any of the existing laws adopted in 1880 and that debaters who wanted to volunteer were still given precedence. She reiterated Lumsden's point that the fate of the debate need not fully rely on the quality of opening speeches—a short and/or lacking opening speech could be made very interesting by a “well-managed” post-debate discussion.¹⁰¹ After hearing these points, the LEDS voted to adopt the new measures by a large majority. They seem to have succeeded in the goal of getting a wider variety of speakers to take on the opening speeches in debates for a while, with very few “honorary members” who never spoke.

Over time, however, the regulations set out in 1883 seemed to relax a bit insofar as the issue of not being able to attract speakers reared its ugly head once again. In 1925, the topic was raised in regard to the numerous absences that members had accrued. Several motions to address

¹⁰¹ Minutes of the LEDS, May 5, 1883, MS 1726.

the issue were brought up and defeated, including Miss Lee's motion that more speakers may be interested if they made the debates less "debate-like" by doing away with formal seconders.¹⁰² In 1930, Alice Smith suggested a change in speech structure for the debates: team debate format. In this format, teams of four or six members spoke on each side of the proposition, taking the exclusive focus off the person who opened the debates in the traditional format. At first, other members were skeptical, voting only to try out team debates for one debate during the year.¹⁰³ However, it seems that the innovation worked well on its trial run, and the team debate format was adopted for the majority of debates in the final five years of the Society.

For the LEDS and perhaps for many debating societies, nurturing different generations of debaters was an enduring issue. In fact, as we shall see, it was the problem of not having enough volunteers to speak that ultimately led to the dissolution of the Society in 1935. Yet from this examination of the LEDS's rules, negotiations, and deliberative practices is that members had to carefully and deliberately balance the needs of its participants, old and new, in order to guarantee the health and sustainability of the argument culture. The next sub-section explores how LEDS negotiated another delicate balance in the argument culture: ideological and identity-based difference.

2.2.2 Identity and Personal Experience in Intergenerational Encounters

The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society hosted a co-mingling of generations of people interested in argumentative encounter. Generational thinking was particularly prominent when the Society featured debates about age, class, race, and gender. It would be a difficult and

¹⁰² Minutes of the LEDS, November 7, 1925, MS 1732.

¹⁰³ Minutes of the LEDS, November 1, 1930, MS 1733. Neaves remarks that the team debate format worked well in the late years of the Society (in Rae, 55).

altogether different project to try and find out detailed information about each participant's identity-based affiliations and commitments. Given the archival materials available, to speculate on these differences would be a historically shaky endeavor as well. Instead, I ask, "is the age, sex, gender, sexuality, class, and race of the debater rhetorically significant?" much like feminist philosopher Lorraine Code asks "is the sex of the knower epistemologically significant?"¹⁰⁴ I resolve that the answer is yes, but not based on any essential quality emanating from these identity categories. Rather, I am interested in how debaters come to mobilize self-representational identity and experience-based claims as evidence to engage in debates about difference. An examination of how members chose to approach debates involving age, class, race, and gender sheds light on the way that the LEDS brought intergenerational perspectives together in argumentative communion.

In some debates, age-based generational differences were on full display. Goodnight suggests that generational argument of this type is an act of translation requiring rhetorical invention:

Because each generation passes through a different time, there persists in the public realm space for a plurality of informing sentiments, each capable of interrogation and generative of arguments that define the urgencies of the present and the relevant domain of future conduct. If such sentiments are not to collapse into blind rejection of the past or nostalgic longing for it, rhetorical invention is necessary to translate historical experience into a reasoned argument about the nature of present choice.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). While the entire book ruminates on this question, Code lays out past theorizing and the stakes of the issue in chapter one.

¹⁰⁵ Goodnight, "Generational Argument," 141. Here, Goodnight is talking about a public realm of meaning. While the LEDS has some qualities that match up with this description, it is not an exact match. More apt would be to describe the LEDS an organizational structure that demonstrates the permeability of public and private spaces, what Rosa Eberly calls "proto-public spaces," where individuals can engage in rhetorical praxis shielded from fully public scrutiny. See her "Rhetoric and the Anti-Logos Doughball: Teaching Deliberating Bodies the Practices of Participatory Democracy," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 293.

In spaces specifically designated for routine argument, such as debating societies, arguers can anticipate interrogation and can prepare to generate argument strategies that draw from the past to guide present action. The LEDS's debates about aging and marriage are representative of this variety of generational argument. The Society debated the question "do the years bring more than they take away?" twice, thirty years apart. The first debate was on April 6, 1889, where a young Miss Robertson argued for old age's "conversion of lessons from grievances into blessings," as a boon to individual, nation, and humankind. Maria Bell took the negative, drawing on "all poets and sages from Solomon downwards" who preferred the days of youth. At age 37, Bell conceded that old age was probably better than middle age, but maintained that childhood was much preferable to her current condition, that "burdened care-worn period of middle age." Though Bell had often written about old age, death and the Christian afterlife in her poetry,¹⁰⁶ she failed to convince the audience of LEDS members that youth was superior. In the end, the affirmative won the debate by a margin of seven votes.¹⁰⁷

When the Society returned to the topic thirty years later, members only slightly changed the wording of the debate question to "do the years give more than they take away?" Isabella Landale supported the affirmative side, defending old age for its ability to make up for the arrogance of youth. Landale considered that the years may take away beauty, but then resolved that the charm of old age had been captured by artists. Besides that, "what young Adonis can compare with the old and dignified Sophocles?" She was steadfast in her belief that if a person maintained good hygiene, kept their mind sharp with mental gymnastics, and learned to read lips

¹⁰⁶ Bell died unexpectedly ten years later, at age 47. Her sister published a book of her poems, *Songs of Two Homes* (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1899), upon her death. Consider these lines from Bell's poem, "Life:" "old age that comes with sudden tread, a shaken body, heavy head—and then, short struggle with the death alarms, the old earth opens mother arms—and then, content we waken in a place where Christ shall show his blessed face, to men" (1).

¹⁰⁷ Minutes of the LEDS, April 6, 1889, MS 1726.

in preparation for hearing loss, old age was superior. Her opponent, Mrs. Wallace, maintained that youth brought hope and adaptability, whereas old age only brought a deteriorating body and a narrowing mind. She drew support from the seven stages of man in Shakespeare's "As You Like It." By this time, there was more of an effort by the LEDS secretary to record the post-debate discussion by audience members. A dynamic discussion ensued, with members drawing from their personal experiences, ranging from work with children to their own feelings of dread as they aged and their friends passed on. Sarah Mair, now in her seventies, recalled the debate on the same subject in 1889. Her older self still felt that old age was better than youth, because "the progress of the world is the heritage of the old who have witnessed various changes and improvements made by humanity." Despite able arguments from the negative, in the end, the affirmative was once again victorious, this time by a margin of ten votes.¹⁰⁸

Another topic that demonstrated the LEDS's age and experience-based difference was marriage. Because it formed as a small group of unmarried eighteen- and nineteen-year-old school women in 1865, the LEDS did not deal with the topic as an immediate concern for membership. But over the years, members began to withdraw from the Society in what Mair refers to as "losses by marriage." Mair, who chose to never marry, betrayed her feeling about this trend: "as was to be expected in a Society of maidens of eighteen and twenty years, especially when possessed not only of distinguished names, but of such charm in form, feature, and dress...wolves very soon began to attack the fold in the shape of husbands."¹⁰⁹ When the first of the members was married, they deliberated about whether the ranks of the Society should be closed to married women. The Society ultimately resolved that matrimony did not disqualify members from participating in debating activities, and women "married and single, presently sat

¹⁰⁸ Minutes of the LEDS, February 1, 1919, MS 1730.

¹⁰⁹ Mair quoted in Rae, 27.

side by side around the Table with no apparent difference, mental or otherwise, to distinguish them.”¹¹⁰

With the matter of married members settled, the LEDS felt free to weigh in on—and return to—debate topics about differing approaches to the institution of marriage. The first debate was undertaken by four unmarried debaters in 1881 on the question, “is the French *mariage de convenance* more conducive to the happiness of those concerned than the English system?”¹¹¹ Debaters on both sides of the proposition agreed that the question should be decided based on the well-being of the women involved in the marriage. Miss Humphrey and Miss Oswald supported the French system based on the idea that women are better off with money and social position and that they needed some paternalistic guidance to guard against making foolish decisions based on fleeting schoolgirl affections. On the negative, Miss Dundas and Miss Eyton suggested that the French system historically situated women as the property of their fathers and that continuing this approach would be culturally regressive. After the debate, “a great deal of interesting discussion followed in which all the married ladies present defended our practice and insisted that it was much better calculated as a measure of married happiness than any other.” One can imagine how the married members of LEDS that constituted an audience for this debate must have been teeming with personal examples and anecdotes to defend the English system of matrimony that they had entered into. In the end, the affirmative side had only four supporters, and negative carried the debate with thirteen votes.¹¹²

In 1903, the issue was revisited when the Society hosted a debate on the question, “has the *mariage de convenance* some advantage over the so-called love marriage?” This second

¹¹⁰ Rae, 27-28.

¹¹¹ This refers to marriages arranged for economic or political advancement rather than marriage for love.

¹¹² Minutes of the LEDS, April 2, 1881, MS 1726.

debate was different because three of the four were married. Mrs. Melville defended the affirmative side based on the French marriage system's use of a dowry. Melville believed that a dowry was a source of power for a woman; it demanded respect from her future husband's family and gave her a bargaining chip in the relationship. Like the affirmative debaters in the 1881 debate, she believed that family-arranged marriages were preferable because they took a wider range of factors into account (temperament, taste, and social position) than marriage based on young love. Mrs. Salveson's second affirmative speech reiterated Melville's point about the social and class position afforded to women through *mariage de convenance*, and also pointed out that the English system was deficient in that it had no provision for those "unmarried daughters" who had not found love. The negative side was defended first by Mrs. Williamson, who conceded that arranged marriages could turn out well, but instead spent most of her speech arguing against those marriages where no love existed between two people, or where there was an unequal relationship between husband and wife. She lauded the ability of a marriage based on love to create camaraderie and cultivate trust. Her seconder, Miss Duncanson, presumably not having much experience with either type of marriage herself, offered up examples of arranged and loveless marriages gone bad from Scottish ballads such as Auld Robin Gray and Hunting Tower. As with the previous debate on the subject, the LEDS once again put their support behind love marriages when the negative won nine votes, the affirmative won four votes, and one person declined to support either side.¹¹³

Based on the ability of LEDS members to reference personal experience, both the 1881 and the 1903 debate questions may have loaded the dice for the negative side. The married members had been united with their mates under the English system, and unmarried members

¹¹³ Minutes of the LEDS, May 2, 1903, MS 1728.

presumably either had no interest in marriage in general, or, if they hoped to be married one day, would do so with some semblance of romance in mind. Both debate propositions focused the point of conflict on differing approaches to matching couples, rather than a deeper probing of whether marriage was a desirable end goal. It was not until 1914 that the Society debated a proposition that questioned that assumption, asking “are married persons generally more selfish than the unmarried?” The arguments made in this debate expose attitudes toward marriage at the time, including the idea that marriage may not be all that it is dreamed to be for women. Miss Greenlees, the first affirmative speaker, painted a picture of married women as people who are so narrowly focused on their families that they are blinded to what else is going on in the world. She maintained that married women are often sheltered and guarded, whereas the “true motherheart is often found in the spinster who looks upon children with a disinterested and unselfish affection and spends herself with little hope of return.” Greenlees then suggested that unmarried women had better access to employment in jobs that were unselfish such as teaching and nursing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the negative side was defended by a married woman—Mrs. Wallace. She argued that single women tended to have bigger egos and were more self-absorbed than married women, who had to constantly deny their own needs in favor of their husbands and children. Although another unmarried woman was scheduled to second Miss Greenlees on the affirmative side, Mrs. Parkes filled in at the last minute. Parkes suggested that selfishness was all about temperament—whether or not the person is married. Mrs. Melville seconded Mrs. Wallace on the negative, pointing to poor working married women who will care for her neighbor’s children in addition to her own as an example of true unselfishness. The post-debate discussion featured strong opinions from both married and unmarried members, including Mrs. Falconer, who attacked Miss Greenlees’s speech as one-sided. Falconer wished to underline that married

life is not so rosy, and that married women often have “very hard uncared for” lives. The meeting closed with a vote: four in favor of the affirmative, that married persons were more selfish than unmarried, while , eleven voted in favor of the negative, and four declining to vote.¹¹⁴

The Society’s final debate on marriage in 1928 was not so much a debate, but a group-wide discussion that returned to the question of French versus English systems nearly fifty years after the LEDS had first entertained the question.¹¹⁵ Predictably, the majority of members still argued in favor of the advantages of love-based coupling, but the range of perspectives on the purpose of marriage is demonstrative of the infinite variety of LEDS members. Sarah Mair, Mrs. More Nisbet, and Miss Patterson spoke eloquently about the value of romantic love while Mrs. Voge considered procreation the primary aim of marriage. Beyond discussion of marriage in France, Miss Underwood brought up marriage in China, where she claimed that women are “of no personal importance,” while Mrs. Stephenson followed with tales of India where “educated natives” had trouble finding “intelligent and companionable wives.” Finally, Miss Smith supported “complete freedom in marriage,” while Miss Wood supported freedom out of marriage—she “rejoiced that she lived in an age when there was freedom not to marry.”¹¹⁶ This discussion bookended an ongoing debate and discussion about marriage for the LEDS. The Society returned to the subject as an enduring topic of interest for different generations of members, old and young, married and unmarried. The LEDS meeting minutes not only document the subject as one of concern for this group, but also can be used to chart intergenerational

¹¹⁴ Minutes of the LEDS, December 5, 1914, MS 1730.

¹¹⁵ The LEDS did hold a debate on the question, “should a woman take her husband’s nationality in marriage?” in 1933 but that debate was not so much about marriage, but rather national identity. Minutes of the LEDS, April 1, 1933, MS 1733.

¹¹⁶ Minutes of the LEDS, May 5, 1928, MS 1732.

approaches to argument about the topic as societal attitudes about marriage and gender roles evolved.

As mentioned previously, LEDS members tended to be members of prominent middle to upper class Edinburgh families. This class bias is not only mentioned in Milne Rae's book, but is apparent in the club's fee and fine structure and attitudes expressed in debates. For example, some members of the LEDS, including Mair, organized in favor of women's education by founding the St. George's Training School. When one ELES member, Mary Walker, found the maid they hired to work at the training school trying to pay attention to lectures, she wrote with a representative attitude toward the working class:

Frequently she was found trying to peer through the hinged side of the door of the lecture-room to see what we were able, or applying her ear at the other side to hear what was going on. One of our number said she thought Jane, had she been born in a higher social stratum, would have led the intellectual life. Had she belonged to the present generation I am sure she would have been found, with the assistance of a Carnegie Bursary, sitting on the University benches, where I hope her scholarship would have proved better than her housemaiding, which was very indifferent.¹¹⁷

Rather than notice Jane's interest and try to include her in the educational aim of the program, here Walker suggests that generation and family ties rule out the possibility that Jane could ever pursue an education. This, unfortunately, was fairly representative of the sometimes short-sighted attempts to gain educational rights for women. Educational campaigners did not organize on behalf of all women. Instead, they thought it was a big enough task just to open the door for moneyed, high status, white women. In fact, Walker's disdain for what she considered to be shabby housekeeping by Jane was an issue that was also made apparent as the LEDS debated certain topics.

¹¹⁷ Mary Walker quoted in Welsh, *After the Dawn*, 27.

In February 1878, for example, the LEDS debated whether the “servants of the present day [had] really deteriorated as a class from former times.” There is not much detail provided in the LEDS minutes, except that the group resolved that there should be better communication between employers and employees. Nineteen members agreed with the affirmative, whereas sixteen felt that servants of the present day were not worse than their predecessors, and two members declined to vote.¹¹⁸ Of course, the Society did appreciate good service when they saw it. When Ann Leask, the maid employed by the Mair family at 5 Chester Street, gave notice of her plan to retire, the LEDS voted unanimously to award her with five pounds and a leather purse for her many years of service, which included preparing for LEDS meetings.¹¹⁹

One LEDS discussion, held in 1901, also betrayed a particular class bias when it called for members to each contribute their “pet economy,” or their favorite way to save money. While some members suggested ways to not waste string or to save on postage, Mair’s suggestion was to always travel first class in order to save money on luggage. From the perspective of the poor and working class of Edinburgh at the time, this may not have come off as a very practical money-saving solution.¹²⁰ Class privilege was not an issue that was acknowledged or directly engaged by the LEDS very often. For identity-based differences to be debatable in a forum like LEDS meetings, the topic needed to be articulated and there needed to be ample arguments on both sides of the debate question. Perhaps like the Clariosophic Society of South Carolina College, the LEDS’s class-based homogeneity made it difficult to represent a minority viewpoint on such issues. Concern for the poor and working class were more likely to emerge in LEDS

¹¹⁸ Minutes of the LEDS, February 2, 1878, MS 1725.

¹¹⁹ Minutes of the LEDS, May 7, 1932, MS 1733.

¹²⁰ Minutes of the LEDS, June 1, 1901, MS 1728.

debates about charity work and discussions about the best charitable organizations in Edinburgh should the Society have any excess funds from member dues at the end of the year.

The LEDS also chose to debate a number of propositions involving race and ethnicity, but not until the Society was fifty years old. Perhaps it was not until 1915 that the issue of race seemed like a debatable subject that could sustain two sides of a proposition. LEDS members may not have felt that they had enough personal experience with the subject to feel like they could debate it earlier, or general attitudes about race may not have shifted until then for the members to see it as an debatable issue. There is evidence that some members traveled to other countries and encountered other races through missionary and charity work.¹²¹ However, personal experience was referenced very little in the Society's debates about race, suggesting that there was very little personal experience to reference.

Primarily preoccupied with World War I, other LEDS debates in 1915 focused on issues like prohibition during wartime and women's work in munitions factories. In December, members turned their attention to the question, "can any race in the world be rightly considered as intrinsically subject?" Helen Neaves defended the affirmative side on her own (Mrs. Wallace had signed up to be the second affirmative speaker, but she was not present at the meeting). She built a case based on the idea that colonialist national policy was premised on the inferiority of certain races. She suggested that the people of Egypt and India had proved to be intrinsically subject because they did not govern themselves. But the crux of the affirmative case was based on Neaves's interpretation of transatlantic conditions: she claimed that the "African negro" had proved to be an intrinsically servile race because despite emancipation and enfranchisement, they had not gained true equality of citizenship in the United States. Due to Mrs. Wallace's absence

¹²¹ Mrs. Milne Rae, for example, traveled to India and also encountered some African tribes during her years as a member of the LEDS. She also wrote to her husband, George, while he was abroad in India, and told him about LEDS debate topics and meetings (Rae 35).

and lack of a substitute, the first affirmative speech was followed by two negative speeches. Mrs. Inglis Clark urged taking a longer view of racial hierarchy. She reminded the audience that races deemed servile in ancient Rome had risen up to rule. On the issue of the “American negro,” she maintained that slavery was a handicap that could only be overcome through years of evolution. Inglis Clark pointed to African Americans pursuing education as evidence that the race was already trending in the direction of self-improvement. Sarah Mair gave the second negative speech, taking the somewhat radical position that there was unity amongst all humans, and that “nature had imposed no barrier on the mingling of various races,” though she acknowledged that there was social sanction against interracial marriage. Following the debate, Miss Esther Millar expressed her support of the affirmative point that British power had been premised on governing inferior races. Lady Carlow Martin and Mrs. Campbell Lorimer were sympathetic to the negative side, suggesting that in the case of African Americans, time would tell a different story (although, as Campbell Lorimer put it, the Negro race was still in a childhood state at the time). The debate was a very close one, with five members voting affirmative, four voting negative, and three declining to vote.¹²²

It was not until fifteen years later that the LEDS took up another debate about race head-on. This time they focused on an issue that was only alluded to as a radical, socially unheard of idea in 1915: “should social intercourse between white and coloured races be encouraged?” Arguments on the affirmative side were progressive for the time, but may surprise the contemporary reader in their execution and scope. Miss Voge referenced anthropological studies of skull formation and shape now known to be the very stuff of scientific racism: that the skulls of “negroid races” were unchanged through the ages. Instead of viewing these studies as fodder

¹²² Minutes of the LEDS, December 4, 1915. MS 1730.

for the negative, she believed it was support for the value of intermarriage and the “introduction of new blood into the racial stock” to create superior races. Voge’s seconder, Miss Bury, was not prepared to go so far as to support interracial marriage. Instead, she supported social intercourse between races as a way to expose “coloured races” to the civilization of the dominant white race. This position was necessary because traditional hierarchical relationships between white and colored races, such as master/servant or teacher/student were not enough to cultivate real friendships.

Miss Greenlees led off the arguments against interracial social intercourse with a series of stereotypes. Her primary example was drawn from the United States, where she believed despite the emancipation of African Americans, “the coloured man” had maintained “his low state of intelligence, his sloth, his general dullness of spirit...he was a creature of impulse, utterly childish mentally and of marked animal tendencies.” The LEDS secretary did not mention if Greenlees cited a source for these claims. Even though African Americans were pursuing university educations, and in fact, were engaging in intercollegiate debating at the time, that image of the “American negro” had not reached the Edinburgh women.¹²³ Greenlees did not mention that she had any first-hand experience with members of different races when she enumerated the stereotypes she had heard. Perhaps her personal experience was connected with her final argument, that white girls, especially in Scotland, tended to find something glamorous about black men, and that this often ended in tragedy. Although she did not specify what type of tragedy she was referring to, it is likely an opaque reference to what feminist historians like Angela Y. Davis refer to as the myth of the black rapist, a cultural trope which served to justify

¹²³ See Chapter Four for a more detailed history of African American debating societies in the United States.

racism.¹²⁴ Finally, Neaves seconded the negative side of the proposition. Neaves started by noting that she was strongly prejudiced on the issue. Considering that she also argued that some races are intrinsically subject in the 1915 debate, we can deduce that Neaves was not willing to “switch sides” on this issue. Just as in the earlier debate, she argued that the strength of the British Empire was based on the racial inferiority of Indians. If there were social barriers against black men in America, Neaves reasoned that they must have been put there for a reason. Post-debate discussion included contributions from a number of members, including Mrs. Arnott, who did have personal experience from her travels in India. She “declared that 15 years of social intercourse with Indian ladies had not led to any better understanding of Indian mentality, which, to her, remained a closed book.” The majority of the LEDS was inclined to agree with her—the negative side garnered twenty-two votes, while the affirmative won only five, and three members did not vote. Neither the affirmative nor the negative side of the debate argued for the inherent humanity of all races. Both agreed that people of color were inferior and the disagreement in the debate revolved around the question of whether social intercourse could do anything to improve their status.¹²⁵

The LEDS returned to a debate question about race four years later. In an unrelated but interesting coincidence, club business for the March 3, 1934 meeting included a discussion of a letter received from the Chinese Christian Association Debating Society in Singapore. The Chinese Society expressed interest in the LEDS, and requested their assistance in developing their own debating group. The LEDS agreed to acknowledge the letter and write a letter back to

¹²⁴ Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), see chapter 11, especially 188-190.

¹²⁵ Minutes of the LEDS, February 1, 1930, MS 1732.

the club expressing their mutual interest.¹²⁶ Other Society business also took on a decidedly international turn—it was decided that Lady Muir of Blair Drummond would give a talk at the next meeting about women in diplomatic posts. The debate of the day was on the question “has the influence of Jews in western civilisation been more beneficial than harmful?” This question would have seemed eminently debatable at the time: Adolph Hitler came to power as Chancellor of Germany in 1933, and subsequently set into motion a series of efforts to restrict the rights and freedoms of the Jewish population. The debate serves not only as a historical snapshot about attitudes towards Jewish people at the time, but also as a gauge of how Scottish women with very little personal knowledge of a particular group articulated arguments about their value in debate.

This debate was one of the LEDS’s new “team debates” where each side included three speakers. Mrs. Burt began the debate by declaring that she had never personally known any Jews, but she had gone to school in Germany and had heard much about them second hand. She set out to research their positive influence on western civilization, and had come with much to point to, including law, western ideas about life, property and family. Burt suggested that it was easier to point to historical influences than contemporary ones, but that their influence was undeniable, “despite the jealousy and envy and evil passions they aroused in the breasts of their Aryan neighbours.” Mrs. Arnott, the second affirmative speaker, suggested that conducting research on the debate topic had given her a “stronger ease in favour of the Jew” than she thought she would have. She also was able to pick up where Mrs. Burt left off in coming up with

¹²⁶ This effort by the Chinese Christian Association Debating Society may have been an attempt to establish what Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink call “historical precursors to modern transnational advocacy networks” although there is no evidence that there were any further developments in the relationship. Keck and Sikkink directly address western reformers and their relationship with Chinese Christians over the issue of foot binding in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in their book, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 60-66. Over the years, the LEDS was received a number of inquiries from other debating societies seeking advice, and in some cases of other Scottish and English societies, requests for inter-society debates. While they often responded, and sometimes even sent debaters to participate in outside events, they seemed ultimately more concerned with cultivating their own argument culture in Edinburgh.

their more recent contributions in philosophy, music, art, medicine, journalism and politics. For evidence of great Jews, Arnott pointed to Einstein and the actress Sarah Bernhardt. All of her research had led her to believe that “we—the non-Jewish community—could not but love them.” The third affirmative speaker, Miss Voge reiterated the eugenic perspective that she had levied in the 1930 debate about interracial social intercourse. She argued that humans will not reach their highest potential without mixing the races. Inter-marriage with Jews should especially be encouraged. According to the LEDS minutes, Voge

then proceeded to give a brilliant and convincing testimony to the wonderful achievement of the Jews in all branches of science. The Jew was not merely the equal to the Aryan but vastly his superior. In all intelligence tests, the Jewish child was found to be far ahead of the Gentile. In abstruse subjects of every kind, the Jew scintillates. Western Civilisation, in her opinion, was under an enormous debt to the Jew, especially in the field of scientific research and achievement.

All three affirmative debaters ended up supporting Jewish people, but from the perspective of outsiders looking in. Because they had no personal experience to reference, they instead resorted to seeking out accomplishments by Jews. It is only reasonable to deduce that the LEDS debated this topic in the first place and that the debaters were able to refer to the audience as “we—the non-Jewish community” because no Jews had membership in the Society.¹²⁷

If there were any Jews in the LEDS audience that day, they would surely have felt alienated by the arguments put forth by the negative side. Miss Scott Moncrieff argued that Jews could not be considered civilized because they had always struggled to survive. She was also suspicious of the wealth of European Jews, arguing that it is not right to consolidate financial power with one group. Her seconder, Miss Fordyce Andrew, narrated Jewish history as a tale of

¹²⁷ Kenneth E. Collins notes that Jews that immigrated to Scotland tended to settle in Glasgow in greater numbers than in Edinburgh due to the city’s commercial economy in *Scotland’s Jews* (Glasgow: Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, 2008), 15. It is estimated that there were only 1500 Jews in Edinburgh in 1914 (Collins 16). That LEDS members had little personal experience with Jewish people may have been due to the relatively small numbers, or because many Jews in Scotland lived in poorer conditions after fleeing poverty and anti-Semitism in Russian and Eastern Europe. This is suggested by Miss Paterson’s arguments.

nomadic people, a perpetually alien race, who were rightly regarded with suspicion because they “exploited the Gentile to his detriment and were the mischief-makers of the world.” The third negative speaker, Miss Paterson, started her speech saying that she felt ill-equipped to debate after Miss Voge’s convincing arguments. Paterson referenced her personal experience, which was not with “well-to-do” or “cultured” Jews, but limited to poor and working class Jews. She argued that they were harmful to civilization because they lowered standards of living and had a deep love of their own culture. In the post-debate discussion, Lettice Milne Rae suggested that the Jewish people were to thank for western religion, philosophy, science, law, and public health. Yet she also understood the perspective that they had been harmful to civilization. Milne Rae argued that the fact that Jew shop owners sold pork and sausages—items they would not consume themselves—was evidence that they were solely focused on financial gain. Most extreme were Milne Rae’s final arguments. She used a post hoc fallacy to argue that “excessive cigarette smoking among other wise innocent Christian women” was owed to the discovery of tobacco by a Jew, and that Jewish facial features conjured up images of the devil. That a LEDS member could both laud Jewish people for influencing the cornerstones of western civilization in one breath and then move to condemn them for their inventions and looks in another suggests the confused and conflicted mentality of the Scottish Christian trying to make sense of Jewish migration at the time. The final vote, however, seemed fairly cut and dried in favor of the positive contributions of Jewish people to western civilization: nineteen votes for the affirmative, two for the negative, and three declining to vote.¹²⁸

Given the Society’s direct engagement on issues of age, class, and race-based difference, it should be no surprise that they also spent quite a bit of time discussing gender issues. As Mair

¹²⁸ Minutes of the LEDS, March 3, 1934, MS 1733. Lettice Milne Rae was the secretary for this time period, and recorded her own post-debate discussion contributions in the minutes.

put it, “there was scarcely any advance made by women that did not find [ours] a friendly stage on which to air its ideas.”¹²⁹ In fact, questions of women’s proper role in society were debated so often that it is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail each one of those individual debates. An entire history of women’s suffrage and access to education in Scotland could be told through the lens of LEDS debates. The LEDS claimed the distinction of being the first debating society in Scotland to debate the issue of women’s suffrage in 1866; the group revisited the issue five more times before the right to vote was granted to women over thirty years of age in 1918.¹³⁰ Many members of the LEDS were directly involved in the suffrage movement. As Mrs. Arnott put it, “opinion was naturally much divided...there was good deal of tension between different women’s societies, and we remember gratefully what an asset to our Society was Miss S.E.S. Mair’s wisdom, strength, and courage during those difficult years.”¹³¹ There was always a spirited debate with strong arguments on both side of the suffrage question. Early on, the post-debate votes all ended with the majority of the Society voting against women’s enfranchisement. A shift seemed to occur around 1891, when the majority of votes started trending in favor of women’s right to vote. Perhaps mainstream discourses had also shifted by that point, and the votes reflected that change, or that LEDS debates themselves were driving a shift in opinion. Another explanation is that LEDS membership grew significantly during this time. A number of pro-suffrage and pro-women’s education members may have been introduced to the society in the interim as a result of friendships formed in activism outside of the LEDS.¹³²

¹²⁹ Mair, “Foreword,” 8.

¹³⁰ The claim that they were the first to debate the subject was made by Mair, “Foreword,” 9.

¹³¹ Arnott, “Memories of Crowded Years,” 63.

¹³² It is tempting to discuss the suffragette advocacy of individual LEDS members here. Indeed, subsequent chapters on Marie Hochmuth Nichols and Barbara Jordan do trace debaters’ later political and academic activism. Yet this I will save for a future research project, as the different focus on argument cultures in this chapter takes advantage of the unique insight generated by focusing on the internal deliberations of a debating society.

Recurring debates about women's education were not as focused as suffrage debates. They covered the value of home education vs. school education for girls, whether classes should be co-educational, and whether women should be allowed to earn university degrees. Debates about education provided interesting moments of self-reflection for members, as the LEDS itself served as a form of self-education and there were quibbles over whether it was enough, or whether they should be fighting for access to universities. Just as with suffrage debates, education debates were complicated by the activist agendas of some members. Representative of this tension was a May 1886 debate on the question, "is it advisable that a training college for women intending to teach in secondary schools and private families be founded in Edinburgh?" In fact, a group of LEDS members were responsible for founding the St. George's Training School. SES Mair opened the debate by explaining the goal of a training college and arguing for its value in Edinburgh. Miss Menzies "did not entirely disapprove of training colleges though she thought them unnecessary and was most sweeping in her condemnation of the St. George's Training College" in particular. At the end of the debate, the Society (perhaps convinced to follow the lead of their president) voted affirmative by a margin of seventeen to one.¹³³ Taking that decisive win as a mandate, Mair proposed that the LEDS donate twenty pounds of their surplus funds to the St. George's Training School as a bursary. While there was some dissent by members who thought that their funds should only be used to enhance the debating society directly, ultimately, Mair's proposal succeeded and the money was donated.¹³⁴ Members often expressed their interest in higher education and levied personal experience (usually regarding the next generation of women—their daughters) about co-education. Attitudes about women's

¹³³ Minutes of the LEDS, May 1, 1866, MS 1726.

¹³⁴ Minutes of the LEDS, June 5, 1886, MS 1726; February 6, 1887, MS 1726. This decision set a precedent. Later surplus funds were donated to a variety of different causes, including the Women's Employment Bureau, schools in New Zealand, and to support construction on Masson Hall, a dormitory for women.

education changed significantly over the course of the Society's existence. Lettice Milne Rae articulated this constant change as such: "what may be the opinion even a decade hence, who can tell? It will be of interest to wait and see if the tide ebbs or flows."¹³⁵

While a number of debates discussed in the chapter so far have been of general interest, I do not mean to imply that the LEDS did not debate issues of women's roles and gendered etiquette.¹³⁶ Topics like "is there a moral turpitude in dying the hair, and painting the complexion?" were debated out with spirited enthusiasm. The majority of the LEDS members supported the affirmative, but by a margin of only one vote. The Secretary mentions that if visitors to the meeting had been allowed to vote that day, the verdict would have been strongly negative.¹³⁷ In 1924, the LEDS voted in support of the idea that the modern girl had more charm than the Victorian maiden.¹³⁸ Such debates often featured a reflection on gendered roles of the past, and where they thought they were going in the future. The LEDS discussion about whether make-up was morally degrading, for example, was undertaken with a seriousness that might have accompanied a debate about wartime provisions. As they took stock of their accomplishments (and their ability to maintain charm despite new rights and responsibilities), LEDS members reflected on their place in history, and were generally satisfied with what they had achieved.

Debate topics directly engaging gendered identity were intermixed with other topics of philosophical, literary, political, social, economic, and aesthetic importance. As my discussion of other identity-based debates has shown, personal experience was a powerful resource in these debates, whether the topic was women's education or relations between races. There was one

¹³⁵ Rae, 38-9.

¹³⁶ Historian Mary Kelley notes the tendency for women's clubs to deliberate on such questions in her examination of extra-institutional literary societies in the nineteenth century United States. See *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in American's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 133-46, especially her discussion of Boston's Gleaning Circle.

¹³⁷ Minutes of the LEDS, June 6, 1891, MS 1726.

¹³⁸ Minutes of the LEDS, May 3, 1924, MS 1731.

debate that is particularly indicative of the confluence of more abstract writings and the gendered existence that LEDS members lived. On March 6, 1920, the Society hosted a debate on the question, “does Schopenhauer while decrying women unconsciously do them honour?” The proposition refers to German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer’s 1851 essay, “Of Women,” in which he casts women as mentally deficient, childish, vain, dependent, and utterly incapable of mature reasoning and deliberation.¹³⁹ The essay is peppered with misogynistic gems such as Schopenhauer’s claim that “you need only look at the way in which she is formed, to see that woman is not meant to undergo great labor, whether of the mind or body.”¹⁴⁰ That a group of women would even gather to debate this question puts pressure on Schopenhauer’s characterization. However, the LEDS debaters did not craft the proposition to focus on whether Schopenhauer’s claims were accurate or misguided. Instead, they explored how the essay could be potentially subversive.

Sarah Mair was the first affirmative speaker. She provided some initial background information about Schopenhauer’s life and influence, and then detailed the major arguments made in the essay. Drawing on the work of British civil servant and sociologist Benjamin Kidd, Mair attempts to invert Schopenhauer’s claim that because women’s only value is to propagate the species, they are solely focused on the future. Kidd’s theory of social evolution was an attempt to create a biological basis for societal progress.¹⁴¹ Mair argued that Schopenhauer paid women a compliment by saying that they renounced past and present in favor of future generations, because that was an essential aspect of social evolution. Mair was seconded by Mrs. Ivory, who suggested that Schopenhauer’s essay was indicative of women’s increasing influence.

¹³⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer, “Of Women,” in *Arthur Schopenhauer: Essays and Aphorisms*, translated by R.J. Hollingsworth (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 80-89.

¹⁴⁰ Schopenhauer, “Of Woman,” 80.

¹⁴¹ Benjamin Kidd, *Social Evolution* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1894).

She declared that he would not have dedicated the time to write about them if they did not occupy an important place in his thoughts. She reinforced Mair's claim that in positioning women as sole guardians of future generations, Schopenhauer really credited them with one of life's most important tasks.

The idea that Schopenhauer did not pay women any compliments, consciously or unconsciously, was supported by Miss (later Dame) Louisa Lumsden. She declared that Schopenhauer's vitriolic rants left no room for a more creative interpretation. Responding directly to the affirmative side's argument about social evolution, Lumsden urged evaluating Schopenhauer's claims in light of his larger philosophy. Elsewhere, he discussed the "will to live" as a base human desire, and "this will is more or less strong in the masculine mind, but women have very little of it, and even their love for their offspring is merely instinctively evanescent [where] the father's love is at once more practical and more durable." In Schopenhauer's telling, women may propagate the species through reproduction, but they are not responsible for any social evolution described by Kidd. Lumsden's seconder, Miss Frobel, argued that there was no way that "Of Women" could be interpreted as an honor. She lamented that Schopenhauer would position men and women in oppositional roles instead of speaking about their common humanity.

The post-debate discussion targeted issues of clarification about Schopenhauer's philosophy and his inability to recognize women's potential beyond their physical capacities. Here, Mrs. Arnott offered the explanation that Schopenhauer was of Slavic descent, and suggested that Slavs tended to devalue women as a cultural practice. In the end, the audience members were not persuaded that "Of Women" could be more creatively interpreted as a compliment to women, and the vote resulted in a majority of five for the negative side with three

members declining to vote.¹⁴² To participate in this debate as a debater or as an audience member, it was necessary to have some knowledge of philosophical writings. If they had not heard of “Of Women” previously, the debate created a reason for members to seek it out and read it. The debate demonstrates how the LEDS was not just a gathering place to proverbially butt heads with opponents—it was also a place where Edinburgh women could sharpen their critical skills in refuting sexist discourses circulating in wider literary and public spheres.

Clearly, the “women of infinite variety” in the LEDS also debated on topics of infinite variety. At times, members had to determine the best practices for engaging in sometimes deeply personal and controversial topics about difference. Yet at other times, the topics referred to difference that did not intersect with their personal experiences, and so they had to invent strategies to make it meaningful to their peers. Identity and experience-based topics were likely to arise if we view the LEDS as a reflection of wider societal concerns at the times; they were absolutely unavoidable if we think about the LEDS as an argument culture seeking to nurture and nourish marginalized rhetors.

2.3 SUSTAINING PRACTICES

After seventy years of existence, the Ladies’ Edinburgh Debating Society voted to dissolve in October 1935. Sounding a common theme, the members proposed a special meeting due to an ongoing problem with finding speakers for the debates. The debating society that had sustained itself through negotiations and innovations for so many years had finally reached a stopping point. The decision to dissolve was no doubt influenced by the advanced age of Sarah Mair,

¹⁴² Minutes of the LEDS, March 6, 1920, MS 1730.

forever a driving and enthusiastic force in the Society, who would go on to live only six more years.¹⁴³ In November, the Society held a final meeting, where aware of the club's significance, the idea for a book detailing the history of the Society was proposed. The book, of course, was published by Lettice Milne Rae one year later. At Mair's request, proceeds from its publication were given to the Bruntsfield Hospital for Women and Children. Eighteen members were not content to stop debating, and so a spin-off "daughter society" was planned. The small funds left over in the LEDS's bank account was split between a donation for the daughter society, a gift for Isa Junes, the Mair family maid, and put toward publication of Milne Rae's book. Older members gave recollections about the Society, and Sarah Mair was thanked for all of her work over the years before the final meeting concluded.¹⁴⁴ To the very end, LEDS members were respectful of the older generations of debaters that had come before them, mindful of their own legacy in Scottish history, and forward-thinking about the future generations of women debaters to come. Though one conclusion may be that the dissolution of the Society suggests that the LEDS never quite solved their internal tensions in balancing difference and their ideal vision of debate, I believe that their various efforts are instructive as a model.

What can we take away from this study of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society? To return to the chapter's epigraph, Mair put it well when she noted that "growth—development—is the healthy condition of life: stagnation—obstinate resistance to change—is death."¹⁴⁵ In contrast to Tannen's sense of the static and monolithic argument culture, the LEDS offers an example of an actual argument culture that accrued and bore the imprint of different debaters, arguments, rhetorical styles, and club deliberations over time. In other words, having debate at the center of

¹⁴³ Minutes of the LEDS, October 9, 1935, MS 1733.

¹⁴⁴ Minutes of the LEDS, November 2, 1935, MS 1733.

¹⁴⁵ Mair, "Foreword," 7.

an organization does not guarantee the kind of ideal argument culture that Zarefsky describes but neither does it ensure the hostile terrain that Tannen fears. Instead, a vibrant and sustainable argument culture requires the ability to be self-reflexive and ever-open to change: to define, negotiate, and revisit the way that the group operates. In the case of the LEDS, the establishment of basic rules and regulations, meta-moments of debate about debate, constant efforts to accommodate different generations of arguers, and a dedication to perspectival diversity empowered members to have a stake in the argument culture they helped to create.

This chapter also points to the potential of studying historical argument cultures across time. By charting generations of arguers and ideas over the years, historians have a unique opportunity to gain greater insight on the inner workings of such groups. The LEDS returned to various logistical issues over the years; they also returned to various topic areas, mirroring societal shifts. While work in feminist rhetorical history can (and should) focus on individual rhetors that go on to achieve public attention, we can also learn from the collective practices of those debaters who contributed to sustaining forums for discussion and debate but whose names may not currently stand out in history books. For part of the LEDS history, Sarah Mair and her fellow members did not have access to formal university lectures in rhetoric. Yet they created and documented their own rhetorical innovations, and ought to be taken seriously as powerful theorists of nineteenth- and twentieth- century Scottish rhetoric. In studying the more mundane and quotidian decisions of groups like the LEDS, we can better understand rhetorical education and performance outside the rigid structures of top-down institutions. The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society negotiated a cooperative argument structure rooted in tradition yet open to change as women's societal roles and deliberative goals changed.

3.0 “YOUR GOWN IS LOVELY, BUT...,” MARIE HOCHMUTH NICHOLS AND THE SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE

“What better way of liberating the human spirit than by recalling examples of liberated men to study the thoughts and feelings which guided them?” – Marie Hochmuth Nichols¹

Recently, there has been renewed interest in “crafting a usable history” of speech communication.² William Keith argues persuasively for a history of speech pedagogy, drawn from both published and primary materials, that is more sustained than just “anecdotes and reminiscences.”³ While notable efforts have been made to write narrative histories of rhetorical criticism in the twentieth-century, my contention is that those histories remain largely untapped and underexplored. Rhetorical criticism is a core course in many undergraduate and graduate curricula today, but contemporary students know little of the people and practices that aided in its development. The dominant history of rhetorical criticism has remained largely unchanged over the years. It goes something like this: Herbert Wichelns published “The Literary Criticism of Oratory” in 1925, an essay that “sought to distinguish the study of oratory from literature, because, at the time, departments for the study of speech were being founded apart from

¹ Marie Hochmuth Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), 12.

² William Keith, “Crafting a Usable History,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 93, no.3 (August 2007): 345. This piece was part of a forum on the history of Communication Studies, edited by David Beard, which includes several approaches to disciplinary history as we approach the National Communication Association’s hundredth anniversary.

³ Keith, *Democracy as Discussion*, 12. Disciplinary histories with a focus on speech communication and rhetorical studies include Herman Cohen’s, *The History of Speech Communication*, Karl R. Wallace’s edited volume, *History of Speech Education*, Thomas W. Benson’s edited volume, *Speech Communication in the 20th Century* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985) and most recently, Pat J. Gehrke’s *The Ethics and Politics of Speech* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009).

English.”⁴ In subsequent decades, “traditional” rhetorical criticism is often described as having followed in this path, stressing description over evaluation and drawing on Aristotelian thinking about rhetoric to make sense of speeches in historical contexts. Marie Hochmuth Nichols’s essay, “Lincoln’s First Inaugural,” is often invoked as the quintessential example of this tradition of scholarship. Then Edwin Black came along and literally wrote the book on rhetorical criticism with the publication of his landmark work, *Rhetorical Criticism*, in 1965.⁵ Black systematically raked traditional criticism over the coals, coining the label “neo-Aristotelian” to describe the approach as rigid, narrow-sighted, and overly formulaic. Black’s influence in the history of rhetorical criticism is vast, with some claiming that with the publication of *Rhetorical Criticism*, “we woke up in 1965 to a new discipline.”⁶

In this chapter, I aid in the process of “craft[ing] a usable history” of rhetorical criticism in the twentieth-century United States. Rather than contradicting the dominant history described above, I complicate it by shifting focus to the contributions of Marie Hochmuth Nichols. Nichols was, undoubtedly, a pioneer woman in the field: she published widely in the top journals, was a tenured professor at a Big Ten university, the first female editor of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* in almost fifty years of its existence (1963-1965), and the president of the Speech Association of America (SAA) (1969).⁷ Over the years, she has been both celebrated and critiqued.⁸ Jim A. Kuyper and Andrew King included Marie Hochmuth Nichols as the sole

⁴ Lester C. Olson, “Rhetorical Criticism and Theory: Rhetorical Questions, Theoretical Fundamentalism, and the Dissolution of Judgment,” in *A Century of Transformation: Studies in Honor of the 100th Anniversary of the Eastern Communication Association*, ed. James W. Chesebro (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 41.

⁵ Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978). The first edition was published in 1965.

⁶ Thomas W. Benson, “Edwin Black: a Tribute,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 4, no.3 (Fall 2001): 536-7.

⁷ Predecessor to the National Communication Association (NCA).

⁸ Previously published work on Marie Hochmuth Nichols, has been mostly done by former students and colleagues. Jane Blankenship and Hermann G. Stelzner’s edited volume, *Rhetoric and Communication: Studies in the University of Illinois Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976) was a festschrift in honor of Karl

woman amongst the eleven figures featured in their volume, *Twentieth-Century Roots of Rhetorical Studies*.⁹ Considering that published contributions from women during the early to mid-twentieth century were few and far between, the inclusion of any woman in this esteemed group should be applauded. One wonders how she achieved and maintained that place in the tradition. Nichols was not keen to draw attention to herself as a lone female scholar. Despite this desire to be seen for her scholarship, male colleagues still publicly referred to her as “our menopausal scholar.”¹⁰ Because she has occupied the strange status of representing the best of an outdated tradition of scholarship—neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism—I worry that Nichols’s contributions have been prematurely dismissed or forgotten by younger generations of rhetorical critics. In terms of the disciplinary memory of rhetorical criticism, it has threatened to turn Nichols into a “lost lady of rhetoric,” when really we ought to be paying attention to the few women in an academic field traditionally dominated by white men.¹¹

Wallace, Marie Hochmuth Nichols, and Richard Murphy. Joseph Wenzel published a tribute and overview of her life and work in *Spectra* (June 1979): 3. Blankenship also prepared a piece for the National Communication Association Women’s Leaders Project, “Marie Hochmuth Nichols: President of the National Communication Association, 1969,” <http://www.natcom.org/index.asp?bid=1212> (accessed November 1, 2009), as well as two published articles in major journals on Nichols as a teacher, “The Song of the Open Road: Marie Hochmuth Nichols as Teacher,” *Communication Quarterly* 34, no.4 (Fall 1984): 419-425, and a retrospective of her leadership roles as SAA president, scholar, and teacher in “Marie Hochmuth Nichols (1908-1978): A Retrospective,” *Review of Communication* 4, no. ½ (January/April 2004): 75-85. Andrew King used his editorial space to discuss her in “Remembering Marie Hochmuth Nichols,” *The Southern Communication Journal* 59 no. 4 (Summer 1994): 362. John H. Patton’s chapter focuses on Nichols as an advocate of rationality, creating space for further studies of her scholarship in “Marie Hochmuth Nichols: Voice of Rationality in the Humane Tradition of Rhetoric and Criticism,” in *Twentieth Century Roots of Rhetorical Studies*, ed. Jim A. Kuyper and Andrew King (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 123-42. The Public Address division of the National Communication Association gives out an award in Nichols’s name to the top scholarship in public address each year.

⁹ Patton, “Marie Hochmuth Nichols,” 123-42. Patton invites other scholars to “look more carefully at some of her theoretical and critical works to see both the scope and depth of her approach” (133).

¹⁰ Blankenship, “Marie Hochmuth Nichols: President of the National Communication Association, 1969.”

¹¹ I borrow the phrase “lost ladies of rhetoric” from Jane Blankenship, interview by author, Chicago, IL, November 14, 2009. Disciplinary memory serves as subset of collective memory, in which a dominant narrative of our past drives future actions. As Marie Louise Stig Sorenson has pointed out in her research on the women in archaeology, women and gender politics are an important influence within the historical arc of academic disciplines, but those histories are also self-regulated. She argues for “attention to the processes (largely of selection) that create disciplinary closure and awareness of how knowledge claims are evaluated” in her “Rescue and Recovery: On Histories of Female Archaeologists,” in *Excavating Women: A History of Women in European Archaeology*, ed. Margarita Diaz-Andreu and Marie Louise Stig Sorenson (New York: Routledge, 1998), 55.

The “historical continuity of individual bodies and the records that index them [are] basic and fundamental resources to draw upon” as we write histories of the field.¹² This chapter brings to light previously obscured or overlooked texts that have the potential to both augment and supplement our understanding of Nichols’s approach to rhetorical criticism. I argue that we cannot fully understand Nichols as a scholar without first considering the critical sensibility and network of relationships formed through her participation in intercollegiate debate in the 1930’s. I first make the case for taking debate experience seriously as a force in the history of Communication Studies. I then put this perspective into practice by examining two thematic periods in Nichols’s intellectual travels—debate and rhetorical criticism. Drawing on key archival texts (pamphlets, narrowly circulated manuscripts, unpublished lectures, and correspondence) from both periods, I pose two questions: (1) did her debate experience lay the groundwork for a proto-theory of rhetorical criticism centered on the concept of excellence? and (2) how would Nichols’s debate experience have come into play had she responded publicly to Black’s characterization of her work? Ultimately, I argue for Nichols’s enduring place as a significant figure in the history of rhetorical studies, and by suggesting some of the rhetorical activities that may have influenced her worldview, enable others to make use of and/or critically interrogate her scholarly corpus with a better sense of the personal philosophy that motivated her work.

¹² Peter Simonson, “Writing Figures into the Field: William McPhee and the Parts Played by People in Our Histories of Media Research,” in *The History of Media and Communication Research: Contested Histories*, ed. David W. Park and Jefferson Pooley (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 302. Simonson is speaking in the context of media research, but as I shall demonstrate, the same can be said of way that activities and relationships drive key developments in rhetorical criticism.

3.1 DEBATE ROOTS IN THE FIELD OF COMMUNICATION

One site in which rhetorical excellence was both envisioned and cultivated was within intercollegiate debating societies of the twentieth-century. Many histories of the field, however, have marginalized its role, and those who have considered debate as an important force primarily focus on the “debates about debate,” or the essays about debate theory and practice written by faculty advisors to debate teams in the early issues of the field’s journals.¹³ Here, I argue for taking a more sustained look at debate history as communication history, offering three justifications for probing deeper into the archival documents that can lend insight into the nature of the activity.

First, debate was an entry point into the academic study of communication and the fostering of professional relationships. The list of rhetorical theorists and critics who developed speech communication into a distinct field of study in the early to mid-twentieth century that could refer to themselves as former debaters is too long to mention here. As previewed in Chapter One, debate and forensics competition provided “an early justification for specialized

¹³ Cohen and Gehrke do not posit debate as an activity of any great meaning for the development of the field. L. Leroy Cowperthwaite and A. Craig Baird’s chapter, “Intercollegiate Debating,” (in Wallace’s *Speech Education in America*, 259-76) chronicles the historical evolution of debate in the United States up until the time when the book was published, but does not tie it to the field of communication. Keith’s *Democracy as Discussion* posits “debates about debating” as a “locus for reimagining the civic role communication” (66). Jarrod Atchison and Edward Panetta draw attention to the importance of debate instruction as a justification for the specialized training of speech teachers, and the early issues in intercollegiate debate that contributed to disciplinary identity. See their “Intercollegiate Debate and Speech Communication: Historical Developments and Issues for the Future,” in *The Sage Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, 322. Michael D. Bartanen attempts to organize the history of forensics into three discrete periods in his paper, “The History of Intercollegiate Forensics in the United States: Some Organizing Questions” (paper presented at the National Communication Association annual convention, Chicago, IL, November 16, 2007) while Robert Littlefield argued for the necessity of archival research to recover forgotten elements of 20th century forensics education in “Gaining a Broader Focus: the Benefits of Archival Research Exploring Forensic Education and Activity in the 20th Century” (paper presented at the National Communication Association annual convention, Chicago, IL, November 16, 2007). Other scholarly articles that “take debate seriously” by focusing on the 1954 controversy over switch-sides debate include: Ronald Walter Greene and Darrin Hicks, “Lost Convictions: Debating Both Sides and the Ethical Fashioning of Liberal Citizens,” *Cultural Studies* 19 (2005): 100-126; and Eric English et al., “Debate as a Weapon of Mass Destruction,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (June 2007): 221-5.

training in speech communication” as a field of study distinct from English departments.¹⁴ Because debating societies often fell under the purview of newly created departments of speech, undergraduate student debaters, especially those who traveled for intercollegiate debate competitions, were coached by some of the major figures in speech communication. Practice sessions, debating society meetings, and long car rides to intercollegiate debate competitions provided ample time for mentorship beyond the typical student-professor relationship. Bright undergraduate debaters were encouraged to continue their relationship with the field as instructors of public speaking or debate coaches as they pursued graduate degrees. Scholars interested in tracing this history would be wise to consider debate participation as a way that people entered the field, and established enduring relationships, loyalties, and intellectual kinship with fellow debaters, competitors, and coaches, even after they dispersed to other institutions of higher learning.

Second, as an organizational structure, the debating society provides a site for institutional memory. The history of rhetorical activities are notoriously difficult to document, with most accounts relying on published materials such as public speaking manuals and books to chart the changes in speech pedagogy over the years.¹⁵ The figures we seek to study often do not have their own papers in archives, especially if we are attempting to piece together a sense of

¹⁴ Atchison and Panetta, “Intercollegiate Debate,” 322. They note that “intercollegiate debating brought some of the leading rhetorical critics of the 20th century to the discipline through their participation in debate. A. Craig Baird, Edwin Black, Celeste Condit, Douglas Ehninger, Thomas Goodnight, Michael McGee, Robert Newman, Marie Nichols, David Zarefsky and many more of our critics who came to the field through participation in debate” (322). For a sense of the centrality of forensics to the early history of speech communication, and possibilities for its future, see Matthew P. Brigham’s “Nostalgia or Hope: On the Relationship Between Competitive Debate and Speech Communication Departments- Past, Present, and Future” (paper presented at the National Communication Association convention, San Diego, CA, November 23, 2008).

¹⁵ While there are exceptions, to date, the majority intellectual histories of communication in the twentieth-century tend to about media and mass communication research rather than rhetorical studies. See, for example, John Durham Peters, “Institutional Opportunities for Intellectual History in Communication Studies,” in *The History of Media and Communication Research*, 143-162; John Durham Peters and Peter Simonson, *Mass Communication and American Social Thought: Key Texts 1919-1968* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004). For an intellectual history project that seeks to reclaim women’s contributions, see the documentary film, “Out of the Question: Women, Media, and the Art of Inquiry,” DVD, directed by Naomi MacCormack (2009).

their lives before they published widely as scholars.¹⁶ However, university archives often include information about the history of debating societies as an extracurricular university activity.

While the organization and comprehensiveness of the files may vary widely, archival materials about debating societies can provide information about the early rhetorical education of intellectuals in the field. Because debate has had to constantly justify its existence and funding to university administrations, debate coaches and students have been incentivized to make the activities of the debating societies visible. The collateral effect of this self-promotion is that researchers have access to information about debate topics, travel, and logistics in press releases, university and local newspaper articles, and in some cases, material items such as certificates and trophies that document successes. We can gain knowledge about the places that individual figures travelled, the other institutions they interacted with, and the topics that they studied. The historical study of debate and forensics also provides an angle for viewing institutional identity, because different debate teams worked to establish a unified organizational persona, especially during the early “debates about debate.” In event booklets or letters to other debating squads, teams sometimes spelled out their beliefs about how debate should be, and this lends insight into the dominant attitudes that prevailed as undergraduate debaters were socialized into the field of speech communication. We can thus learn about people and the practices that filled their lives.

Finally, the competitive nature of debate prepared debaters for later critical scholarship. In addition to the traditional skill set attributed to the activity, rhetorical education in debate included the exercises of debating preparation, such as the research process in response to a proposition, preparation of organized debate briefs, and feedback from peers and coaches in practice debates. This critical feedback continues from the actual deployment of arguments in

¹⁶ Marie Hochmuth Nichols does not have her own papers or student entry at the University Archives of the University of Pittsburgh. Her professional papers are deposited at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

debates. The public nature of the activity primed debaters for the presentation of their ideas in their published scholarship socializing them in the ways of criticism.

The next section provides a glimpse into Marie Hochmuth Nichols's experience as a debater and debate instructor, demonstrating the potential of each of these justifications for studying debate history to understand developments in the history of communication. In order to explore the role of debate participation in her later critical scholarship, I identify a constellation of terms that undergird Nichols' concept of rhetorical excellence: *conviction*, *criticism*, *curiosity*, *poise*, and *joy*. By considering how these terms manifest throughout her intellectual travels, contemporary scholars can more fully understand how Nichols viewed rhetorical criticism as a systematic search for excellence.

3.2 EXCELLENCE IN DEBATE

Marie Kathryn Hochmuth¹⁷ grew up in a Dunbar, Pennsylvania, a small town about an hour outside from Pittsburgh. In high school, she was a member of the student newspaper and a debater.¹⁸ It was during her junior year in 1925 that she first met Wayland Maxfield Parrish, the Director of Debate at the University of Pittsburgh, who was serving as a judge of a high school debate competition. Using a labor metaphor to describe her early relationship with Parrish, Nichols explained, "Professor Parrish had judged some high school debate colleagues of mine...

¹⁷ A note on nomenclature: Marie Hochmuth married Alan Nichols, faculty member and longtime director of the University of Southern California debate squad, in 1961. I will refer to her as Nichols throughout the piece because that is how she is most commonly referred to in recent publications. Citations of her work sometimes refer to her as Marie Hochmuth, Marie Hochmuth Nichols, Marie H. Nichols, and Marie Hochmuth (Nichols). Names like Hochmuth provide researchers research with a practical challenge: to think of all of the possible ways that the last name could be misspelled. In scholarly publications, as well as in university materials such as yearbooks and news articles, I found Hochmuth spelled *Hockmuth*, *Hochmeth*, *Hockmeth*. A web search may have missed these valuable documents. My bibliography includes all of her publications under Nichols for ease of reference.

¹⁸ Jane Blankenship, "Marie Hochmuth Nichols: President of the National Communication Association."

and found their membership ‘not in good standing.’ It seemed to me at the time that qualifications for membership in his unions were pretty high. But in 1928 I applied, and I am still trying to qualify.”¹⁹ Nichols attended the University of Pittsburgh during the Depression Era, graduating with Bachelor of Arts degrees in English and History in 1931.

Debate was taught by faculty in Public Speaking, a division that separated from the English department when Frank Hardy Lane came to the university in 1912.²⁰ The Women’s Debating Association formed in 1921 “for the purpose of affording women students an opportunity to engage in debate and to enter into intelligent discussion of current problems.”²¹ Wayland Parrish succeeded Lane as Director of Debate in 1923. He oversaw all debate operations, while Richard Murphy and Theresa Kahn (later Murphy), both members of the Public Speaking Staff, served as faculty advisors of the men’s and women’s societies. The teams attended separate debate events, but coordinated on-campus activities, including the end-of-the-year debate awards banquets.

Parrish had strong opinions about how to organize debate activities, and took certain measures to solidify the University of Pittsburgh’s team identity. He created a document called “The Pittsburgh Policy” to make the team’s perspectives on intercollegiate debate clear to potential competitors at other universities. The Pittsburgh Policy is a list of aims, demands, and ethical expectations that the team wished to make public. It can also be read as a guiding document for the cultivation of excellence through debate—a policy that team members would need to be aware of and consent to before representing the university.

¹⁹ Marie Hochmuth [Nichols], “Great Teachers of Speech: III. Wayland Maxfield Parrish, Teacher and Colleague,” *Speech Teacher* 4, no. 3 (September 1955): 159.

²⁰ Agnes Lynch Starrett, *Through One Hundred and Fifty Years: The University of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1937), 515- 16.

²¹ *The Owl: the Annual of the University of Pittsburgh, 1930-31* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1931), 146-7.

The vision laid out in the Pittsburgh Policy was “to give students instruction and practice in Public Discussion” in contrast to making the activity “a major sport, a gladiatorial combat, or an advertising agency.” Audience members for the events should not expect entertainment, but should be genuinely interested in the issues at hand, and see the forum as a space for “the molding of public opinion.”²² University of Pittsburgh-hosted events functioned as non-decision debates or used audience shift ballots in order to gauge how the audience was influenced by the debate. Audience members were asked to report their present opinion about the debate proposition before the debate by checking off yes, neutral, or no, and adding in any remarks they may have about the topic. After the debate, the audience was asked to register their opinions by indicating whether their views about the topic were affected by the arguments presented in the debate (as opposed to which team was better at debating). Rather than just voting for the affirmative or negative team, the audience members were able to choose between a range of options. The audience shift ballots acknowledged that audience members had nuanced opinions and that there were shades of gray in their reactions to debate performance—it did not suppose that they would be able to make a definitive, black-or-white decision.²³

The document also made clear their view that debate is an exercise in truth-finding and coming to judgment rather than winning: “each debater speaks on one side of a question only, and his choice of side is dictated by his own honest conviction after study of both sides. Whatever enthusiasm he feels is generated from the heat of conviction, not from a desire to win decisions.”²⁴ This privileging of *conviction* over competitive success was a hallmark feature of

²² Pamphlet, “The Pittsburgh Policy,” 1929-30, 90/8/3615, Box 1, Folder 3, William Pitt Debating Union Papers, University of Pittsburgh Archives, Pittsburgh, PA. Hereafter cited as William Pitt Debating Union Papers.

²³ Pamphlet, “Intercollegiate Debate between Pennsylvania State College and the University of Pittsburgh, March 9, 1928, Women’s debate, Proposition: Resolved: that Women’s Suffrage Has Been of Practical Benefit.” 90/8/3615, Box 1, Folder 8, William Pitt Debating Union Papers.

²⁴ Pamphlet, “The Pittsburgh Policy,” 1929-30, William Pitt Debating Union Papers.

the University of Pittsburgh's debating societies at the time, instilling in Nichols and her fellow debaters the idea that speech in public forums ought to reflect qualified opinions held by the speakers.

In order to join the debating societies at Pittsburgh, even veteran debaters had to demonstrate that their skills remained sharp to continue the tradition of excellence that Parrish expected:

We carry on the most extensive debating program in the United States and the University of Pittsburgh leads the colleges of the world, as well, in this activity. Our program requires a great many new candidates each year. For this reason, freshman candidates are most eligible. And as we do not wish to carry over any dead timber from year to year, all candidates, whether old or new, are required to try out for the squad each season. In this way old and new members alike have the same opportunities.”²⁵

Women's team tryouts required students to prepare five minute speeches on the debate propositions for the year.²⁶ Rather than selecting just a few students to be on the team, Theresa Kahn would select up to fifteen. This approach had two benefits: it allowed more students to have access to the benefits of rhetorical education through debate, and because no one had a star varsity debater position locked up at any given time, “discussions [were] more heated because more students [took] part, and competition [was] keen.”²⁷ By creating opportunities for competition, and ensuring that no debater would take their position on the team for granted, the activity socialized students into a culture of *criticism*.

Debate was indeed an exercise in critical thinking and making oneself open to criticism. Kahn describes the process of analyzing a debate proposition:

²⁵ “Debaters Will Start Season with Smoker,” *The Pitt Weekly* xxii, no. 2 (September 26, 1930): 2.

²⁶ “Debate Season Opens Oct. 16 for Coeds,” *The Pitt Weekly* xxii, no. 5 (October 10, 1930): 7.

²⁷ Theresa Kahn, “Organizing Debating Activities Within the School: Broadcast from the University of Pittsburgh Studio on December 19, 1929,” in *Debating: A Series of Six Radio Talks*, eds. Theresa Kahn and Richard Murphy (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Radio Publication, 1929), 52-3.

We will think about the question, prepare a bibliography, read widely, and talk to people who know something about the resolution. We will probably read the same articles, because I must know your arguments if I am to answer them, and you must know mine. We will take notes, preferably on small cards, so that when we organize our material later on we can sift and arrange them with like points together.²⁸

Debaters imagined their competition and anticipated arguments, although as Richard Murphy notes, they often met their toughest critics in their own team members: “A debater on tour may feel tempted to stretch a point or two; but if [s/]he is debating against students in his own school, students who will take [her/]him to the library after the debate and point out any distortion, [s/]he will develop a respect for accuracy.”²⁹ In other words, the critical spirit within the debating society, even amongst teammates, meant that debaters developed rigor in all of their intellectual pursuits.

University of Pittsburgh debaters participated in both extension debates in front of local civic and religious groups and intercollegiate debates with one or two other institutions in the late 1920’s and early 1930’s. Kahn believed that this mix of debate forums provided female college students with a unique opportunity:

Naturally, you would expect me to be prejudiced, but I really think that debating develops qualities in a student that might never find expression otherwise. To stand before a critical audience and reason out a reply to a point that has been contested certainly develops poise. A debator [sic] learns to be alert and accurate. To consider both sides of a question and weigh each thoroughly develops a keen reasoning ability.”³⁰

Kahn believed that debate would allow students to gain poise in front of an audience, to approach a speaking situation with grace and precision. *Poise*, as an element in the cultivation of

²⁸ Kahn, “Analyzing the Proposition: Broadcast from the University of Pittsburgh Studio on December 5, 1929,” in *Debating*, 37.

²⁹ Richard Murphy, “The Etiquette of Argument: Rules and Ethics of Debating: Broadcast from the University of Pittsburgh Studio on November 14, 1929,” in *Debating*, 23.

³⁰ “Former Coed in Many Activities Tells Why She Likes Debating,” *Pitt Weekly* xxii, no. 9 (November 14, 1930): 3.

excellence that Nichols learned during her time at the University of Pittsburgh, can be defined as the attainment of balance and ease with one's rhetorical performance. Not only does the word poise have a quotidian sense that invokes the equilibrium of bodily comportment, but it also has etymological roots in the process of weighing ideas.

Similarly, participation in debate had the potential to instill an intellectual *curiosity* in students:

Debate stimulates an intellectual curiosity that is valuable not only in debating but in outside work and in conversation. Here at Pitt, our policy of extension and collegiate debates offers the girl outside contacts with other girls whose interests are similar. Every girl who has debated with a team from another college has an experience worth remembering. If women are to take an active part in community life, then they should be able to talk intelligently on political and economic issues. Debating gives them this ability to think constructively.³¹

The activity provided an outlet for inquisitive women students of the thirties because it provided the imperative to study current events, politics, and economics (rather than, say, an expectation to limit women's collegiate study to home economics). Curiosity was roused in the topics selected for debate, and ideas were honed within the structure of debate competition, which provided students with opportunities for interaction with interlocutors who had similar intellectual interests. Note that in Kahn's view, the intellectual curiosity stimulated by debating was not meant to be limited to the activity; there was a view that women would take their experience, training, and knowledge about current affairs, politics, and economics with them when they left college.

During the 1929-1930 school year, Nichols debated on the affirmative side of two propositions: "Resolved, that chain stores are detrimental to the best interests of the American public," and "Resolved, that a liberal arts college education should be restricted to those of

³¹ "Former Coed," 3.

special ability.”³² Considering that debaters were expected to defend their convictions at this time, Nichols found the affirmative sides of these propositions most compelling. The notion inherent in the education proposition, that standards of excellence should be maintained in higher education, is a concern that persisted throughout Nichols’s career, a topic that became a central issue in the later years of her life.³³ During the 1929-1930 season, Nichols debated in intercollegiate events with the University of Cincinnati, Cornell University, Oberlin College, and New York University. She participated in seven extension debates hosted by high schools, churches, and various branches of the League of Women Voters in western Pennsylvania.³⁴ The final Women’s Debating Association event of the year was a debate aired on an evening broadcast of KDKA, the local radio station. Nichols again defended the affirmative side on the education proposition.³⁵

During her senior year, Nichols was elected president of the Women’s Debating Association after teammate Edith Hirsch was forced to resign due to “excess activities points.”³⁶ Initially, propositions for the year were: “Resolved, that the Eighteenth amendment should be repealed and the control of liquor traffic be placed in the hands of state legislatures” and “Resolved, that the emergence of married women into gainful occupations has been to the best interests of society.”³⁷ However, these propositions were abandoned in favor of, “Resolved, That

³²Pamphlet, “Debating Associations Annual Banquet, May 8, 1930,” 90/8/36/5 Box 1, Folder 7, William Pitt Debating Union.

³³ See Marie H. Nichols, “When You Set Out for Ithaka...” *Central States Speech Journal* 28, no. 3 (Fall 1977): 145-56 and “Song of the Open Road” (commencement address, Drury College, St. Louis, MO, August 12, 1978), Marie H. Nichols Papers, Series 15/23/25-1, Box 1, Folder 1, University of Illinois Archives, Archival Research Center, Urbana, IL. Hereafter cited as Nichols Papers. Hochmuth Nichols regularly lectured on the topic, and kept a large file of source materials on the theory and practice of education.

³⁴ Pamphlet, “Debating Associations,” May 8, 1930.

³⁵ “Women’s Final Debate to Be Broadcast Over KDKA,” *The Pitt Weekly* xxi, no. 26 (April 4, 1930): 5.

³⁶ “Install Coed Debate Head,” *The Pitt Weekly* xxii, no. 7 (October 31, 1930): 3.

³⁷ Pamphlet, “Annual Banquet of the University of Pittsburgh Debating Associations, Schenley Hotel, Saturday, May Ninth, Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-One,” 90/8/36/5 Box 1, Folder 7, William Pitt Debating Union Papers.

the several states should enact legislation providing for compulsory unemployment insurance,” because of its importance given the mass unemployment that plagued the nation at the time.³⁸

The issue of unemployment was never far from the minds of the debaters. As Helen Smith Schlenke put it,

During the depression years we had very little money. Most of the debaters were on scholarship—that's the only way they could attend school. And so we had to work very hard at our studies to remain in school. We saw a world, you must remember, that was pretty grim— full of joblessness, poverty. In the early '30s we went to college to get as much out of college as possible to start a career. Debate was an important part of our college education and student drive was in evidence among the debaters.³⁹

The need to discuss the pressing issues of the time motivated students to research, and hastened their wish to reach larger audiences. Noting that “the turnouts for home debates [had] been discouraging in the past,” the debate team hoped “that since the question this year is of such current interest, there [would] be a greater response on the part of the students.”⁴⁰

Against this backdrop, the Women’s Debating Association made other changes. In 1930, they adopted the Oregon plan of debating. This style required three person teams on both sides of the proposition. The first debater would present the constructive arguments of her team, the second debater would cross-examine her opponents, and the final team member would summarize their arguments.⁴¹ Nichols’s experience and leadership position in the association meant that she often was a part of the three-person teams who represented the University of Pittsburgh during this time. She participated in five extension debates and traveled on both the “western trip” to Ohio Wesleyan University and Wittenberg College and the “eastern trip” to

³⁸ “Install Coed Debate Head,” *The Pitt Weekly* xxii, no. 7 (October 31, 1930): 3. Hochmuth did debate the married women proposition once during the year, on the negative side of the proposition.

³⁹ Quoted in Valerie Markess, “Debaters Past and Present— Driven to Succeed,” *Pitt* 36, no. 2 (November 1981): 23.

⁴⁰ “Coeds Debate Job Question,” *The Pitt Weekly* xxii, no 10. (November 21, 1930): 3.

⁴¹ “Coed Debaters Turn Lawyers,” *Pitt Weekly* xxi no. 6 (January 17, 1930): 1. See also John Gray, “The Oregon Plan of Debating,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 12 (1926): 175-80.

Cornell University, Swarthmore College, New York University, Bucknell University, and the Pennsylvania State University.

At Wittenberg, Nichols and her two teammates, Genevieve Blatt and Marjorie Hanson, debated an all-male team for the first time in the women's team's history.⁴² Blatt, Hochmuth Nichols's frequent debate partner, eventually went on to a successful career in law and politics. She came to be known as the "First Lady of Pennsylvania Politics," was the first woman to hold statewide office in Pennsylvania, ran for the United States Senate, and as a Commonwealth judge, made a landmark opinion which "ruled that high school sports teams in Pennsylvania could no longer discriminate on the basis of gender."⁴³ Reminiscing about her experience at the University of Pittsburgh, Blatt made clear the fundamental role that debate participation played:

It has been a long time since I was a Pitt Debater, but I have never forgotten the excellent training which I received then, and I have always been grateful to the University for the opportunities it provided me for a thoroughly enjoyable learning experience. I also spent a year as Coach for the Women Debaters, so I had an additional opportunity to learn in that capacity. And, all in all, I would not want to trade those years as a Debater and as a Debate Coach for any equivalent period of time I have spent elsewhere and at other times of my life doing other things!⁴⁴

Although we have no equivalent testimony from Nichols, one can imagine how exciting membership on the debate team, and the travel opportunities it afforded, would have been for a western Pennsylvania woman of the time.⁴⁵ As Blankenship notes, "in addition to learning about

⁴² "Coeds to Debate in Intercollegiate Tilt," *Pitt Weekly* xxii, no. 18 (February 6, 1931): 1

⁴³ Pennsylvania State Archives, "Genevieve Blatt Papers," <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/mg/mg283.htm> (accessed November 1, 2009).

⁴⁴ Genevieve Blatt to Thomas Kane, Stephen Marzen, and Michael Alberty, May 13, 1981, in the author's possession. Blatt sent this letter congratulating Kane and the debaters after they won the 1981 National Debate Tournament.

⁴⁵ On the theme of travel, it is interesting to note that at his retirement ceremony, Wayland Parrish was remembered by both Hochmuth and Harold Ruttenberg (Pitt, Class of '35) for often reciting his favorite poem, "The Listeners" by Walter De la Mare, which features a character called "the Traveller." See Hochmuth, "Great Teachers of Speech," 159 and Harold J. Ruttenberg, "Public Speaking and Public Affairs," (Remarks in Honor of Wayland Maxfield Parrish at the Annual convention of the Speech Association of America, Conrad Hilton Hotel, Chicago, IL (December 28, 1954).

argument, for many, particularly those who were daughters and sons of blue collar parents, debating allowed them to travel.”⁴⁶ During Nichols’s tenure at Pitt, two members of the Men’s Debating Association, C.J. Phillips and Elliott Finkel, traveled with Parrish on a three week tour of the south. Likely aided by Phillips’ editorship of the University of Pittsburgh newspaper, *The Pitt Weekly*, reports from the tour were documented in a three part feature. In each installment, the adventures of the tour were dramatized with reports from “the cast”: Prof. W.M. Parrish as “The Kernel,” Elliott Finkel as “The Pistol City Flash,” and C.J. Phillips as “Ten Yards Johnny.” Their reports provided details about their travels, the debates, and their encounters with “fair southern lassies.”⁴⁷ While the women’s trips were not quite as extensive, after the eastern trip, an article ran in *The Pitt Weekly* proclaiming:

Resolved, that we adopt a policy of more extensive debate trips in the future.”
These are the sentiments of the members of the women’s debate team which has just returned from a long eastern trip, and it is a safe wager that it would not be easy to find an enthusiastic negative team to debate the question.⁴⁸

Travel continued to be a theme at the 1931 annual banquet, coordinated by both the men’s and women’s associations. A flyer promoting the event spoofed a booking agency, the “Debate Booking Bureau,” and the “Forensics Tours, Inc.” For the Debate Booking Bureau, the flyer offered its unique services, promising entertaining debates on demand, and advertising the skills that debate experience offered:

YOU FIND the audience
GET THEM ALL together, for the program
Without

⁴⁶ Blankenship, “Marie Hochmuth Nichols: President of the National Communication Association.”

⁴⁷ C.J. Phillips, “Pitt Debaters Shake Kentucky Cornfields for Georgia Peaches on Whirlwind Southern Trip,” *The Pitt Weekly* xxi, no. 18 (February 5, 1930): 2; C.J. Phillips, “Adventurous Debating Trio Reports Actions in Land of Caballeros by Airmail Message,” *The Pitt Weekly* xxi, no. 19 (February 14, 1930): 2; C.J. Phillips, “Debaters Bring Home May Victories; Losses Sustained Only to Fair Southern Lassies,” *The Pitt Weekly* xxi, no. 2 (February 21, 1930): 2.

⁴⁸ Gladys Pyle, “Coeds Praise Debate Trips,” *The Pitt Weekly* xxii, no. 25 (March 27, 1931): 1.

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CONSULT THE PITT PUBLIC SPEAKING STAFF TO-DAY Specialists in Debate

The debaters were prepared to think on their feet, to debate any topic, in front of any audience at a moment's notice. Lampooning the more exaggerated claims of public speaking education, the debaters brought humor to their craft.

The Forensics Tours, Inc. offered "a peripatetic course, giving personally conducted instruction in the art of travel." Debate afforded students with opportunities to travel, but it also provided learning-in-motion, a chance to discuss rhetorical skills and topics of the day while en route to intercollegiate debate events. In addition to being able to "see the world from a Pullman," this parody claimed to teach recruits the tongue-in-cheek practical skills learned from debate travel:

How to get into an upper birth
How to get a dollar's worth from a dime tip
How to meet college presidents
How to pack evidence

How to keep fresh on 2 hours sleep
What to do with club towels
How to dress in 2 minutes flat

Bookings Now For next Year's Tours de Luxe⁴⁹

The flyer, which was likely only circulated to members of the debate team who would be attending the annual banquet, showcases some of the skills claimed by debaters of the time, but also implies that despite all the hard work it involved, debate was also an activity that could be enjoyable. According to Smith Schlenke, "it was rigorous. It was difficult. But debate provided a tremendous sense of accomplishment, built cohesive friendships...and it was so much fun."⁵⁰ By refiguring debaters as travelers, the document suggested that the students were provided with new experiences, and there was a social element of debate training. The 1931 banquet marked the end of Nichols's career as a debater. She was awarded \$15.00 as the top female debater of the year, and was inducted into Delta Sigma Rho, the national honorary forensics society, alongside two male debaters, Jess Spirer and Edward T. Crowder.⁵¹

Like many women of the time, Nichols sought social work to aid the community during the tough Depression era years. After graduating from the University of Pittsburgh, she went to work for the Allegheny County Emergency Relief Association as a field worker.⁵² The association provided assistance to the unemployed sick and poor. They concentrated on

⁴⁹Pamphlet, "Combined Men's and Women's Forensics Show." 90/8/36/5 Box 1, Folder 7, William Pitt Debating Union Papers.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Markess, 23.

⁵¹ *Pitt Weekly* xxii, no. 32 (May 15, 1931):1. Spirer went on to become a distinguished clinical psychologist, and Crowder worked as a statistical officer at the United States Bureau of the Budget.

⁵² Blankenship, "Marie Hochmuth Nichols: President of the National Communication Association."

placement short-term jobs of practical benefit to the community, such as training unemployed men to create home gardens.⁵³

Later, Nichols returned to the University of Pittsburgh for a master's degree in speech. As she was finishing her degree program, she served as a faculty advisor alongside her former coach, Theresa Kahn, for the Women's Debating Association.⁵⁴ Wayland Parrish directed her master's thesis: "Richard Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric*, Part III, a Critical Edition."⁵⁵ This project was a continuation of Parrish's own study on Parts I and II, which, as Nichols recalls, was a tough act to follow: "I shan't go into all the details of his making me trace 132 allusions for an appendix, after I thought I had finished the greatest study on Whately—since his own, that is."⁵⁶ By the time that she received her master's degree in 1936, she had, as a debater and a debate instructor, learned and internalized five elements of excellence critical to rhetorical performance. As a practitioner, she learned about the need for *conviction*, *criticism*, *curiosity*, *poise*, and *joy* as she prepared for and took part in debates. As an instructor, she had to learn how to translate those elements into action for her students. Nichols put her speech and debate skills to work when she taught courses and coached debate at Mount Mercy College, an all-women's college in Pittsburgh (now Carlow University), from 1935 to 1938.

As a faculty member in the speech department, Nichols taught a class on radio continuity and effectiveness,⁵⁷ and was an active participant in groups such as the Pennsylvania Forensics

⁵³ See, for example, McCann's Garden Shops advertisement, "Pittsburgh... This is Your Chance to Help the Unemployed," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (April 1, 1931): 4. For more on the Allegheny County Emergency Relief Association, see Dorothy M. Brown and Elizabeth McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 166.

⁵⁴ *The Owl: the Annual of the University of Pittsburgh, 1935-36* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1936), 130.

⁵⁵ Hochmuth [Nichols], Thesis, "Richard Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric*, Part III, a Critical Edition," 1936, Nichols Papers, Series 15/23/25-1, Box 1, Folder 7: Master's Thesis on Whately.

⁵⁶ Hochmuth, "Great Teachers of Speech," 160.

⁵⁷ "Offer New Course at Mount Mercy," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (January 16, 1939): 14.

Association, the Western Pennsylvania Speech Council, and the National Association of Teachers of Speech. As a debate coach, she carried on her dedication to excellence in education, pushing to challenge students and reward hard work. She worked to reform debate in several areas, including the proposition subject areas, which thought were “dull and adhere slavishly to newspaper headlines,” and the announcement of the debate topic, which she believed should be announced in the spring rather than the fall to allow students to work on debate throughout the summer.⁵⁸

Central to Nichols’s agenda of debate reform, was her mission to address the status of women debaters. She published a piece called “Your Gown is Lovely, but...” in the *Bulletin of the Debating Association of Pennsylvania Colleges*.⁵⁹ Not only does Nichols outline her notion of the value of being able to take *criticism* as an element of excellence in debate in the article, but she also showcases her view of gender and education. Because she so rarely spoke about gender issues in academia or the ways that she navigated masculine institutions, “Your Gown is Lovely, but...” is a rare text that identifies a problem in a speech activity and prescribes a solution for women debaters and their coaches. As her first published article, it suggests the qualities of excellent rhetorical performance that laid the groundwork for a proto-theory of rhetorical criticism in her later scholarship.

“Gentlemen, you may light your pipes and sit back smugly for the duration of this article, if you choose. Frankly, it is not intended for you.” Marie Hochmuth Nichols’s article begins with a jolt: debate coaches have put up with lackluster women debaters for far too long, failing to provide adequate critique either because they do not consider them worthy their time, or fear

⁵⁸ “Miss Hochmuth Convention Speaker,” *The McAuleyan* (April 1938): 2.

⁵⁹ Hochmuth [Nichols], “Your Gown is Lovely, but...” *Bulletin of the Debating Association of Pennsylvania Colleges* no. 12 (January 16, 1939): 1-4. References hereafter are from the five page typewritten manuscript of the article found in the Nichols Papers, 15/23/25-1, Box 1, File 1.

retribution. Whatever their reasons, Nichols assumes that the male debate coaches of Pennsylvania colleges share common feelings about having to judge mediocre women debaters, that “a strong man must have often felt like fleeing in desperation.”⁶⁰

Nichols bemoans what she sees as harbingers of women’s special treatment in debate: the selection of a Pi Kappa Delta debate question for women, and the publication of a public speaking textbook for women. The book, Jasper Vanderbilt Garland’s *Public Speaking for Women*, aimed to help women speak well and properly just as they like to “dress well and properly.”⁶¹ It features speech instruction, exemplary speeches by women, and even guidelines for running a discussion meeting. No mention is made of debate meetings, despite Garland’s position as Director of Debate at Colgate University. The idea that women deserve special treatment, Nichols notes, is in sync with the view that women are inherently limited in what they can and cannot do (excepting, she says, “the very unusual women.”) Not wanting to be seen as too radical, she acknowledges that women are essentially different from men, but questions how those differences manifest in rhetorical skill, insisting that “it remains to be proved that the best woman debater is not as good as the best man debater.” Nichols suggests that Dorothy Thompson, *Time Magazine*’s most influential woman of the year after Eleanor Roosevelt in 1939, would never have been told that she could not debate. “I shall grant that Dorothy Thompson is an exception, and grant that there are far fewer excellent women debaters than there are excellent men debaters,” she says, “but I insist that there are far fewer than there ought to be, or need to be.”⁶² Here, Nichols argues against female tokenism, wanting to expand the possibilities of excellence in debate to a wider circle of women beyond the chosen few who have

⁶⁰ Hochmuth [Nichols], “Your Gown,” 1.

⁶¹ Jasper Vanderbilt Garland, *Public Speaking for Women* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1938), xi.

⁶² Hochmuth [Nichols], “Your Gown,” 2.

somehow managed to rise to the top of an activity seemingly more hospitable to male debaters. She seeks to democratize debate, not by lowering standards of excellence to accommodate difference, but by suggesting a regimen that women debaters and their allies can pursue.

Nichols isolates five causes contributing to women's inferior debate performance.

Echoing her dissatisfaction with a "women's debate question," the first cause is an unwillingness to study the tough subjects:

Women, especially in the women's colleges, do not elect to study economics or political science, and only recently have they shown any interest in social studies. The announcement of a debate question involving a knowledge of economics or political science finds them wanting, and they throw up their hands in despair...let her arm herself with a few good basic texts and make up for some of her weaknesses. The worst thing she can do, as far as her own morale is concerned, is put off coming to grips with difficult problems.⁶³

This sentiment echoes Nichols's conviction that only students of special ability should be admitted to universities when she was a debater. Higher education and research offer an opportunity to make up for weaknesses in educational background. Consider this point as a personal philosophy that carries over to Nichols's later scholarship: she saw it as absolutely necessary for rhetorical critics to harbor an intellectual curiosity and do the intellectual heavy lifting to read about history, politics, and economics as part of their craft. Debate provided her with the ability to talk about these issues in a public forum in college and she saw herself as rising to meet this challenge in all phases of her own life.

As the title "Your Gown is Lovely, but..." suggests, Nichols also worries that some students have interpreted the function of the debating society as a social fraternity rather than an academic activity. She points to the extraordinary effort that some women debaters expend in preparing the stage for a debate—more effort, she fears, than goes into the preparation of their arguments: "there are ferns and flowers; there is music which is a nuisance during

⁶³ Hochmuth [Nichols], "Your Gown," 2.

intermission...; and there are academic robes or formal gowns.”⁶⁴ She may have inherited her view from Richard Murphy, who professed that “a glee club singing 'Who is Sylvia?' raises questions which are irrelevant to discussion.”⁶⁵ Nichols recognized the need for poise and grace in debate, a lesson that Theresa Kahn had instilled in her as a debater. But poise represented a need for equilibrium in argumentation, not necessarily in the selection of a formal gown. Debate should take precedence over adornment, and if one cannot balance the two, debate must be the thing that stays.

The next reason for mediocre debating is the misguided sense that in order to be true women, debaters must be weak in their rhetorical performances. Nichols demonstrates her passion for debate and the airing of perspectives, stating, “no strong assertion of an honest opinion ever detracted from the dignity or charm of a woman, and to translate dignity into terms of a weak-kneed approach to debate work is to rob debate of the fire that really makes for good debating.”⁶⁶ Nichols creates an alternative vision of what femininity can be, offering readers of her article a way to transform any conflicted feelings they may have about being assertive speakers into rhetorical excellence. She does not give women debaters license to “rant and thunder on the debate platform,” perhaps recalling Kahn’s comparison of young debaters in rebuttal to Plato’s comment about young philosophers: they are “like puppy dogs who delight to tear and pull at all who come near them.”⁶⁷

A fourth cause is that “women often appear to be just about ready to take a dose of some foul tasting medicine when they appear on the debate platform.” Nichols believes that one cannot have perfection without passion; she considers “enthusiasm, or love for debate, to be of utmost

⁶⁴ Hochmuth [Nichols], “Your Gown,” 3.

⁶⁵ Murphy, “The Etiquette of Argument,” 20.

⁶⁶ Hochmuth [Nichols], “Your Gown,” 3.

⁶⁷ Hochmuth [Nichols], “Your Gown,” 3; Kahn, “Analyzing the Proposition,” 43.

importance to good debating.”⁶⁸ She suspects that some women debaters may be in the activity for its prestige rather than love of the activity.

The final contributing factor to inferior debating by women shifts the blame from the debaters to their coaches. Debate coaches deserve some fault for unsupportive practices, which fall into two categories: inadequate instruction and treating women debaters with kid gloves. Nichols is more sympathetic to those coaches who, because of their lack of knowledge about debate, or lack of time, are unable to help their debaters. She is much less tolerant, however, of coaches who insist on “nursing” their debaters through a variety of practices, including writing their speeches, and not permitting them to debate “non-cultural” topics: “women would probably be very comfortable if they were never called upon to do anything for themselves after they leave college... But this is not the case, and why colleges should continue to treat women as if they were living in the eighteenth century is a mystery.”⁶⁹ Coaches should do what they can to foster an intellectual curiosity in their debaters, and this includes disavowing a double standard that prevents women from debating non-cultural topics.

Although she identified five obstacles to the ability of women to attain excellence in debate, Nichols is not without hope that they will be able to rise above mediocrity. Her ultimate recommendation for debaters, especially those at women’s colleges, is to recognize the value of public criticism. Reminiscent of Hannah Arendt’s articulation of excellence as the result of public activities that require the presence and formality of one’s peers, Nichols’s notion of excellence requires publicity, and intercollegiate debate provides a formal venue for structured criticism:

⁶⁸ Hochmuth [Nichols], “Your Gown,” 4.

⁶⁹ Hochmuth [Nichols], “Your Gown,” 4-5.

[W]omen need audiences that will heckle instead of praise; they need to be taught to accept criticism without giving way to tears; they need to come in contact with really good debating more often they do...those who cannot bear the brunt should make way for those who can. Hard work is tiring; mental energy is painful; criticism is discouraging, but all of these things are essential to the woman debater who is to attain excellence.⁷⁰

The process of learning the flaws in arguments, and working to make arguments better, is an essential lesson in understanding how criticism can lead to excellence. Nichols's recommendations to women debaters were the result of a view of rhetorical performance honed over many years as a debater and debate instructor. This little-known article should be viewed as an admonishment to women debaters, but also as an attempt to pass on lessons that she had learned on how to survive and excel in an activity dominated by men. It provides unique insight into Nichols's attitudes toward the activity, other women in debate, and the vision she developed for herself as a woman in academia. Although she did not continue to work with debate teams in her later academic career, the elements of excellence that she expressed in "Your Gown is Lovely...but" would later come to shape her approach to rhetorical criticism.

3.3 EXCELLENCE IN CRITICISM

As Marie Hochmuth Nichols moved into her next stage of life as a rhetorical critic, the lessons of her debate experience in Pittsburgh were not far from her mind. Relationships formed when she was a debater and debate coach in Pittsburgh continued to provide her with opportunities. She first met Henry Lee Ewbank, Director of Debate and her eventual dissertation advisor at the University of Wisconsin, when she arranged for him to be a guest speaker at the Delta Sigma

⁷⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 48-9; Hochmuth [Nichols], "Your Gown," 5.

Rho Alumni dinner at the Pennsylvania Teacher's Association.⁷¹ Still at Mount Mercy College at the time, Nichols explains that she was "at the time, dimly considering the alternatives of staying in my teaching position or striking out for work on a doctorate degree."⁷² She elected to start graduate work at Wisconsin the next summer, and found in Ewbank an advocate and advisor for life. In addition to his wise counsel, Ewbank helped with Nichols's material needs: "by some extraordinary method he arranged for my collaboration with him on a manual for an extension course in public speaking which someone paid for, my part being used to send me to Widener Library at Harvard to complete my investigation for a dissertation."⁷³ While at Wisconsin, she took courses such as American Rhetoric, Speech Education, Speech Disorders, American Literature, and Emerson and His Circle.⁷⁴ Nichols defended her dissertation, "William Ellery Channing, DD: A Study in Public Address," in 1945, and joined the faculty at the University of Illinois full-time, where she had worked in previous summers.

At Illinois, her academic home through her death in 1978, Nichols reunited with her former debate mentors, Richard Murphy, Theresa (Kahn) Murphy, and Wayland Parrish. Murphy, who had been hired at the University of Colorado in the interim, was a scholar of American and British rhetoric, specializing in free speech topics. He continued to publish about forensics long into his career, including taking part in a heated scholarly debate about the ethics of debating both sides of a topic, in which he continued to support the perspective that debaters should defend their convictions, as laid out in "The Pittsburgh Policy" during the 1920's and

⁷¹ "Miss Hochmuth Directs Plans for Reunion," *The McAuleyan* (May-June 1938): 8.

⁷² Hochmuth [Nichols], "Henry Lee Ewbank: Scholar and Teacher," (eulogy, 1961): 1 in Nichols Papers, Box 1, Folder 35: Ewbank Eulogy and correspondence, 1961-2.

⁷³ Hochmuth [Nichols], "Henry Lee Ewbank," 10.

⁷⁴ In Nichols Papers, Box 1, Folders 12, 13, 14, 19, 20.

30's.⁷⁵ Theresa [Kahn] Murphy was a Dickens scholar who published in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*.⁷⁶ Although she did not hold a faculty position at Illinois, she traveled to academic conventions and regularly chatted with students, especially female graduate students, who saw her not only as a "motherly figure" who they could talk to about issues that they couldn't talk about with their professors, but an "intellectually interesting" person who knew a lot about rhetoric.⁷⁷

Wayland Maxfield Parrish left the University of Pittsburgh for the University of Illinois in 1936. He had given his word about a contract for an instructor in the program at Pittsburgh, and when the university administration refused to renew it, he resigned.⁷⁸ This was not, incidentally, the first time that the University of Pittsburgh administration had confronted problems with speech professors. Herbert Wichelns was hired in the department in the early 1920's, and even shared an office with Parrish. However, he tangled with the university president over a non-smoking policy on campus, and left the next year.⁷⁹ As Wichelns said in a tribute to Parrish: "...after just one year there finding that the smog of Pittsburgh couldn't really be pierced even by our composite brilliance, I withdrew, leaving the field to Max."⁸⁰ As a colleague at Illinois, Parrish continued to require the excellence he had instilled in Nichols as a debater under the Pittsburgh Policy: "make no mistake about it; he still calls me down for writing sentences that move across a page like freight cars about to go off the track."⁸¹

⁷⁵ See Richard Murphy, "The Ethics of Debating Both Sides," *Speech Teacher* 6, no.1 (January 1957): 1-9 and "The Ethics of Debating Both Sides II," *Speech Teacher* 7, no. 3 (September 1963): 242-7.

⁷⁶ Theresa Murphy and Richard Murphy, "Charles Dickens as Professional Reader," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 33, no.3 (October 1947):299-308; Theresa Murphy, "Interpretation in the Dickens Period," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 41, no.3 (October 1955): 243-250.

⁷⁷ Jane Blankenship, interview by author, Chicago, IL, November 14, 2009.

⁷⁸ Richard Murphy, "Colleague and Counselor," *Speech Teacher* 4, no. 3 (September 1955): 163.

⁷⁹ Ray Howes, "Herbert Wichelns and the Study of Rhetoric," *Cornell Alumni News* (January 1970): 13.

⁸⁰ Herbert A. Wichelns, "Colleague and Scholar," *Speech Teacher* 4, no. 3 (September 1955): 163.

⁸¹ Hochmuth [Nichols], "Great Teachers of Speech," 160.

During the 1940's and 1950's, Nichols established herself as a major figure in speech communication. She published articles on Phillip Brooks, William Ellery Channing, Henry Wallace, Kenneth Burke, and I.A. Richards in the field's flagship journal, the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. In 1954, she co-edited a book of great American speeches with Parrish.⁸² Striking out to develop her own view of excellent rhetorical criticism, in 1955, Nichols edited the final volume of *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*, which included her much-cited introduction chapter, "The Criticism of Rhetoric."⁸³ The first two volumes had been edited by W. Norwood Brigrance of Wabash College in 1943. Joseph Wenzel remembers taking a class with her at Illinois shortly after the third volume had been published. Remarking on her mastery of the subject material, he notes, "she was uniquely qualified to teach this class: she knew the history, she knew the speakers and speeches, and she had a method that was well designed to lead students into their first experience with rhetorical criticism."⁸⁴

The defining characteristic of Nichols's approach to rhetorical criticism was her belief that research should be grounded in the rational study of humane discourse. She viewed rhetoric as the "theory and the practice of the verbal mode of presenting judgment and choice, knowledge and feeling,"⁸⁵ pairing it with John Dewey's definition of criticism as "judgment engaged in discriminating among values."⁸⁶ When done correctly, criticism unveils true excellence, studying individuals "in their moments of decision, exercising a judgment, moral, rational, imaginative, and in the finest tradition of the human spirit."⁸⁷ Nichols maintained optimism in the ability to

⁸² Wayland Maxfield Parrish and Marie Hochmuth, *American Speeches* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1954).

⁸³ Marie Kathryn Hochmuth [Nichols], *A History and Criticism of American Public Address Volume III* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1955).

⁸⁴ Joseph Wenzel, e-mail message to author, September 21, 2009.

⁸⁵ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 7.

⁸⁶ Hochmuth [Nichols], *A History*, 4.

⁸⁷ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 10.

learn by example, to observe and emulate excellence in humanity, and to judge and discern evil. This faith in the value of criticism is reminiscent of Parrish's insistence on the need for debaters to defend their honest convictions, and Kahn's description of the goals of debate as a "method of progressing toward the truth of a question through presenting and defending issues honestly and subjecting them to counter attack."⁸⁸

Nichols maintained her belief that intellectual curiosity entailed studying the "tough subjects" of the humane tradition, lauding the Bell Telephone company for sending its employees to the University of Pennsylvania to study history, philosophy, logic, language, ethics, and literature because it is "beyond the area of the formula lies an area where understanding, imagination, knowledge of alternatives, and a sense of purpose operates."⁸⁹ Wenzel notes how this dedication to intellectual curiosity manifested in her academic speech and writing through her frequent quotations in "bringing to life a historic period, a speaker's performance, or a speech's effect." As a debater himself at the University of Illinois in the 1950's, Wenzel speculates that this was likely a residual skill from Nichols's debate training:

Like all good debaters of my time, I had naturally learned the value of good quotations, not only for support of a claim, but also for dramatic effect in making a point. I'm sure that, as a debater and coach, Marie Hochmuth must have learned the same uses of quotation. Her lectures were richer for the way she brought in poetic and fictional reflections on times and places to describe pivotal scenes, as well as the words of speakers and their contemporaries.⁹⁰

She was particularly concerned that rhetoricians have a sound grasp on the historical contexts surrounding the speeches they studied. She welcomed criticism when two historians were invited to critically respond to Nichols's volume of *A History and Criticism of Public Address* at an

⁸⁸ Kahn, "Analyzing the Proposition," 43.

⁸⁹ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 7.

⁹⁰ Wenzel, e-mail message to author, October 19, 2009.

academic convention in 1957.⁹¹ Noting that she was “not a professional historian in any sense of the word,” she maintained that history was the well within the necessary realm of rhetoricians, stating, “I cannot conceive of a life that has not been directed to some extent by a knowledge of the past.”⁹² For Nichols, it is impossible to study rhetoric or history without the other—history was important to the rhetorician, and rhetoric has always had an influence on history.⁹³

It is not surprising, given the joy and curiosity that debate travel provided her as a debater in Pittsburgh, that Nichols used travel as a way to describe the process of rhetorical criticism in her chapter, “The Criticism of Rhetoric.” Having traveled to London in the 1950’s, she likely translated her own feelings of curiosity in encountering a new culture in England to the acts of identification, recognition, and evaluation that compose the critical process. In the same way that a traveler walking in London’s Hyde Park would need to make sense of a speech act at Speaker’s Corner by comparing what they see to their past experiences, a critic must observe the elements of a rhetorical situation, taking note of the speaker, audience, timing, location, purpose, and form of the speech. “If the traveler concludes that he is witnessing a unified whole different from any other unified whole which he has encountered,” she says, “he will have performed the first analytic step in a total critical act, that of identifying his object and separating it from other

⁹¹ The panel, “A Critical Analysis by Historians of Volume III of *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*,” took place at the Speech Association of the Eastern States 48th Annual Convention in New York City on Saturday, April 13, 1957 and included feedback from historians Robert Rayback and Oscar Zeichner. Hochmuth would mention the suggestions brought forth by the historians in future speeches and publications as concerns that needed to be heeded by rhetoricians. Correspondence with Brigance, however, revealed that she meant to “push the historians around a little” in the panel by defending the rhetorical approach to the history of public address. Not one to over claim her performance, she concluded, “Well, I am glad it is over, and that we may yet survive.” [Hochmuth to W.N. Brigance, undated] Brigance’s read of the papers presented revealed that she was quite humble in her retelling of the event, noting that her “paper towered so far above the others that my sense of pride in having our spokesman present the case for rhetorical criticism so ably is arrested ever so slightly by a feeling that historians in the audience must have been embarrassed at hearing their spokesman being taught history by an outsider.” [Brigance to Marie Hochmuth, April 20, 1957]. All materials from Nichols Papers, Box 2, Folder 14, University of Illinois Archives.

⁹² Hochmuth [Nichols], “The Quest for Excellence: The Past, What We Should Preserve of It, and Why” (lecture, 1975): 5 in Nichols Papers, Box 2, Folder 13.

⁹³ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 20.

cultural phenomena.” The second part of the critical act is recognition, when a traveler would take stock of the ways in which the particular speech act that s/he is encountering in the park relates to the greater cultural milieu. The final aspect of the critical act, evaluation, is necessarily comparative—the traveler must compare the speech act with other similar acts, based on past experience or perhaps by encountering other speakers nearby in the park. Without this ability to compare, “he is in no position to perform the final aspect of judgment, for obviously what is ‘better or worse’ involves an act of comparison. It is an act, in the main involving synthesis, in which the observer sees his object as a whole, and sees it in relation to similar cultural objects at the same or different times or places.”⁹⁴

Despite her prolific publishing record, disciplinary memory about Marie Hochmuth Nichols often begins and ends with three texts: her essay, “Lincoln’s First Inaugural,” published in *American Speeches*, her edited volume, *A History and Criticism of American Public Address, Volume III*, and Edwin Black’s book, *Rhetorical Criticism: a Study of Method*. Based on this trio of texts, her work is often cited as an exemplar of neo-Aristotelian, or “traditional criticism” made famous by Herbert Wichelns’ 1925 essay, “The Literary Criticism of Oratory,” relying heavily on the application of models derived from the Aristotelian canon, and generally resulting in descriptive, one-dimensional analysis. A popular rhetorical criticism textbook, for example, describes Nichols’s “Lincoln’s First Inaugural” as the

Neo-Aristotelian tradition at its best. She does an excellent job of discussing all of the elements initially set forth by Wichelns, weaving history and rhetorical analysis quite effectively. In the process, the essay typifies the common neo-Aristotelian bent, stressing description and interpretation rather than evaluation.”⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Hochmuth [Nichols], *A History*, 5.

⁹⁵ Robert L. Scott and Bernard L. Brock, *Methods of Rhetorical Criticism: a Twentieth Century Perspective* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972), 21. Herman Cohen provides a historical outline of the importance of Wichelns’ 1925 essay in *The History of Speech Communication*, 161-3.

This characterization is based upon Edwin Black's book, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*, in which the essays in the three *A History and Criticism of American Public Address* volumes are the main targets of his critique of neo-Aristotelian criticism, and "Lincoln's First Inaugural" is put forth as an example of its limitations.⁹⁶

As noted previously, Black fundamentally changed the course of rhetorical criticism in the field with his critique; the publication of his book "transformed the discipline of rhetorical criticism."⁹⁷ Challenging some of the fundamental texts and assumptions intrinsic to rhetorical criticism at the time, "one could disagree with Black but one could not get back to the old context."⁹⁸ According to Kathleen Hall Jamieson, who, as a graduate student, witnessed Black's conversations with colleagues about the ideas put forth in *Rhetorical Criticism*: "eavesdropping on that conversation was like watching a chess game in which one person was playing both sides of the board in order to find the perfect game."⁹⁹ But what if Black wasn't playing the game alone?

Numerous authors have attempted to rescue Nichols from being relegated to the ranks of mere stodgy traditionalist in the depths of our disciplinary memory. John Patton, for example, finds such characterizations "far too limiting,"¹⁰⁰ while Blankenship is emphatic that Nichols has been unfairly linked with other authors, including her longtime mentor and former debate coach, Parrish:

To suggest that Nichols' body of rhetorical criticism and theory was based on a narrow neo-Aristotelian, let alone a slavishly followed narrow Aristotelian prescription, is not easily justified by a careful and extensive reading of her

⁹⁶ Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978). The first edition was published in 1965.

⁹⁷ Stephen E. Lucas, "The Legacy of Edwin Black," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 513.

⁹⁸ Benson, "Edwin Black: a Tribute," 536-7.

⁹⁹ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "Remembering Edwin Black," *Rhetoric & Affairs* 10, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 495.

¹⁰⁰ Patton, "Marie Hochmuth Nichols," 133.

work... [Lincoln's First Inaugural] is tied too closely to the Parrish essay which precedes it, and [her essay "The Criticism of Rhetoric"] was published some nine years after the first two volumes edited by William Norwood Brigance. Indeed, the Brigance volumes were published two years before Nichols received her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. However, all three volumes are sometimes treated as if they were identical in perspective.¹⁰¹

In what follows, I similarly attempt to intervene in this trend. Using debate and rhetorical excellence as a lens for analysis, coupled with the resources of archival research, I demonstrate how Nichols may have used her debate skills had she decided to respond to Black in a public forum. To imagine this exchange is a rhetorical intervention which exposes and amplifies an under-circulated text with the ability to impact disciplinary memory. I recognize that all historical research is act of imagination, in which a contemporary scholar is tasked with connecting the dots based on the texts available.¹⁰² It acknowledges, as Michael Calvin McGee does, that rhetorical critics must "invent texts suitable for criticism" out of the textual fragments of culture.¹⁰³ The creation of a debate brief mirrors this process: debaters piece together fragments of evidence, putting previously unacknowledged discourses into conversation.¹⁰⁴ In fact, before recent technological advances that made computer use the norm in debate, there was a process of reconstructing texts for debate briefs that involved copying an original text, and then using scissors and tape to adhere it to a page or 3x5 note card, physically going through the movements of unifying previously fragmented texts.

¹⁰¹ Blankenship, "Marie Hochmuth Nichols (1908-1978): A Retrospective," 80.

¹⁰² The idea of argumentative reconstruction also has theoretical grounding in Frans H. Van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst's *Argumentation, Communication, and Fallacies: A Pragma-Dialectical Perspective* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1992), 7-8.

¹⁰³ Michael Calvin McGee, "Texts, Fragments, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (Summer 1990): 288. I am not intimating that McGee would necessarily agree with this process. In fact, in his article, McGee echoes Black, using Marie Hochmuth Nichols' "Lincoln's First Inaugural" as an example of too much focus on the text, obscuring the context and leading her to "odd critical judgments...holding Lincoln to account for failing to stop the Civil War with his First Inaugural Address" (283). However, the notion of textual fragments is compelling in this case for understanding my intention with the faint rejoinder.

¹⁰⁴ McGee, "Texts," 280.

The imperative to reconstruct a scholarly exchange that did not unfold in a linear, co-present physical space, as typical debate speeches would, parallels feminist work on the history of women's authorship, in which women sometimes use *nom de plumes* or male pseudonyms because they did not have access to public forums to amplify their thoughts.¹⁰⁵ At first glance, the parallel to Marie Hochmuth Nichols is hardly apt: she certainly had access to public forums—she was, after all, a well-published and well-spoken leader in the field at this point. So why didn't she publish her rebuttal to Black? It is difficult to pinpoint the exact reason, but it may have been that she did not anticipate the way that disciplinary history about rhetorical criticism would develop; she did not foresee that future reader's impressions of her work might be limited to "Lincoln's First Inaugural." She may have believed that her work spoke for itself, and that it was not worth it to publish a response. In this case, exposing and amplifying that a defense of her approaches existed where we might usually find a void can be seen as a comparable to revealing the true author of an historical text. There is the potential to change our understandings of the complexity of historical exchanges.

In Nichols's case, I reconstruct a rebuttal speech for an imagined scenario in which she and Black face off in a debate round. Stephen Lucas attributes Black's style in *Rhetorical Criticism* to his experience in debate: "a championship debater as an undergraduate at the University of Houston, Black constructed a *prima facie* case against neo-Aristotelianism."¹⁰⁶ What many may not take into account is that Nichols was a debater in her own right. Given these backgrounds, it seems only appropriate to use the convention of a debate to amplify Nichols's rejoinder. As an organizational format, an imagined debate between Nichols and Black most clearly lays out the arguments and stakes for readers interested in having a more nuanced view of

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Susan S. Williams, *Reclaiming Authorship: Literary Women in America, 1850-1900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁶ Lucas, "The Legacy," 513.

Nichols's relationship to neo-Aristotelianism. In the subsections that follow, I briefly describe Nichols's "Lincoln's First Inaugural" as an initial constructive speech. I then outline Black's major attacks against her work in his rebuttal speech. Finally, I offer Nichols's rejoinder, a final rebuttal drawn from a lecture, "Models of Rhetorical Criticism Done by Rhetoricians," that she developed in the late 1960's. The lecture examines models of rhetorical criticism put forth by Herbert Wichelns, Martin Maloney, Donald Bryant, Kenneth Burke, and her own study of "Lincoln's First Inaugural."¹⁰⁷ Although never published, the lecture responds to many arguments put forth by Black, providing a sense of how she defended herself based on her theory of rhetorical excellence.

3.3.1 Nichols's Constructive Speech

The first speech in this imagined debate is "Lincoln's First Inaugural." It is highly unlikely that Nichols intended to initiate a debate with this text, but for our purposes, it serves as the first constructive speech, or the initial piece of public discourse that motivated Black's response. The essay is a fifty page, two-part rhetorical analysis of Lincoln's first inaugural speech. In Part I, Nichols lays out in careful detail (beginning with a description of springtime in Washington via Carl Sandberg), the circumstances leading up to the speech, and through the citation of historical texts and newspapers, attempts to access Lincoln's character and to demonstrate the rhetorical situation of Lincoln's address in March 1861.

Part II of the essay views the speech "as a communication, with a purpose, and a content presumably designed to aid in the accomplishment of that purpose, further supported by the

¹⁰⁷ Nichols, "Models of Rhetorical Criticism Done by Rhetoricians," (lecture) Nichols Papers, Box 2, Folders 6, 7. This lecture was undated, and went through several different drafts. Based on the content and citations, can be assumed to have been delivered in the late 1960's. The only indicators of where the lecture was given were references to hosts, "Mr. Stewart" and "Mr. Fisher," suggesting that it may have been delivered at Purdue University.

skillful composition in words, and ultimately unified by the character and manner of the person who presented it.”¹⁰⁸ The analysis roughly echoed the elements of rhetorical criticism laid out by Wichelns, with concern for the speaker’s personality and character, purpose, style and arrangement, delivery, and the speech’s effect. In most ways, she finds Lincoln’s speech admirable: “his thought emerged clearly and appeared to be in no way obstructed by affectation or peculiarities of manner. With dignity and firmness coupled with mildness and humility he sought to enforce his plea by those powers that reside in personality. That they have stimulus value one can scarcely question.”¹⁰⁹ She concludes by mentioning that thirty nine days after the speech, the Civil War began, but insists “that the Inaugural alone could not prevent the war is surely insufficient ground to condemn it for ineptness.”¹¹⁰ Because the contours of the imagined exchange between Nichols and Black do not take full shape until Black points out the shortcomings in “Lincoln’s First Inaugural,” we will now turn to his arguments.

3.3.2 Black’s Rebuttal Speech

Black’s case against Marie Hochmuth Nichols’s “Lincoln’s First Inaugural,” begins by positing the essay “as a good example of [the neo-Aristotelian] restricted view of context, not only because its pages of historical criticism are unusually thorough, but also because its scope is unusually explicit. Nichols’s expression of her critical concern reveals a consciousness of Aristotelian canons.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Hochmuth [Nichols], “Lincoln’s First Inaugural,” in Hochmuth and Parrish, *American Speeches*, 57. Interestingly, Hochmuth also conducted research on Mary Todd Lincoln for a talk on the campus of the University of Illinois, but never published that work. See Jerrol Harris, “Potpourri,” *The Daily Illini* (April 28, 1955) in Nichols Papers, Box 1, Folder 9: Mary Todd Lincoln, ca. 1955.

¹⁰⁹ Hochmuth [Nichols], “Lincoln’s First Inaugural,” 71.

¹¹⁰ Hochmuth [Nichols], “Lincoln’s First Inaugural,” 71.

¹¹¹ Black, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 39.

Black makes three specific claims about “Lincoln’s First Inaugural.” First, he argues that Nichols minimizes her concern for the speech as a “force in the shaping of American culture” by focusing instead on the immediate audience and situation, a focus demanded by neo-Aristotelianism rather than the speaker.¹¹² His second argument is that neo-Aristotelian criticism’s focus on context so constrains Nichols’s view that it effects her selection of historical data in attempting to locate Lincoln’s purpose. Her argument, that Lincoln’s purpose was to declare his position in regard to the South, announce his judgment about secession, and assure his personal integrity, was based on her attention to the immediate audience and specific occasion for delivery. In contrast, historians who had studied Lincoln’s speech expanded the scope of their study to consider the way that a sense of religious obligation and impending tragedy shaped his purpose.¹¹³ Finally, Black finds fault in the neo-Aristotelian impulse to determine the “nature and expressive intent” of speech, which limits understanding of the historical context. He locates this point in Nichols’s work in phrasing such as “What, then, was Lincoln’s purpose? Clearly, he *intended*...”¹¹⁴ In trying to uncover intent, neo-Aristotelian critics miss the forest for the trees.

In taking aim at a widely read essay by a prominent scholar, Black sought to revolutionize the way that communication scholars approached rhetorical criticism. If we take seriously the idea that Black’s arguments function as a rebuttal speech to “Lincoln’s First Inaugural,” then Nichols should be entitled to a rebuttal to answer the arguments and clarify the position put forth in her constructive text.

¹¹² Black, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 40-1.

¹¹³ Black, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 41-2.

¹¹⁴ Black, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 42.

3.3.3 Nichols's Rebuttal

Marie Hochmuth Nichols was not one to be ashamed of knowing Aristotle. Drawing on a sense of rhetorical excellence rooted in poise and conviction, she valued Parrish's insistence that she know the classics during her time as master's student:

I've charted my way through Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* line by line. Like the Headmaster of the Boston Latin School, The Colonel never seemed troubled by not being in line with changing educational practices. "Human nature hasn't changed very much," "Aristotle's still pretty good today," he used to say to refute the miracle men and quick-success artists.¹¹⁵

Nichols's experience at the University of Pittsburgh had taught her to be well-versed in the classics. Yet Nichols maintained that charting one's way through Aristotle did not necessarily require the formulaic approach that Black ascribed to her. Her book, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, called for a humane approach to rhetoric, in which critics are able to understand the "logical, emotional, and ethical dimensions of language," and consequently, learn something about human nature.¹¹⁶ A humane approach, however, "does not mean burying one's self in fourth-century Athens or first-century Rome...the real spirit of the humane approach, is, I think, in the words of Kenneth Burke: 'Use all that is there is to use.'¹¹⁷

Nichols's unpublished lecture, "Models of Rhetorical Criticism Done by Rhetoricians," provides a defense of her own rhetorical model in "Lincoln's First Inaugural," revealing her belief that exposure to criticism functions as an element of rhetorical excellence. The lecture acknowledges that although the idea of "models" have come under increased scrutiny, the rhetorical critic, "like the scientist, [has] become concerned with orderly organization and

¹¹⁵ Marie Hochmuth [Nichols], "Great Teachers of Speech," 160.

¹¹⁶ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 13.

¹¹⁷ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 18.

ordering of his discussion, and I suspect he is concerned with generating other research.”¹¹⁸

Elsewhere, Nichols expressed her respect for scientists’ ability to discover new facts, but believes that the rhetorical critic is necessary to interpret and judge those facts, stating, “the humanities without science are blind, but science without the humanities may be vicious.”¹¹⁹

In terms of her specific aim for “Lincoln’s First Inaugural,” Nichols explains,

There are not many people in our field who have had the gall to attempt rhetorical analysis for the distinct purpose of producing a model. But mine was a textbook piece designed to accompany a collection of speeches for study. Some of you are familiar with it. The conceptual framework runs like this: a speech is a response to a situation that exists. It is presented by some particular person, in some particular time and place, using some particular words, in some particular form, to some particular people, with their own attitudes and urgencies, and designed to get them to act in some particular way.¹²⁰

This quote suggests two important considerations for her approach to criticism. First, it suggests that her critics should recognize that the *context* of where she chose to publish “Lincoln’s First Inaugural”—in a textbook meant for students new to rhetorical criticism—made a difference in her aims. The problem with creating a model designed for classroom instruction, however, is that it is not easy to make it interesting.¹²¹ Second, it betrays Nichols’s deep commitment to the situatedness of rhetoric—that the criticism must necessarily be rooted in the particular context of the rhetorical situation.

Next, she responds directly to Black’s claim that her critical assumptions are characteristic of neo-Aristotelianism:

With a proper gloss, that’s a bit like saying, “She’s a Presbyterian,” as if it were almost a sin to be one. Now Aristotle has been blamed for many things, but that he should be blamed for my narrowing of purpose to *specific* purpose rather than extending it to *general* purpose is not one of them. One robin does not make a

¹¹⁸ Nichols, “Models,” 5.

¹¹⁹ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 18.

¹²⁰ Nichols, “Models,” 24.

¹²¹ Nichols, “Models,” 25.

springtime, anymore than one allusion to a few words in Aristotle makes one an Aristotelian. If mine is an Aristotelian model, it is not much of one.¹²²

Here, Nichols does not so much deny the neo-Aristotelian label, but rather diminishes its effectiveness, relegating to the level of an *ad hominem* attack. As noted previously, Nichols considered there to be no shame in knowing Aristotle, referring to herself as a “faithful grandchild of Cornell.”¹²³

Finally, she answers Black’s claim that she “minimiz[es] her concern for the First Inaugural as a force in the shaping of American culture,” by suggesting that the critic should be limited to their specific object of criticism and not make spacious claims:

The reason for claiming so little rather than so much has little or nothing to do with Aristotelianism or the lack of it. It has something to do with the possibilities of demonstration, which is just as much a matter of good sense in any age as it is of Aristotelianism. The farther one moves from the facts the closer he comes to something he does not know and cannot prove. There is in Black’s comment an assumption that the job of the critic is the same of that of the historian, and this I would deny. The critic’s job is always limited by his specific object of criticism.¹²⁴

In other terms, she believes that although all politicians probably have a general aim of influencing history, rhetorical critics should focus on their specific aim in the speech. In the case of Lincoln’s first Inaugural, the president had a specific job to do based on the particularities of his rhetorical situation. If the critic ventures beyond that, they have created for themselves “a job of sheer speculation in a world of enormous uncertainty.”¹²⁵ Her critical sensibility, as cultivated in her past experiences, has led her to believe that excellent rhetorical criticism requires reining oneself in to focus on the specific object of criticism.

¹²² Nichols, “Models,” 27.

¹²³ Hochmuth [Nichols], “Great Teachers of Speech,” 160.

¹²⁴ Nichols, “Models,” 28.

¹²⁵ Nichols, “Models,” 29.

Nichols likely took the opportunity to lecture about models of rhetorical criticism as a way to promote her overall vision of excellence in rhetorical criticism. If we recall her sentiments in “Your Gown is Lovely, but...” we can read her response to Black as an opportunity to refine her arguments in a lecture, a chance to further justify and support her approach, to accept criticism without giving way to tears, and thus come closer to the Arendtian ideal of excellence. Just as Nichols suggested that women debaters be subjected to tough criticism so that they could learn to better articulate their arguments, she takes Black’s criticism in stride, using the opportunity to clarify her intent, reinforce her convictions, and further refine her view of the proper role of the rhetorical critic. At root, her arguments here have to do with her ideal of excellence in rhetorical criticism, a vision in which the rhetorical critic conscientiously pieces together the context of historical discourse, and tests ideas through research.

By dramatizing this debate, I attempt to bring Nichols’s unpublished perspective to fuller view. This exchange between Black and Nichols should go some lengths to support the contention that “the early approach to the criticism of oratory was not as monolithic as it is sometimes characterized today, nor was it devoid of internal debate over such matters as standards of judgment.”¹²⁶ Discussions about what should or should not be considered neo-Aristotelian and whether it is a useful or harmful tradition were historically important, because they opened up space to discuss what rhetorical criticism can and should be, paving the way for its evolution. Yet looking back, as we tend to do now, on the neo-Aristotelian approach as an undesirable phase in the history of rhetorical criticism, figures and the nuances of their ideas tend to be flattened. Archival research in Nichols’s academic papers allowed me to locate a

¹²⁶ Olson, “Rhetorical Criticism and Theory,” 41.

previously unpublished lecture that has the potential to recast, or at least better understand, her relationship to neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism. It is not that Nichols denied using classical thought in her analysis, but rather believed that Black's arguments about why it is limiting are misguided unfairly characterized her work. By showcasing her responses to Black in this lecture, my intent is to encourage contemporary scholars to consider how Marie Hochmuth Nichols's place in disciplinary history may change if we were to view her scholarship through the lens of debate and a commitment to excellence rather than through the lens of neo-Aristotelianism.

3.4 ALPINE CLIMBING WITH BURKE, RICHARDS, AND SHAW

Finally, a fuller consideration of Nichols's take on excellence in criticism must examine the evolution in her scholarly thinking beyond "Lincoln's First Inaugural" towards what she calls "Alpine climbing." Alpine climbing literally refers to a style of mountaineering in which hikers forsake leisurely climbing options in order to chart their own paths and carry all of their own equipment. As a travel metaphor for expanding the possibilities of rhetorical criticism, Alpine climbing refers to efforts to introduce the oeuvres of theorists previously underutilized by scholars in the field. In *Rhetoric and Criticism*, she scales the mountains of theoretical work done by Kenneth Burke and I.A. Richards in order to make them accessible to rhetorical critics and then presents an analysis of George Bernard Shaw to demonstrate the promise of this expanded view of rhetorical criticism. As she set out to carve a space for criticism that was "traditional although balanced with the modern influence,"¹²⁷ a sense of excellence rooted in the desire for critics to contribute to a better life and an understanding of debate guided her travels. I

¹²⁷ Waldo Braden, introduction to *Rhetoric and Criticism*, vii.

argue that a more textured historical view of Nichols's contributions to rhetorical criticism must take note of these developments in her scholarship.

In her introduction of Kenneth Burke's work, Nichols builds in an additional defense preempting Black's claims about the pitfalls of the neo-Aristotelian approach. Ultimately, she agrees that "Aristotelian rhetoric read out of context of the Aristotelian rationale has, of course, made easy the practice of seizing upon the mechanical aspects of the lore,"¹²⁸ and offers Burke's theory as an antidote to formulaic approaches, "best adjusted to the mind willing to continue to inquire, to experiment, to deepen insights with knowledge deriving from a variety of sources...Burke would "use all there is to use."¹²⁹ Her treatment of Burke in *Rhetoric and Criticism* distills Burke's views of the bases of communication, essence of rhetoric, scope of rhetoric, method of accomplishing communication, and mode of analysis of motivation for readers.¹³⁰

The importance of the introduction of Kenneth Burke's perspective on the scope of rhetoric cannot be underestimated. For a field that previously concentrated solely on speech texts, the idea that "if a magnolia lures me to it by its beauty, it is acting on me rhetorically"¹³¹ was a radical expansion of the domain of rhetorical scholarship. Ironically, Marie Hochmuth Nichols's late scholarship worked to redefine the study of language as the center that holds communication studies together. In a move reminiscent of her earlier call to study the tough subjects in debate, she would come to deplore studies of "such ephemeral concerns as the rhetoric of bralessness, the rhetoric of pornography, the rhetoric of the bagel and white bread, the rhetoric of hello, goodbye, and the rhetoric of the duck call and the barbed wire fence"—in other

¹²⁸ Hochmuth [Nichols], "Burkeian Criticism," *Western Speech* xxi, no. 2 (Spring 1957): 90.

¹²⁹ Hochmuth [Nichols], "Burkeian Criticism," 94.

¹³⁰ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 81.

¹³¹ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 84.

words, studies made possible by viewing rhetoric as the study of symbols.¹³² Still Nichols greatly admired Burke's intellectual trajectory, believing that the end goal of his work was in "promoting the good life here on earth."¹³³ Alpine climbing, in this case, meant that in her quest for rhetorical excellence, she was able to both facilitate and push back against expansions of rhetorical studies—her scholarship enabled change in rhetorical criticism but maintained a commitment to the permanence of some more traditional aspects.

By engaging I.A. Richards's theories, Nichols presented rhetorical scholars with the challenge of studying a figure that "approaches rhetoric by attacking the concept which he wishes to restore."¹³⁴ While her treatment of Richards's work is multifaceted, there is one instance in which her debate knowledge emerges as an explanatory tool. I.A. Richards had considerable distaste for debate and discussion, believing that speakers are blinded by their dedication to specific purposes and too focused on making points to see the big picture. In explaining his perspective, Nichols asks readers to visualize "all the college debaters in America springing to the defense of debate, possibly with just the kind of heat and maneuver that Richards condemns," noting that the incensed responses to Richard Murphy's articles about the ethics of switch-side debating may support Richards's perspective.¹³⁵ While her goal in elucidating Richards's writings was not to endorse his views, but rather to demonstrate the need for clear methodology for rhetorical analysis, Nichols's debate experience served as way to translate Richards's perspectives for her audience of readers.

¹³² Hochmuth Nichols, "A Viable Theory of Rhetoric for 1974 and the Foreseeable Future" (paper presented at the Western Speech Communication Association annual convention, 1974, Newport Beach, CA): 24 in Nichols Papers, Box 2, Folder 33.

¹³³ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 92.

¹³⁴ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 96.

¹³⁵ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 98.

After Alpine climbing with Burke and Richards, *Rhetoric and Criticism* culminates with Nichols's own rhetorical criticism of George Bernard Shaw as a rhetorician and public speaker. We can view this piece as her attempt to put the theories of excellence in rhetorical criticism that run throughout the book into practice. Tellingly, the chapter begins with an admission that her interest in Shaw lies in their shared confidence in the power of discussion and debate.¹³⁶ Throughout the chapter, Nichols's claims about Shaw are based almost entirely on her understanding of him based on his participation in debating societies. George Bernard Shaw's speaking career began, according to Nichols, when he joined the Zetetical Society in London after several failures in novel writing.¹³⁷ She studied his participation in a number of London debating societies, whose meetings were conducted "first in the parlors of members of the societies, then on street corners, in the parks, at the docks, or down on the Thames embankment." Nichols mentions that while visiting England, she even attended the London Fabian Society sessions in order to get a better sense of what Shaw's experience must have been like.¹³⁸ This experience coupled with Nichols's own sense of the vital life of debating societies, enabled her to analyze the rhetorical skills that he would have acquired. This is evident in the following passage, which compares Shaw's enthusiasm with that of an undergraduate debater:

As a result of his activities in these societies, Shaw developed a kind of undergraduate exuberance and delight in forensic feat, and he never lost the pleasure of intellectually downing an opponent in debate. In these societies he developed the habit of investigating topics, of collecting masses of facts to support any argument, of playing with ideas, of intellectual sparring.¹³⁹

Nichols knew the sense of joy that came through intellectual sparring, and understood the intellectual curiosity that fueled the research process in preparation for debates.

¹³⁶ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 109.

¹³⁷ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 111.

¹³⁸ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 112.

¹³⁹ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 113.

This knowledge also formed the basis of her understanding of Shaw's stylistic approach to theatrical writing: "the avalanche of the perpetual talker is there. It is witty, exuberant, conversational pattern, often with the cutting edge of the rapier; it was a fit instrument for oral struggle and combat, for scoring points in debate."¹⁴⁰ Far from the limited neo-Aristotelian approach often ascribed to her work, Nichols's essay uses historical context, the experience of travel, and her own knowledge of forensics to analyze Shaw as a rhetorician. There is little doubt that Nichols had her debating days in Pittsburgh in mind as she wrote about Shaw. Shortly before the publication of her book, she returned to the University of Pittsburgh to give a lecture on Shaw to the William Pitt Debating Union. Her old debate partner, Genevieve Blatt, sent her a note to let her know that she was sorry to miss the event.¹⁴¹

In her scholarly career, which spanned forty years, Nichols's approach to rhetorical criticism evolved considerably. However, all too often, the history of rhetorical criticism is told with Nichols in a very limited role. An examination of her scholarly corpus in toto reveals that debate participation figures prominently as an element contributing to her view of rhetorical excellence.

3.5 ON INTELLECTUAL TRAVELS

As a college debater, Marie Hochmuth Nichols seized the opportunity to encounter new people, places, and arguments through intercollegiate debate travel. Travel introduced a sense of possibility, and, a sense of curiosity and whimsy. Her life was full of travels, both literally, from

¹⁴⁰ Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism*, 124.

¹⁴¹ Genevieve Blatt to Marie K. Hochmuth, April 7, 1960, Nichols Papers, Box 2, Folder 37: Shaw, 1951, 1960, 1963, University of Illinois Archives.

Pittsburgh to Wisconsin to Illinois, and intellectually, as she navigated the terrain as one of very few prominent women in mid-twentieth-century rhetorical studies. Nichols never forgot her debate experience as she cultivated her theory of excellence in rhetorical criticism. Vestiges of her participation in debate in the form of people, ideas, and a commitment to conviction, criticism, curiosity, poise, and joy remained long after she traveled away from Pittsburgh. Even as she moved into leadership positions such as the Speech Association of America presidency during a rough time in the association's history, when "the politics of the time made it very difficult for her not to be involved,"¹⁴² she focused her efforts on what she saw as the need to "search for excellence" in education.¹⁴³

One year before her death, Marie Hochmuth Nichols's speech "When You Set Out for Ithaka..." was published in the *Central States Speech Journal*. Against the backdrop of the Greek poet Cavafy's poem, "Ithaka," in which Ulysses's voyage home after the Trojan War was laden "with enslavement, with shipwreck, with the loss of traveling companions, with the songs of sirens, with narrow passages between Scylla and Charibdys, with the loss of direction, with dreaded nights and rosy fingered dawns," Nichols draws a parallel to the state of speech communication in a time of uncertainty, looking to find its way.¹⁴⁴ She bemoans the trend away from the history and criticism of rhetoric, maintaining that the field must have a coherent center in the logical, ethical, aesthetic, and rhetorical dimension of language to counter diminishing verbal skills and declining educational standards. She asks "is excellence in our understanding of these dimensions the Ithaka which we seek? Are our eyes constantly on this destination or are we all too ready to listen to Calypso urging us to forget Ithaka?"¹⁴⁵ Scholars of rhetorical studies are

¹⁴² Jane Blankenship, interview with author, Chicago, IL, November 14, 2009.

¹⁴³ Marie H. Nichols, "The Search for Excellence," *Spectra* V, no.1 (February 1969): 1-2.

¹⁴⁴ Nichols, "When You Set Out," 146.

¹⁴⁵ Nichols, "When You Set Out," 148.

wise to take these questions seriously as we continue to face questions of what communication studies can and should be in the twenty-first-century.

As we look backwards to move forward in crafting a usable history of rhetorical criticism, we cannot forget Marie Hochmuth Nichols's contributions. This chapter has provided texture to our understandings of intercollegiate debate, the history of rhetorical criticism, and has recast a figure whose life and work can be understood as a search for excellence cultivated through a belief in the power of debate. I have underscored the unexpected debate skill emerging from Nichols's debate experience: habituating students toward a critical sensibility that can be later manifested in scholarship. In Nichols's case, she learned the importance of *conviction*, *criticism*, *curiosity*, *poise*, and *joy* as aspects of rhetorical excellence. In emphasizing the network of scholars who were faculty advisors to debate teams or former debaters themselves, I demonstrated the strong connection between debate history and disciplinary history. By drawing on archival materials from her time as a debater, debate coach, and scholar, and by more carefully reading her published scholarly corpus, I have highlighted connections between Nichols's approach to rhetorical criticism, excellence, and debate experience, pointing to ways in which disciplinary memory needs to be complicated and contested.

There is certainly more work to be done in re-discovering the "lost ladies of rhetoric." Feminist rhetorical scholars have spent considerable time negotiating how best to study historical women, including consideration of the criteria that determine which speakers and figures should be included in a feminist canon, should such a thing exist at all.¹⁴⁶ It is problematic to limit our

¹⁴⁶ Barbara Biesecker and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's exchange in *Philosophy and Rhetoric* about the value of studying the individual speaking subject as opposed to collective rhetorical practices remains a significant methodological rift in feminist rhetorical history. See Barbara Biesecker, "Coming to Terms"; Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Biesecker Cannot Speak For Her Either," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 26, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 153-159; Barbara Biesecker, "Negotiating With Our Tradition: Reflecting Again (Without Apologies) on the Feminization of Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 26, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 236-241. Kate Ronald identifies the exchange as one of two major methodological issues in the development of feminist rhetorics in "Feminist Approaches to the History

understanding to only those women who published widely or can be studied through archival remnants. My hope is that this chapter opens up a space for future studies rethinking disciplinary history to better understand the women—prominent or not—that contributed to its development.

Lori Jo Marso asks the question: “what do we learn from discovering that our feminist mothers were not always able to create and inhabit feminist ways of thinking?”¹⁴⁷ In the case of Marie Hochmuth Nichols, we might refigure this question as “what do we learn from discovering that our female intellectual role model was not able to, and would not have necessarily wanted to, inhabit feminist ways of thinking?” She was highly suspect of anyone who would suggest that she should be singled out as a lone woman in the field. “Your Gown is Lovely, but...” can be read as an attempt to teach women debaters about what they must do to ensure that they are not treated differently in the context of intercollegiate debate. When Indiana Speech Association president David G. Burns suggested that she could give a speech entitled “Marie Nichols, Other Women, and the Struggle to Liberate the Speech Profession,”¹⁴⁸ she declined, stating “that’s a task in which I am not aware of having shared much.” She decided to title her speech “The Education of the Speech Teacher” instead.¹⁴⁹ This study has shown that even if she did not realize her contribution to charting new territory for women in rhetorical criticism to travel, Nichols can be seen as a figure with theories worthy of our scholarly attention. At best, this

of Rhetoric,” *The Sage Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, ed. Andrea A. Lunsford, Kirt H. Wilson, and Rosa A. Eberly (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 139-52, while Lindal Buchanan and Kathleen J. Ryan feature Biesecker’s original article and Campbell’s reply as a landmark controversy in their volume, *Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics* (West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press, 2010).

¹⁴⁷ Lori Jo Marso, *Feminist Thinkers and the Demands of Femininity: the Lives and Work of Intellectual Women* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006), vii. Other perspectives in feminist intellectual history include Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) and Linda Kerber, *Toward an Intellectual History of Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

¹⁴⁸ David G. Burns to Marie Hochmuth Nichols, August 15, 1970, in Nichols Papers, Series 15/23/25-1, Box 1, Folder 33: Education of Speech Teachers, Indiana, 1970.

¹⁴⁹ Marie Hochmuth Nichols, “The Education of the Speech Teacher,” (lecture, Indiana Speech Association, October 2, 1970), in Nichols Papers, Series 15/23/25-1, Box 1, Folder 33: Education of Speech Teachers, Indiana, 1970.

knowledge helps to revise our assumptions about the people and practices that animated twentieth-century rhetorical criticism, enabling others to take debate and women within that history seriously. Make no mistake: I am not suggesting that we view Nichols retroactively as a feminist, but rather, by studying women in academic history, we, at the very least, validate the notion that female intellectuals existed and are worth studying. In the history of rhetorical criticism and in the history of debate, they did much more than just wearing a lovely gown.

4.0 “THE FIRST AND ONLY:” BARBARA JORDAN’S EDUCATION, EMBODIMENT, AND ELOQUENCE

What makes Barbara so special? It’s that along with all her superior intelligence and legislative skill she also has a certain moral authority and a...presence, and it all comes together in a way that sort of grabs you, maybe you’re kind of intimidated by it, and you have to listen when she speaks and you feel you must try and do what she wants. What Barbara has is not something you learn and develop, it’s something that God gave her and it’s something you can’t really describe. — Charles Wilson¹

Congressperson Charles Wilson is just one of the many people who struggled to adequately express the experience of hearing Barbara Jordan speak. Jordan, the first black woman to serve in the Texas Senate and the first black woman from the south to serve in the United States House of Representatives, regularly captivated audiences throughout her political career. As Molly Ivins put it, “the words, the first and only, came before Barbara Jordan so often that they almost seemed like a permanent title.”²

Like many citizens across the nation, rhetorical scholars took notice when Jordan delivered a keynote address at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in 1976. It has been ranked as one of the top speeches of the twentieth-century because of Jordan’s “eloquence, power and masterful delivery, as well as the historical importance of the first keynote by an African-American woman.”³ The performative dimension of Jordan’s speech has cultivated the common sentiment that one has to view the address to experience its full rhetorical force. Wayne N. Thompson, for example, admits that “Jordan’s imposing figure, earnestness, and deliberate,

¹ Quoted in Jessie Carney Smith, *Epic Lives: One Hundred Black Women Who Made a Difference* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1993), 299.

² Molly Ivins, “The First and Only,” interviewed by Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Newshour with Jim Lehrer transcript, PBS, January 17, 1996, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/remember/jordan_1-17.html (accessed March 1, 2010).

³ The speech was ranked #5 in the Top 100 Speeches by Stephen Lucas and Martin Medhurst. See “I Have a Dream Leads Top 100 Speeches of the Century,” December 15, 1999, <http://www.news.wisc.edu/releases/3504.html> (accessed March 1, 2010).

seemingly thoughtful manner contributed much to the total effect,” even though he locates these factors beyond the purview of his article analyzing her DNC speech.⁴

In addition to its striking delivery, Jordan’s DNC speech has been theorized as the quintessential example of rhetorical enactment: when a “speaker or writer is proof of the claim he or she is making.”⁵ Enactment functions as an element of ethos because it include not only what an argumentative text *says* by direct statement, but also what it *does*, forging a connection between the author and the audience.⁶ For, as many commentators would observe, it was not *solely* the words that commanded the audience’s attention that night, it was the cumulative effect of viewing Jordan as she delivered the speech: a compelling message backed by a body—female, black, and big—and a booming voice that many believed could serve to “play the role of God almighty.”⁷ Jordan’s bodily presence buttressed the verbal, propositional arguments made within the written text of her speech.

To adapt Congressperson Wilson’s comment in the epigraph, what makes Barbara Jordan so special as a figure in the history of public address? What allowed her to not only access, but yield considerable influence in institutions traditionally dominated by white, class-privileged men? And why is it that so many commentators, in trying to adequately describe Jordan’s

⁴ Wayne N. Thompson, “Barbara Jordan’s Keynote Address: the Juxtaposition of Contradictory Values,” *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 44 (Spring 1979): 230.

⁵ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *The Rhetorical Act* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982), 273; Linda D. Horwitz, “Transforming Appearance into Rhetorical Argument: Rhetorical Criticism of Public Speeches by Barbara Jordan, Lucy Parsons, and Angela Y. Davis” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1998), chapter two.

⁶ Michael Leff, “Rhetoric and Dialectic in Martin Luther King’s ‘Letter from a Birmingham Jail,’” in *Anyone Who Has View: Theoretical Contributions to the Study of Argumentation*, ed. Frans H. van Eemeren, J. Anthony Blair, Charles A. Willard and A. Francisca Snoeck Henkemans (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 263. For example, Martin Luther King’s restrained and non-aggressive ‘voice’ in “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” enacts his pleas for tolerance and reasonability (Leff 266); his narration of the numerous instances of discrimination encountered by African Americans “enacts and transmits that experience in a way that no propositional argument could accomplish.” See Michael Leff and Ebony A. Utley, “Instrumental and Constitutive Rhetoric in Martin Luther King Jr.’s ‘Letter from a Birmingham Jail,’” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*. 7, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 45.

⁷ Ivins, “The First and Only.”

oratorical force, found it necessary to recourse to descriptions of her body and voice? To answer these questions, we can take a cue from Jordan herself, who wrote, “people always want you to be born where you are. They want you to have leaped from the womb a public figure. It just doesn’t go that way. I am the composite of my experience and all the people who had something to do with it.”⁸ Lester Olson has called on public address scholars to examine “personal experiences as a resource during the production of ideas and deeds to be expressed through language and symbolic action to others.”⁹ Such an approach asks critics to more carefully attend to a speaker’s lived experiences as elements precipitating their choices in public communication. While rhetorical criticism traditionally analyzes the immediate context of speeches, Olson’s call highlights a need to study the broader contexts of historical women’s public addresses.¹⁰ Accordingly, a rich account of the bodily aspects of rhetorical performance requires widening the ratio of text to context to consider how the accretion of embodied experiences over time informs our understanding of public speech events like Jordan’s DNC address.

This chapter argues that in order to better appreciate Jordan’s distinctive style and to deepen our understanding of rhetorical enactment as a bodily resource, we must explore a period in Jordan’s biography long before her famous speech at the DNC: her experience on the debating team at Texas Southern University (TSU) in the 1950’s. Speech and debate provided Jordan with a variety of opportunities to refine her oratorical style, but it was also an activity rife with white, masculine, and class privilege. I draw a parallel between Jordan’s early rhetorical education at TSU and her later political speech, isolating episodes where she used her body to

⁸ Barbara Jordan and Shelby Hearon, *Barbara Jordan: A Self Portrait* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1979), 2.

⁹ Lester C. Olson, “Audre Lorde’s Embodied Invention,” in *The Responsibilities of Rhetoric*, ed. Michelle Smith and Barbara Warnick (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2009), 93.

¹⁰ E. Michele Ramsey elaborates on this argument in her article, “Addressing Issues of Context in Historical Women’s Public Address,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 27, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 352-76.

access and maintain her lasting presence in forums where African American women were traditionally underrepresented.

My focus on Barbara Jordan's body in this chapter runs counter to what feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz terms "profound somatophobia." In western philosophy, "the body has been regarded as a source of interference in, and danger to, the operations of reason."¹¹ Grosz demonstrates how dichotomies of mind/body and reason/emotion have been mapped onto gendered expectations of masculine/feminine. Others have suggested that the history of communication has similarly sublimated the body, a tradition that has edged out the appreciation of alternative discourse styles and distorted the rhetorical contributions of marginalized peoples.¹² To be clear, it is not that this tradition has completely ignored the body. But insofar as it suffers from a "profound somatophobia," it only acknowledges *some bodies*, suppressing those outside a white, male norm, and those ways of arriving at rhetorical knowledge outside the norm of formal instruction.¹³

¹¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 5.

¹² See especially Raymie McKerrow, "Corporeality and Critical Rhetoric: a Site for Rhetoric's Future," *Southern Communication Journal* 63, no. 4 (1998): 315-28; Jay Dolmage, "Metis, *Metis*, *Mestiza*, Medusa: Rhetorical Bodies across Rhetorical Traditions," *Rhetoric Review* 28, no. 1 (2009): 1-28. Both articles provide overviews of foundational work done in feminist philosophy and relate it back to rhetorical history. McKerrow makes the point about alternate discourse styles on page 325.

¹³ Rhetorical history is full of examples of thinkers who addressed the body but did so assuming a white, male, body within the confines of formal instruction. For a broader overview of the conflicted role of bodies in rhetorical traditions, see Gerard A. Hauser's "Incongruous Bodies: Arguments for Personal Sufficiency and Public Insufficiency," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 36, no. 1 (Summer 1999): 1-8. The Summer 1999 double issue of *Argumentation and Advocacy* contains a number of articles on the theme of bodily argument. There is a distinction to be made between marginalization of the body and delivery in "contemporary histories of rhetoric" and evidence about their actual importance in the classical world. This distinction is particularly bemoaned by Christopher Lyle Johnstone in his article, "Communicating in Classical Contexts: the Centrality of Delivery," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87, no. 2 (May 2001): 121-43. Debra Hawhee also ruminates on this issue in her discussion of *chironomia* in her book, *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 153-61. Joy Connolly discusses the complex role of the body in ancient Rome, especially in the rhetorical writings of Cicero in *The State of Speech: Rhetoric and Political Thought in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), chapter three, esp. 130-136. Other examples in British rhetorical history include the Elocutionary Movement, which focused on systematic, explicit instruction in oral interpretation and bodily training in gesture and stance. This chapter draws our attention to the body's inventional role in the service of enactment, a skill that Jordan developed organically despite her formal training in debate.

The challenge, then, is to “stake out a bodily focus for communication in a field that has its center in text-focused media regimes.” Carolyn Marvin draws our attention to the way that mediation, rather than simply eliding the body, can be seen as a packaging or re-presenting of the body. *Dramatizing media* (clothing, ornamentation, dancing, oratory) “enhance the potency of the communicative body” thus “amplify[ing] its aura.” *Textualizing media* (print, film, video), on the other hand, obscure and diminish bodily aura in favor of the authority of the text.¹⁴

One can rightfully point to the fact that the two previous case studies of the Ladies’ Edinburgh Debating Society and Marie Hochmuth Nichols have placed an emphasis on minds, and not bodies. So why focus on the body in the case of Barbara Jordan? One explanation is that the archival materials available for interpretation of the two previous case studies obscure rather than reveal the role of the body in this history. This is partially an issue of media: minute books and academic papers tend not to lend themselves to a clear discussion of corporeality (though there were some discussions of proper bodily comportment at LEDS meetings). Because Jordan was a public figure in a televisual age, it is easier for me as a researcher to take the body into account as I experience audiovisual evidence in the process of rhetorical-historical analysis. Another explanation has to do with the societal roles of the women studied. As a woman scholar working at a particular historical moment, Nichols sublimated her body, buying into the idea of the life of the mind. This is likely due to her desire to be taken seriously for her academic accomplishments despite the fact that comments such as “our menopausal scholar” recentered her gendered difference. To the extent that she could, she found it necessary to shift focus away from the body, perhaps recreating the idea of a mind/body dichotomy as she admonished young

¹⁴ Carolyn Marvin, “Communication as Embodiment” in *Communication as...Perspectives on Theory*, ed. Gregory J. Shepherd, Jeffrey St. John, and Ted Striphas (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 69-70. See also Marvin’s “The Body of the Text: Literacy’s Corporeal Constant.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80, no.2 (1994): 129-49.

women debaters from paying too much attention to their gowns and not enough attention to their debate arguments. My purpose here is not to place undue focus on the body of a black woman instead of her ideas. Rather it was her ability to dissolve this distinction that was part of her rhetorical success. As a public figure, Jordan was subject to the visual stereotypes of black femininity, and she invented varied strategies for alternately drawing attention toward and away from her body in the name of highlighting her political messages.

A sophisticated vocabulary to discuss the body's role in communication is not yet fully developed, which may explain why Jordan's bodily aura has been mentioned but not fully explored.¹⁵ As such, this chapter seeks to *recorporealize* the concept of rhetorical enactment. Enactment has been used as a concept to analyze marginalized groups in the past, but the role of the body has not been fully explored in the process.¹⁶ Bodily particularities, such as the sex and race "assigned" to the body, make "a great deal of difference to the kind of social subject, and indeed the mode of corporeality assigned to the subject."¹⁷ The body is simultaneously a preexisting, physical element that can be used by a speaker (inartistic proof) and a contingent element invented by a speaker in act of persuasion (artistic proof).¹⁸ By paying attention to public commentary about, and Jordan's strategic use of, dramatizing media such as voice, comportment, dress, ability, skin color, size, and gendered expression in her biographical

¹⁵ Marvin's explanation for the reticence to talk seriously about bodies is the more sinister view that textualization has created a class system in which a textual class (academics) maintains power over a body class (physical workers; soldiers; those who do the dirty work). See "Communication as," 70-1. Hawhee echoes similar themes when she suggests we should be asking "how might a sustained focus on bodies and materiality retrain our memories and produce new accounts of rhetoric?" in her "Review Essay: Somatography," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 93, no.3 (August 2007): 366.

¹⁶ See Leff, "Rhetoric and Dialectic;" Leff and Utey, "Instrumental and Constitutive;" Carrie Crenshaw, "Resisting Whiteness' Rhetorical Silence," *Western Journal of Communication* 61, no.3 (Summer 1997): 253-78.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 84. Elsewhere, she suggests that "questions of sexual specificity, questions about which kinds of bodies, what their differences are, and what their products and consequences might be, can be directly raised in ways that may more readily demonstrate, problematize, and transform women's subordination to men." See her *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), vii-viii.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* 1.2.1356 a-b.

episodes, we can better analyze how bodily enactment is rendered as a resource in rhetorical performance.

4.1 EARLY EDUCATION: SPEECH AND DEBATE

A number of factors have been identified as contributing to Jordan's rhetorical success. Linguist Barbara Johnstone, for example, analyzes how the intersections of Jordan's identity as an African American woman from Texas influenced her distinctive style. She observes that Jordan's speech is generally compatible with African American linguistic style: "elevated diction, self-conscious word choice (and commentary about word choice), extremely careful diction, grammatical complexity, and a lack of editing."¹⁹ Molly Ivins suggests that this focus on diction was "actually typical of an entire class of Southern educated blacks."²⁰ Jordan was content to acknowledge the role that her southern heritage played, but resisted the idea that gendered expectations made a difference in the development of her oratorical persona.²¹ There are a number of potential sites of Jordan's rhetorical education: her exposure to African American preaching, involvement in a number of extracurricular activities in high school and college, and later legal and political training.²²

As noted in Chapter One, African Americans formed literary societies, educational societies, and lyceums in the nineteenth-century in order to gain "experiences influencing

¹⁹ Barbara Johnstone, "Sociolinguistic Resources, Individual Identities, and Public Speech Styles of Texas Women," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 5, no.2 (1995): 195-6.

²⁰ Molly Ivins, "Barbara Jordan Used System Well," *Sun Journal*, August 10, 1994.

²¹ Johnstone, "Sociolinguistic Resources," 189-90. In addition to the influence of being raised in Houston, many have noted that Jordan seemed to acquire a Kennedy-like northeastern accent during her time at Boston University's Law School.

²² Ira B. Bryant, *Barbara Charline Jordan: From the Ghetto to the Capitol* (Houston: D. Armstrong Co., Inc., 1977), 2-3.

proficiency in communication.” Similarly, intercollegiate debating societies were one site of African American rhetorical education in the twentieth-century, where participation was possible despite educational segregation.²³ Jordan’s time as a debater with the Sigma Phi Alpha Forensic and Dialectical Symposium at Texas Southern University is often mentioned as an activity prefiguring her political communication. However, it has been largely overlooked as a pivotal period during which she claimed a rhetorical education, and through the process of travel to intercollegiate competitions, imagined herself succeeding beyond her community in Houston. The debating society provided a rhetorical education in a formal sense, in that it offered vocal and logical training in argumentation. But it also functioned in Jessica Enoch’s broader sense, as an “educational program that *develops* in students a communal and civic identity and *articulates* for them the rhetorical strategies, language practices, and bodily and social behaviors that make possible their participation in communal and civic affairs.”²⁴

This section will pay particular attention to the way that Jordan’s early education in speech and debate allowed her to refine her delivery style, including the vocal and bodily elements of speech. However, as Lindal Buchanan points out in her renovation of the traditional fifth canon for women rhetors, a fuller account of delivery requires painting a picture of the larger historical context, such as the “behind-the-scenes arrangements needed for non-privileged groups to reach the public platforms in the first place.”²⁵ Participation in debate is often credited with equipping students with a skill set that includes public speaking, listening, critical thinking

²³ See Royster, *Traces of a Stream*; Shirley Wilson Logan, *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008); Wilson Logan, “By the Way, Where Did You Learn to Speak?: Black Sites of Rhetorical Education,” in *Calling Cards: Theory and Practice in the Study of Race, Gender, and Culture*, ed. Jacqueline Jones Royster and Ann Marie Mann Simpkins (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005). The definition cited here is Wilson Logan’s definition of rhetorical education in “By the Way,” 216.

²⁴ Enoch, *Refiguring Rhetorical Education*, 7-8. Emphasis in the original text.

²⁵ Buchanan, *Regendering Delivery*, 4.

and a healthy sense of competition. Yet because the debating team itself was an exclusionary institution on the basis of sex, Jordan was challenged to view her body as a contingent resource that could be adapted for rhetorical effect. In understanding the behind-the-scenes orchestration that animated Jordan's participation in debate, we can expand that skill set to include bodily invention and enactment.

To appreciate debate's key role in awakening her sense of rhetorical invention, it is useful to flash back to Jordan's early life at Phillis Wheatley High School in the Fifth Ward of Houston. Until the mid-1950's, the Fifth Ward "was virtually cut off from the city, connected only by an iron drawbridge."²⁶ It was an economically depressed area of Houston that housed most of the city's African American population, known to some as a "large Black Ghetto."²⁷ Barbara was the third and youngest daughter of Ben Jordan, a warehouse laborer and part-time preacher, and Arlyne Jordan, a homemaker. Along with sisters Bennie and Rose Mary, Barbara was brought up in an "unusually strict" household, in which their parents stressed two things—religion and education—above all else.²⁸

It was at Phillis Wheatley High School that Jordan began to perceive a difference in the way teachers treated light-skinned students and dark-skinned African American students. As she writes in her autobiography, "the whole system at that time was saying that you achieved more,

²⁶ Mary Beth Rogers, *Barbara Jordan: American Hero* (New York: Bantam Books, 1998), 13.

²⁷ Bryant, *Barbara Charline Jordan*, 1.

²⁸ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 31. Like many African American women including her mother, church first provided Jordan with a setting for public speaking. As a young girl, she recited religious poems in front of congregations and prayed in public at her church's special evening Speaking Meetings (Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 40-3). Dorothy L. Pennington argues that African American women's rhetoric has spirituality and religion as its "archetypal epistemic base." See her "The Discourse of African American Women: a Case for Extended Paradigms," in *Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations*, ed. Ronald L. Jackson II and Elaine B. Richardson (New York: Routledge, 2003), 298. In Pennington's view, Barbara Jordan's speeches "are secular in nature and do not provide an example of the type of discourse that this chapter highlights as needing greater paradigmatic development" (303). However, Jordan's biographies reveal that her earliest oratorical experiences were provided in religious settings. Barbara A. Holmes analyzes religious themes in Jordan's speeches in her book, *A Private Woman in Public Spaces: Barbara Jordan's Speeches on Ethics, Public Religion, and Law* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000).

you went further, you had a better chance, if you were not black-black with kinky hair.”²⁹ Jordan was darker-skinned than many of her classmates, and as her body matured, she had to negotiate the expectations of feminine beauty that seemed to define popularity at the time. She was also physically larger than many of her classmates, and attempted to fit in with the other young women at her school by “trying to feminize her broad, strong facial features” with girlish adornments such as curling her hair and wearing jewelry and bobby socks.³⁰ Despite these efforts to fit in physically, Jordan’s biographies tell a common story about her ability to stand out academically amongst her high school peers. Consider how one biographer, Mary Beth Rogers, attributes Jordan’s gift of voice to her bodily size during her teen years:

By the time she was fifteen, her wide diaphragm and broad girth were supporting a gift that began to compensate for her dark skin and lack of beauty: the voice. Jordan’s voice had always been loud. But as she matured, it expanded to a depth that eliminated shrillness. It was almost as if there were a clear, single sound coming from her throat that encompassed a harmonic blend of a dozen tones, round and complete.³¹

In this description, Jordan’s body aids in literally and figuratively backing her voice, the size of her body contributing to her distinctive vocal tone and pitch; her loud voice and large body enabled her to command attention and respect.

Even at that young age, when Jordan spoke publicly, people noticed. At Phillis Wheatley High School, students were commonly asked to do recitations for classes. Ashton Jerome Olivier, a teacher and oratorical contest sponsor at the school, took notice of Jordan’s recitation style and invited her to join the speech team. Due to rigid segregation laws in Texas at the time, African American high school students participated in speaking competitions at Prairie View College, a historically black college, while white students held their meets at the University of

²⁹ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 62.

³⁰ Rogers, *Barbara Jordan*, 38-9.

³¹ Rogers, *Barbara Jordan*, 4.

Texas. Success came quickly to Jordan at the black state meets, and she began to realize that winning accolades in debate was a way to separate herself from her peers. She felt “self-important” as a declaimer and debater, viewing the fruits of speech competition— trophies, medals, the three-by-five index cards that she referenced during speeches— as a “badge of superiority over the others who could not do things like that.”³²

By her senior year in high school in 1952, Jordan had become accustomed to winning. She competed for a thousand dollar prize in an Elks Speech contest, and ended up with her first real taste of what it was like to lose. One of the judges at the Elks contest was Thomas Freeman, the debate coach at Texas Southern University. Freeman would later reflect that he recognized that Jordan had talent upon their first meeting, but did not fully realize the full force of her talent until he saw her success as a politician.³³ After the results were announced, he told Jordan that he had ranked her first, and that she should have won the competition. She made note that the winners “were all male, were very skilled in histrionics and always very dramatic in their presentations,” redoubling her efforts as she prepared for her other competitions.³⁴

During the same year, Jordan won the Texas State Ushers Oratorical Contest.³⁵ The first place prize was fifty dollars and a trip to Chicago to compete in the national contest. The trip to Illinois was Jordan’s first experience traveling outside of Texas. She traveled to the competition with her mother by train. Success in public speaking had earned her a ticket to see a different

³² Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 66.

³³ Thomas Freeman, interview by M.E. Sprengelmeyer, Houston, Texas, May 20, 2008. <http://www.rockymountainnews.com/news/2008/aug/13/transcript-me-sprengelmeyers-interview-thomas-free> (accessed April 18, 2010).

³⁴ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 68-9.

³⁵ This was a branch of the organization now known as the National Church Ushers Association of America, a group founded to address discrimination within Christian churches.

world, causing her to think to herself that “this must be the life, seeing different people and going different places. The train must be the way to go.”³⁶

Jordan’s attire for the competition, held at the Greater Bethesda Baptist Church in Chicago, was consonant with her earlier attempts to feminize her appearance: she wore a pink evening dress first purchased for an All Girls’ Choir recital. As she watched contestants from other states recite their memorized speeches, Jordan felt no lack of confidence in her ability to wax eloquently on her subject “is the necessity for a higher education more in demand today than a decade ago?” She was well-practiced on the topic, having delivered the same speech at the state level. Her audience was composed of fellow black high school-aged students, members of the Ushers organization, and a panel of judges. Jordan delivered her speech with self-assurance, believing that her audience “had never heard the word before about higher education that I was going to give them, and that it was probably going to be the great revelation of their lives.” The speech argued that higher education was the one constant offering salvation for African Americans in an ever-changing and unpredictable world. Higher education was hailed as integral to democracy, American culture, and solving social problems. Jordan presented her material as her own opinion, but did not mention personal experience. She eschewed statistics and examples in favor of broad, abstract appeals. While the majority of the speech was not addressed to anyone in particular, the final point invoked an added moral responsibility to audience members. If you deny a student the chance to pursue higher education, she said, “you are also deliberately refusing to give them the intellectual and moral guidance they need and that the world of tomorrow is to need.” In the end, it turned out that Jordan’s confidence was warranted: she was awarded first place and a two-hundred dollar scholarship for college. Her speaking skills thus

³⁶ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 69.

directly aided in the quest for higher education that she spoke about. However, years later, when she looked back on the competition, Jordan regretted the approach that she had taken in the speech, acknowledging that she was essentially telling her African American church-going audience that higher education “was the only way out of the fix you’re in.”³⁷

Still, the trip to Chicago marked a change in Jordan’s outlook. Her yearbook comment makes clear that the experience was critical in shaping Jordan’s early years: “my trip to Chicago was the most Wonderful, Enjoyable, Exciting, Adventurous, Adorable, Unforgettable, Rapturous—it was just the best doggone trip I have ever had.”³⁸ The trip proved that she could stand out from black students from across the nation, solidified her faith in higher education, and opened her eyes to the possibilities presented by travel—possibilities enabled by rhetorical competence.

Shortly after her Chicago trip, Jordan graduated from Phillis Wheatley High School with honors at the age of sixteen. Barbara’s father, Ben, had attended Tuskegee University but due to economic hardship, was not able to complete his degree. This made him firm in the resolution that his children would attend college.³⁹ Rose Mary attended Prairie View College, while Barbara chose Texas Southern University, where her sister Bennie was already enrolled.

Founded in 1947, TSU (originally named the Texas State University for Negroes) was “the product of the efforts of white segregationists to buy time and hold off unfavorable court decisions to integrate Texas colleges and universities” when an African American man, Heman Sweatt, was denied admission to the University of Texas law school. There was no black law school in the state at the time, and Thurgood Marshall saw this as a test case to challenge the

³⁷ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 70-71.

³⁸ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 71-72.

³⁹ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 30-1.

doctrine of “separate but equal.”⁴⁰ The Texas legislature hurried to create a law school as part of the newly formed Texas State University for Negroes, but the effort was a hasty façade: a faculty of two teaching law classes in a Houston office building. In 1950, this new law school was ruled inadequate, but the Texas legislature maintained the operation of TSU. As a result, the school struggled with inadequate funding, placing a focus on educating students toward vocational careers. When Barbara Jordan informed a counselor that she planned on a career in law, she was told that they had no pre-law track and she could take whatever classes she wanted, because it was the credits, not the subjects she took that counted toward graduation.⁴¹

Because it was born out of litigation in the 1940’s, Texas Southern University faced different challenges than institutions of black higher learning created in the immediate postbellum years. Many southern HBCUs began as missionary schools, while TSU was always secular and co-educational.⁴² However, shortly after its creation the school took a step that allowed TSU students to unite in a fine tradition practiced by many HBCUs dating back to the nineteenth century: it formed a debating society. Historically, literary and debating societies have been an important part of African American rhetorical education.⁴³ Intramural debating activities at colleges such as Fisk University in Nashville, Howard University in Washington DC, and Atlanta University in Atlanta date back to the late nineteenth-century, and most black colleges

⁴⁰ Rogers, *Barbara Jordan*, 48.

⁴¹ “Texas Southern University: the Stepchild of the Texas Higher Education System,” *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 25 (August 1999): 65.

⁴² Susan C. Jarratt theorizes these institutions as counterpublics in her “Classics and Counterpublics in Nineteenth-Century Historically Black Colleges,” *College English* 72, no. 2 (November 2009): 134-59. See also Henry Allen Bullock’s *A History of Negro Education in the South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967). Bullock was at Texas Southern when the book was published, but says little about the institution itself in the book.

⁴³ For a comprehensive look at nineteenth century literary societies, see McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*. Logan’s features a chapter on literary societies called “Mental Feasts: Literary and Educational Societies and Lyceums,” in *Liberating Language*, 58-95. For a look at community based literary societies, see Bacon and Glen, “Reinventing the Master's Tools,” 19-47.

had active literary societies by the century's end.⁴⁴ Intercollegiate debates between black colleges can be traced back to the early twentieth-century. Atlanta, Fisk, and Howard Universities took part in a triangular debating league, debating resolutions such as "Resolved: that the United States Should Have an Income Tax" in 1910, and "Resolved: That the Initiative and Referendum Should Be Made a Part of the Legislative System of Our States" in 1911.⁴⁵ As Monroe Little notes, extracurricular activities were an important component of education at HBCUs, "a significant socializing and integrating force for black students whose lives, unlike those of their white counterparts, were severely circumscribed by *de facto* and *de jure* segregation."⁴⁶ Students were motivated to join debate teams for a shot at the fame and fandom usually only reserved for college athletes.⁴⁷ The 1930's interracial debating of Wiley College, a historically black college in Marshall, Texas, has been documented in recent work by David Gold,⁴⁸ and has been represented on the silver screen with Denzel Washington's 2007 film, *The Great Debaters*.⁴⁹ Debate at historically black colleges experienced a slowdown during the

⁴⁴ Marcus H. Boulware. "Speech Training in the Negro College," *Journal of Negro Education*, 16, no.1 (Winter 1947): 116. As Royster notes, women students at Howard initially did not participate in debates, but later formed their own organization, see her *Traces of a Stream*, 198.

⁴⁵ Pamphlet, "Debate between Fisk University and Atlanta University, April 1, 1910 at Fisk Memorial Chapel, Resolved: That the United States Should Have an Income Tax." Pamphlet, "Triangular League Debate: Howard vs. Fisk, April 7, 1911 at Fisk Memorial Chapel, Resolved: That the Initiative and Referendum Should Be Made a Part of the Legislative System of Our States." Fisk University Debating Society Papers, Special Collections, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Fisk University, Nashville, TN.

⁴⁶ Monroe H. Little, "The Extra-Curricular Activities of Black College Students, 1868-1940," *The Journal of Negro History* 65, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 135.

⁴⁷ Little, "Extra-Curricular Activities," 137.

⁴⁸ Gold, *Rhetoric at the Margins*, 43-49.

⁴⁹ Denzel Washington actually consulted with TSU's Thomas Freeman when researching his role of Melvin Tolson for the film (*The Great Debaters*, DVD, directed by Denzel Washington (Chicago: Harpo Films, 2007). Freeman and his debaters taught the cast of *The Great Debaters* about debate fundamentals. Wiley College did not actually debate Harvard, as the film depicts. In the scene dramatized in the film, they actually debated University of Southern California (coached by Alan Nichols, Marie Hochmuth Nichols' spouse). Texas Southern did debate Harvard. Timothy M. O'Donnell has made a case for the relevance of *The Great Debaters* to contemporary debate practice, as well as the need to harness interest in the film towards greater institutional support for the activity. See his "'The Great Debaters': A Challenge to Higher Education," *Inside Higher Ed*, January 7, 2008, <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2008/01/07/odonnell> (accessed April 18, 2010). There is an additional link between TSU and Wiley College: Heman Sweatt, the student whose lawsuit against the University of Texas Law

1940's for a number of reasons, including the war, lack of financial support, and a growing emphasis on discussion activities.⁵⁰

It is against this backdrop, and within this tradition, that the Texas Southern University debate team began in 1949. Thomas Freeman joined the faculty as a professor of Philosophy that year, with a freshly minted doctorate in homiletics, or the art of preaching, from the University of Chicago in hand. Although Freeman had been a debater as an undergraduate at Virginia Union University and at the Andover Newton Theological Seminary where he received his Bachelor of Divinity degree, the idea to start a debate team at TSU was not his. He taught a course in Logic and created an assignment that required his students to debate. Four young men in the class, including Otis King, a classmate of Jordan's from Phillis Wheatley, wanted to start a debate team and took Freeman's assignment as a sign that their dream could be realized. The students went to the Dean of Students claiming to have found a debate coach, and Freeman eventually agreed to be their faculty mentor. After working with the students for several months, he took them to compete in two debates against his alma mater, the University of Chicago. The TSU debaters won both decisions. Although Freeman had little intention of staying in Houston for the long term, TSU administrators enticed him with the incentive of a twelve-month contract, a rarity for faculty members at the time. He remains there to this day.⁵¹

When Barbara Jordan realized that she could essentially "play around for three years" in her classes at TSU, she turned her attention to the activities that had brought her much prestige in high school: speech and debate. It was in her endeavor to join the debate team that Jordan had her first self-taught lesson about the role of the body in rhetorical education. Although Freeman

School is responsible for the creation of TSU, was previously a student of Melvin Tolson at Wiley College. See "Great Debaters: Then and Now," *Our Texas* (Winter 2008): 20-3.

⁵⁰ John W. Parker, "The Status of Debate in the Negro College." *The Journal of Negro Education* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1955): 152-3.

⁵¹ Thomas Freeman, interview by author, Houston, Texas, June 25, 2008.

had judged Jordan in the Elks contest and recognized her nascent talent, he would not allow women to travel to debate competitions out of the sense of gendered decorum that dominated the 1950's. To travel to intercollegiate competitions, women students would have to ride in cars with male students, and Freeman was wary of what this might do to their reputations. There was no university policy against it, but at the time norms in intercollegiate debate competition dictated that "girls didn't participate, men did. Everywhere we went, we met men."⁵²

But Jordan did not give up easily, and she did not waste her words. Instead, finding herself blocked from fully accessing the debate team, Jordan asserted her right to a rhetorical education. Instead of viewing her body as a static object, Jordan materially tapped into her body's contingent capacities. She invented a bodily strategy in the service of *enacting* the claim that she could travel with the team without risking impropriety. Her body became both a site and source of rhetorical ingenuity, and through use of dramatizing media, physically incarnated her argument.⁵³

She gave up the scoop-neck dresses and costume jewelry of high school, cropped her waved hair short above her ears, affected bulky, boxy jackets and flat shoes. Gaining twenty pounds, her buxom figure took on the squared lines of androgyny. She became a no-nonsense presence, someone it was all right to take across the country in a car full of males and not worry about chaperonage.⁵⁴

Jordan altered her body so that she could ensure its mobility through travel to debate tournaments. She "gave up much of her femininity, [so that] she was accepted in the world of

⁵² Freeman, interview by author.

⁵³ The idea the body as both site and source for argument originates in Hauser, "Incongruous Bodies," 2. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson describe enactment as an incarnation of an argument. See their "Form and Genre in Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction," in *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Criticism* (Falls Church, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1978), 9.

⁵⁴ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 78.

men,” much in the same way that she made a conscious decision to change her appearance to fit in with the popular girls in high school.⁵⁵

Gender theorist Judith Halberstam has argued that masculinity “becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the male middle-class body.”⁵⁶ In this case, we can better understand the way that codes of gendered expression were manipulated through material aspects of appearance, with clothing and trinkets of bodily adornment deployed to burnish embodied performance.⁵⁷ As a young woman in a pre-dominantly Baptist, Christian, and African American community in the south, Jordan’s bodily alterations teetered on a fine line between enabling and disabling behavior. As she shifted toward a more androgynous appearance, downplaying stereotypically feminine physical characteristics, she was rewarded with access to intercollegiate debate travel. As the coach, Freeman was the main audience for her bodily argument, yet indirect audiences included the male TSU debaters, administrators, and other debaters and debate coaches on the circuit. Her bodily enactment was successful insofar as it located the stasis of the conflict in her ability to distract each of these audiences (Freeman and administrators worried about scandal, male debaters may be attracted to her or may not take her seriously as a teammate or competitor). Once the more pronounced visual indicators of femininity were eliminated, those audiences could be satisfied in their beliefs that Jordan’s body would not effuse a (hetero)sexuality that would be distracting to others, thus affirming the assumption that a masculine body is a normal, non-threatening body.

⁵⁵ Ann Crawford Fears, *Barbara Jordan: Breaking the Barriers* (Houston: Halycon Press, 2003), 20.

⁵⁶ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 2.

⁵⁷ This brings to mind Carol Mattingly’s work on appearance and dress as a resource for navigating power structures in nineteenth century women’s lives. See her *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women’s Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth Century America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 5. Iris Marion Young has similarly theorized women’s clothing and fashion as a site of exploitation with the potential for empowerment. See her “Women Recovering Our Clothes,” in *On Female Body Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 63-74.

There need not be any actual link between gender expression and sexual preference; however, in many cases, there is a perceived connection. Jordan's sexuality was an aspect of her life that was largely concealed from public view until the end of her life.⁵⁸ As a TSU debater in the 1950's, had she gone "too far" in her physical transformation so that it was seen as gender deviance, she may not have been taken seriously, or worse, put herself in physical danger. Instead, Jordan's bodily strategy was reliant on her knowledge of a particular historical, social, and rhetorical context. She still, for example, wore women's dress suits, they just happened to be less frilly than the typical women's dress of the time period. She conditioned her approach so that she would be accepted as unassuming, untouchable, and immune to heterosexual scandal. The success of this move parallels some of the reasons that tomboyism is accepted in otherwise intolerant contexts: it "tends to be associated with a 'natural' desire for greater freedoms and motilities enjoyed by boys. Very often it is read as a sign of independence and self-motivation, and tomboyism may even be encouraged to the extent that it remains comfortably linked to a stable sense of a girl identity."⁵⁹

Jordan's adopted a targeted strategy motivated by the desire to debate. Debating teams may indeed live up to their reputations as part of a masculinist and exclusionary argument culture, but the structure of the team and the possibility of travel presented her with the challenge of bodily adaptation, a catalyst for invention. Jordan's corporeal transformation created a physical appearance that would stick with her throughout her political career. Once she found a

⁵⁸ The *Houston Chronicle* publicly 'outed' Jordan in her obituary, reporting that she was in a long term relationship with educational psychologist Nancy Earl. See J. Jennings Moss, "Barbara Jordan—the Other Life: Lesbianism Was a Secret the Former Congresswoman Chose to Take to Her Grave," in *Witness to Revolution: The Advocate Reports on Gay and Lesbian Politics, 1967-1999*, ed. Chris Bull (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1999), 373-7. I do not mean to suggest any static connection between sexuality and gendered expression, but rather suggest that Jordan deliberately adapted her gendered expression in this case in order to downplay the risk that heterosexual attraction would be used as a reason to restrict her access to intercollegiate debating. The assumption that she was a single woman did play into public commentary about Jordan. See footnote 85 for a discussion of how her unmarried status was interpreted in one rhetorical analysis of her DNC keynote address.

⁵⁹ Halberstam, *Female Masculinities*, 6.

way to convince Freeman to allow her to travel with the team, not only did she have a strategy for dealing with power relations in politics, but she also set the pattern for other women debaters to join the traveling intercollegiate team. As Freeman himself explained, “it opened the door and they came running in.”⁶⁰ Jordan’s actions granted future women debaters with access to travel without similar challenges of bodily adaptation.

This episode in Jordan’s life can be read as an informal self-education in gaining access to, and credibility within an organization, and subsequently, a forum for rhetorical performance. After staking her claim, Jordan was able to access the more formal rhetorical education that occurred at TSU. Freeman employed a number of strategies to prepare his debaters for competition: “everything you can think of—long hours, studying, practice—everything. There was no one methodology.”⁶¹ The students were expected to do research on topics for debate and write their own speeches. Freeman worked one-on-one with the debaters to help them develop critical thinking skills, verbally sparring with them to develop a sense of the extemporaneity necessary for delivering rebuttals in competition. He told Jordan that her high school experience had taught her to deliver speeches, but had not adequately prepared her in the art of refutation. Debate rounds typically included two person teams, with two main speeches to establish the affirmative and negative cases, and two shorter rebuttals.⁶² Jordan was initially tasked with being the team’s first speaker, laying out the pre-scripted affirmative constructive, while her debate partner, Otis King, gave the rebuttals.⁶³ Her competitive spirit prompted her to keep striving to improve in the activity. Having fought for access to the traveling team, Jordan worked hard to

⁶⁰ Freeman, interview by author.

⁶¹ Freeman, interview by author.

⁶² Parker, “Status of Debate,” 146.

⁶³ Rogers, *Barbara Jordan*, 54. This first speaker/second speaker power differential still exists in contemporary debate, with the more advanced or skilled debate partner typically taking the second speaker position. However, policy debate rounds today require all speakers to give rebuttals.

justify her presence there. Intent to not “let the boys beat her,” she matched hour for hour of the time spent by male teammates in the debate office.⁶⁴

Rhetorical education in argumentation at Texas Southern involved an emphasis on aspects of delivery, including practice in enunciation, hand gestures, and facial expressions. For TSU debaters, vocal performance was undoubtedly influenced by Freeman’s own distinctive style in his everyday speech: a rhythmic, booming voice coupled with deliberate and measured inflection. He draws out certain words in the tradition of classically trained Shakespearean actors, ending sentences sharply.⁶⁵ Freeman, of course, was skilled in preaching, an art that requires oratorical mastery to capture a congregation’s attention. As Otis King recalls,

I didn’t have the deep booming voice that he had, but Barbara did, and we copied his mannerisms and inflections. Barbara picked up a lot of that, a lot of Dr. Freeman’s flair. She was a very effective speaker. She was the absolute best orator we ever had. As part of a team, I thought I was as good or a better debater than she because I had the ability to make the key debating points. I used to tell people when we were debating, ‘I have to listen to *what* Barbara says, so I can defend her positions. I can’t be listening to *how* she says it.’ She had the sense of the dramatic even before coming to Tom Freeman. But he certainly influenced all of us.⁶⁶

Here, King draws on a well-known dichotomy commonly attributed to rhetoric when it is juxtaposed with reality. In this configuration, rhetoric is at best logic’s flowery adornment, and at worst, manipulation, what Wayne Booth calls “mere rhetrickery.”⁶⁷ The historical distancing of the rhetorical tradition from bodily delivery can be seen as an attempt to divorce itself from this overly simplistic formulation of style versus substance. While Jordan’s delivery style in her later political speeches is a composite that can be traced to many different sources, Freeman’s

⁶⁴ Freeman, interview by Sprengelmeyer.

⁶⁵ Observations based on the author’s oral history interview with Freeman.

⁶⁶ Rogers, *Barbara Jordan*, 54.

⁶⁷ Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: the Quest for Effective Communication* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), X.

influence is undeniable. She would later say that he “inflict[ed] on [her] a pattern of speech” that she was never “able to eradicate.”⁶⁸

Beyond building her oratorical style, being a debate team member at TSU enabled Jordan to a whole new world through intercollegiate travel to tournaments. Because Freeman had attended universities in Virginia, Massachusetts, and Illinois, he had connections that enabled him to arrange debates with other universities around the country. Most TSU students were born and raised in Houston, and the debate team provided the rare opportunity for travel outside of the city, state, and the south in general. As King recalls, “most of us had never been out of the ghetto, although we probably didn’t know what a ghetto was then.”⁶⁹ The trip to Chicago had been Jordan’s only major venture outside of her community in Houston, and she had only previously competed against other black high school students.

Due to segregation, few non-HBCU schools in the south were willing to debate Texas Southern University. Freeman arranged interracial debates with universities in the Midwest and East Coast, but this often involved traveling through regions that were very hostile to them. Preparing for a debate trip went beyond just researching their cases, it also involved charting out travel routes where there would be food and lodging available for African Americans. Often, this meant that the team would have to stay with Freeman’s friends and relatives or find accommodations that would allow African Americans outside of the towns where debate tournaments were taking place. Inconsistent food options required them to pack food for entire weekends in their cars. At one stop in Georgia, Freeman entered the front door of an empty

⁶⁸ Quoted in Thomas Freeman’s speech at Barbara Jordan’s Memorial, Good Hope Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, January 20, 1996, transcription by the author. Commentators observing the memorial remarked upon the similarities in their speech styles. When I interviewed Freeman, though, he denied any overt effort to influence his debater’s style, but admitted that many people could choose a TSU debater out of a crowd due to vocal stylings decidedly Freeman-esque.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Rogers, *Barbara Jordan*, 53.

restaurant and asked to purchase food for his debaters. The owner agreed to serve them, but only if they would come to the back door. At other locations throughout the south, they were denied service at restaurants, access to restrooms, and told that they should get out of town. Freeman maintains that although he was angered by the discrimination that the team faced on the road, it was that experience of travel that taught his students how to deal with a segregated world and ultimately created new opportunities:

I went through all of those experiences for the one purpose of steeling my students against whatever they faced. And at the time I was criticized—"you shouldn't do that. If it's not available to them, you shouldn't even go." But had I adopted that policy, they never would have developed. Doors closed...and they would have remained closed. But because they interacted with those on the other side of the door, and did so at a level of acceptability, they were received.⁷⁰

Just as Jordan's bodily transformation opened the door to allow women to travel on the TSU debate team, neutralizing discrimination in debate on the basis of sex, Freeman's efforts to expose his students to a "white world" similarly sought to counteract discrimination in debate on the basis of race. In both cases, it was the physical act of traveling to intercollegiate competitions that brought them face-to-face with prejudice.

Debating at predominately white schools allowed Jordan and her teammates to compete in a world that was formerly unknown to them. Slowly, interracial debating began to chisel away at long-held stereotypes about African American intelligence. In 1954, the team visited East Central State College in Ada, Oklahoma. The TSU debaters performed well and won major awards at the tournament. When called upon to make a comment after the speeches, one judge, a retired white coach of another team said, "thirty years ago I wrote a paper in which I argued that blacks were inherently inferior. After listening to these debaters tonight, I confess before this

⁷⁰ Freeman, interview by author.

audience that I was wrong.”⁷¹ Competition by competition, the TSU debaters changed minds.

While experiences of discrimination in travel served to reinforce Jordan’s race consciousness and sense of segregation, the experience of travel also expanded her sense that they could succeed beyond a separate but equal world.

Jordan and King came from very different backgrounds than their white counterparts from other schools, but they believed that some of the disparities were neutralized by the conventions of the activity. They were assigned a common debate topic, and as long as they had access to a library to research their case and time to practice, felt that they had relative equality with their opponents in preparing for competitions.⁷² Still, they were under no illusion that the playing field was completely level in the way that speech and debate contests were decided: “we felt that, to win, we had to be so clearly better than the white team so that a judge who wanted to rule for the white team, based upon his own prejudice, just couldn’t do it. We had to make our case so clear that we could not lose.”⁷³ In other words, Jordan and King were fully aware of the forces working against them, but believed that they had the basic resources necessary to succeed.

In 1956, Texas Southern University made history by participating in the first integrated speech and debate tournament in the south at Baylor College. Glenn Capp, the director of debate at Baylor, was a proponent of the race and sex-based integration of debate, but many in the Waco, Texas community disagreed with the decision to admit TSU to the tournament.⁷⁴ The team had to stay outside of town because there was no place that would lodge them. This

⁷¹ Quoted in “The Shrinking Number of White Students at Black Colleges,” 11.

⁷² Whether this perception is accurate is itself up for debate. In the 1950’s, debate preparation required only access to a library and basic materials but there likely was some disparity in the quantity and quality of research materials available. The economics of contemporary debate participation are manifested in issues such as a team’s travel budget, computer, printing and copying costs, ability to hire a coaching staff and access to library-based and online resources.

⁷³ King quoted in Rogers, *Barbara Jordan*, 56.

⁷⁴ Capp received irate letters and reports that there were editorials published against the integration of the tournament. See his *Excellence in Forensics: A Tradition at Baylor University* (Waco: Baylor University, 1986), 49.

discrimination, however, seemingly did not carry over to the competition at Baylor: Jordan won the junior division's first place prize in oratory and third place in extemporaneous speaking.

Pitted against white students, Jordan began to see herself as a star. She thought, "why, you white girls are no competition at all. If this is the best you have to offer, I haven't missed anything."⁷⁵

Inspired by a newfound confidence in her ability to excel in an integrated world, Jordan began to think more seriously about her future. She decided to change her major to government in order to prepare for law school. Having heard that Harvard was the best law school, she was determined to apply there.⁷⁶ Freeman, however, urged Jordan to temper her ambition, saying that she could never get into the law school because "they have never heard of Texas Southern University at Harvard Law School."⁷⁷ He encouraged her to instead consider Boston University, where the team debated during Jordan's tenure at TSU. Freeman's brother was a law student at Boston University and was able to show her around the campus.⁷⁸ Jordan was accepted at Boston University, where despite financial hardship, she was able to attend. Eventually, she graduated as one of only two women in her class to complete the degree.

⁷⁵ Rogers, *Barbara Jordan*, 55.

⁷⁶ When the Harvard University debate team visited TSU, the debate ended in a tie. Over twenty years later, when Jordan was asked to give the commencement address at Harvard, she commented on that decision. She surmised that the bias towards Harvard was so strong in the debate that a tie must have really meant a TSU victory. She joked with the audience that if she would take home any surplus trophies they found lying around back with her to Texas Southern. While Houston judges may have felt intimidated in awarding TSU a win over Harvard, Jordan, bolstered by the passage of time and her political office, had no trouble letting Harvard graduates know that she remembered the rightful victors. See Jordan's "Harvard University Commencement Address, Cambridge, Massachusetts, June 16, 1977," in *Barbara C. Jordan: Selected Speeches*, ed. Sandra Parham (Washington DC: Howard University Press, 1999), 53.

⁷⁷ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 82.

⁷⁸ There is a discrepancy in Freeman's account of Jordan's top law school choice and the one reported in her co-authored (auto-) biography with Hearon. While Jordan and Hearon write that Jordan wanted to attend Harvard and was dissuaded by Freeman, he claims that she never wanted to go to Harvard and suggests that she was influenced to go to Boston University because of her debate experience: "Now the books that have been written have said her goal was to go to Harvard. That's not true, see. Harvard was not in her mind. Harvard came in the mind of the people later who wanted to dramatize the success that she had made because she didn't go to Harvard, therefore . . . And that's not true. She decided to go to Boston University when I took her to Boston to debate against Boston University" (interview by Sprengelmeyer).

While it is tempting draw an easy connection between debate participation and success in law school, such triumphalism would be not only naïve, but historically inaccurate. Upon entering law school at Boston University, Jordan reflected that her supposedly “separate but equal” education at TSU had, in fact, been quite unequal. Her experience on the debate team had opened doors for her, but it had not adequately prepared her to think logically in the way she was challenged to at Boston University:

In the past I had got along by spouting off. Whether you talked about debates or oratory, you dealt with speechifying. Even in debate it was pretty much canned because you had, in your little three-by-five box, a response for whatever issue might be raised in opposition. The format was structured so that there was no opportunity for independent thinking. (I really had not had my ideas challenged ever.) But I could no longer orate and let that pass for reasoning. Because there was not any demand for an orator at Boston University Law School. You had to think and read and understand and reason. I had learned at twenty-one that couldn't just say a thing is so because it might not be so, and somebody brighter, smarter, and more thoughtful would come out and tell you it wasn't so. Then, if you still thought it was, you had to prove it. Well, that was a new thing for me. I cannot, I really cannot describe what that did to my insides and to my head. I thought: I'm being educated finally.⁷⁹

One interpretation of Jordan's reflection is that her rhetorical education on the debating team did not prepare her adequately for the challenges of law school. From this perspective, she left TSU feeling as though she had not truly learned to think, she had only learned to “speechify.”

However, a more generous interpretation is that while debate did not train Jordan in the specific style of reasoning that law school would require, it did provide her with three advantages. First, although the exclusionary policy limiting women's travel did Jordan no direct favors, it challenged her to use her body as an inventional resource that manifested in successful rhetorical enactment. Second, once she had access to full participation in debate, Jordan was able to develop and refine a style of verbal and bodily communication that commanded attention. As my

⁷⁹ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 93.

analysis of her DNC keynote address will reveal, it was her delivery style in tandem with her ability to deploy bodily enactment that combined to make it one of the most memorable speeches of the twentieth-century. Finally, participation in debate allowed Jordan to travel beyond her neighborhood in Houston. This opportunity to encounter and compete in a “white world,” equipped her with an “enlarged mentality” to imagine what was possible. Jordan was not outfitted to excel on logic exams at Boston University, but she was equipped with a different kind of critical thinking articulated by Hannah Arendt:

Critical thinking is possible only where the standpoints of all others are open to inspection. Hence, critical thinking, while still a solitary business, does not cut itself off from ‘all others.’ To be sure, it still goes on in isolation, but by the force of imagination it makes the others present and thus moves in a space that is potentially public, open to all sides’ in other words, it adopts the position of Kant’s world citizen. To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one’s imagination to go visiting.⁸⁰

By physically traveling to new places and encountering new people, Jordan’s imagination could also figuratively travel to new places, exposing her to novel ideas and opportunities. It was that enlarged mentality that enabled her to pursue a career in law, and later, politics.

4.2 LATER EDUCATION: STATE AND NATIONAL POLITICS

Barbara Jordan referred to her time in Boston as a “departure from the womb” of Houston, Texas.⁸¹ Following her graduation from Boston University, Jordan, perhaps predictably, returned to that warm and familiar place to practice law. She was one of few black female lawyers in Houston at the time. During her free time, she did volunteer work convincing citizens in Harris

⁸⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 43.

⁸¹ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 83.

County's primarily African American precincts to vote for the John F. Kennedy-Lyndon B. Johnson ticket. She was asked to speak on behalf of the campaign to local churches and civic organizations, and by the end of the election, had earned a reputation for eloquence. Jordan put the delivery skills honed in speech and debate to good use, speaking to "any group who wanted me, on any topic they requested. If they wanted somebody to talk about flowers, I'd be the one there to talk about flowers."⁸²

These experiences as a speaker, along with her growing participation in local politics, paved the way for Jordan's run for the Texas House of Representatives. As she campaigned for state office, Jordan was forced to ask herself the question that so many commentators would eventually pose: what made her so special? What accounted for her ability to mesmerize through speech—whether it was in a debate round or on the campaign trail? After she received a standing ovation for a campaign speech in 1962, Jordan took stock, wondering if the reaction was provoked because she was the "only black, or the only woman, or sounded different, or had such fantastic things to say about state reform." Jordan's desire to know if audience members were motivated to stand because of her visible identity as a black woman, her delivery, or the content of the speech was rooted in a hope to replicate the effect in future campaign appearances, to find out "what had really turned them on, what had given them the spark."⁸³

Initially, she believed that being an African American woman who sounded like she was from the Fifth Ward of Houston was an advantage in her run for elected office with local voters—that a "bod[y] whose colloquial speech bears the oral impress of neighborhood origins"⁸⁴ would appeal to local voters who identified with such cultural markers. Yet later,

⁸² Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 111.

⁸³ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 113.

⁸⁴ Marvin, "Communication as Embodiment," 71.

Jordan would come to grasp how such qualities, while reassuring for some audiences, alienated others. After she had lost her second bid for the Texas Legislature in 1964, Jordan began to think seriously about an issue that she had been warned about earlier by a Rice university professor: that she would have an uphill battle because she was black, female, and large. At the time, she assured him that she could not do anything about the first two issues, but did not believe that they would be factors in the election. Sensing that Jordan's political aspirations were going nowhere after two losses, family members and friends urged her to think about getting married and settling down. She admitted that "public expectations were different for a white man than for a black woman," because women were expected to tend to home and family. Jordan did not believe that she was cut out for a life in which she was expected to be "always available at her husband's side...always be[ing] prepared to turn and kiss his puckered lips." Determined to prove this public perception wrong, and drawing on a competitive spirit that she traced back to the Elks Oratorical Contest, she vowed a total commitment to a life in politics.⁸⁵

In 1966, Barbara Jordan was finally elected to the Texas State Senate. As one might expect, there was a flurry of media coverage about Jordan as "the first and only" black woman to hold such a position. As a person of multiple intersecting identities, she did not have the luxury of forgetting or ignoring her body—or inasmuch as she did, there were often people around to remind her just how incongruous her body was in spaces like the halls of the Texas legislature. By remaining private about her personal life, Jordan befuddled commentators who wanted an angle on her as a black female public figure. Her strategy was to go about business as usual,

⁸⁵ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 116-7. While her sexuality was not explicitly discussed as visually marked in the texts that I examine, Jordan's size and perceived masculinity figures into commentary about her body, and her status as an unmarried woman plays into some of the stereotypes circulating in public discourse. In his analysis of her DNC address, Wayne Thompson argues that as an unmarried woman, Jordan lacked the opportunity to capitalize on "womanliness" by appearing in public as a wife and mother (as compared to other women in politics like Ella Grasso). See his "Barbara Jordan's Keynote Address: Fulfilling Dual and Conflicting Purposes," *Central States Speech Journal*, 30, no. 3 (Fall 1979): 276.

reminding reporters that upon her arrival in Austin, “the Capitol stayed on its foundations and the star didn’t fall off the top.”⁸⁶

A variety of mass-mediated stereotypes, including the “mammy,” jezebel, black matriarch, and welfare queen, have been deployed to limit and control black femininity.⁸⁷ This taxonomy of labels, according to Patricia Hill Collins, often denies black women a role as actors in community structures and social institutions, relegating them to “nameless, passive objects serving as topics of discussion for others.”⁸⁸ One insidious aspect of institutional racism and sexism is its ability to discipline the bodies of some while others can carry on without worry, a luxury of being unmarked. In her 1979 autobiography, Jordan credits her large body and her “still-increasing bulk” with insulating her from many of these common stereotypes during the time. She “didn’t look like their dear old mother, and she didn’t look like their beautiful young girlfriend, so none of the patterns needed to operate. Here was someone cut from a different mold, who, being outside their standard frame of reference, would not disrupt it.”⁸⁹

Yet public commentary about Jordan’s deeds and appearance tells a different story. She may not have had to worry about not being taken seriously because of her sex appeal, and she may not have looked like the dear old mothers of those in state government, but unfortunately, her ‘still-increasing bulk’ did not insulate her from being subjected to nasty stereotypes, such as being regularly referred to as a “nigger mammy washerwoman [*sic*]” by one of her colleagues in

⁸⁶ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 138.

⁸⁷ Evelyn M. Simien, *Black Feminist Voices in Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 72. In her taxonomy of the stereotypes of black femininity, Patricia Hill Collins affirms that labels ranging from the Big Black Bitch to the Mammy are alive and well today. See her *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2005), chapter four.

⁸⁸ Patricia Hill Collins, “Epilogue,” in *Centering Ourselves: African American Feminist and Womanist Studies of Discourse*, ed. Marsha Houston and Olga Idriss Davis (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2002), 243.

⁸⁹ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 139.

the Texas Senate.⁹⁰ The physical characteristics—a “large, dark body” and “round, smiling face”—often signal corresponding stereotypes about the behavioral attributes of “mammies,” such as “infinite patience...self-deprecating wit...acceptance of her inferiority and her devotion to whites.” The result, according to Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, is “a long-lasting and troubled marriage of racial and gender essentialism, mythology, and southern nostalgia.”⁹¹ Jordan’s appearance provided commentators with a point of reference from which to frame the supposed disjuncture between racist expectations in politics and the actual power that Barbara Jordan wielded in voice and presence.

Why did Jordan, looking back as she penned her autobiography, choose to write that she disrupted visually-based frames? Did she not know about the way that she was being referenced, or did she simply choose to ignore it? My read is that as she charted her lived experience in her biography, Jordan was making choices that underlined her rhetorical strategies for survival and ascendancy in politics. Even though she knew, for example, that the visual typecast of the mammy was being used to describe her, Jordan’s strategy was not to dwell on these instances. Instead, her self-framing focused attention on the ways her body might have confounded those who sought to put her in a neat, little box. Like the physical transformation that allowed her to attend intercollegiate debate competitions, Jordan believed that her appearance worked to her advantage because it allowed her to occupy a safe and non-threatening space amongst her fellow public officials. She wanted to signal to readers of her biography that her bodily size was just one element of the dramatizing media she had at her disposal in crafting her personal way-of-being in the public life of Texas politics. She still had the ambition that came with the “enlarged

⁹⁰ Ivins, “Barbara Jordan,” 4.

⁹¹ Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 2.

mentality” of being able to see herself succeed in a white world; her “enlarged” body allowed her to continue down that path.

After winning a second term in the Texas Senate in 1968, Jordan was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1972. Her victory was aided in no small way by the support of Lyndon Baines Johnson and the interest of the national Democratic Party. Additional conversation about her body followed as Jordan gained attention nationally. A November 1972 article in the *Texas Observer* describes frustration over some of her moderate positions in the Texas legislature: “Aside from the vicarious kick a white lib can get from watching Jordan speak to a new audience—they tend to snigger and assume that anyone who looks that much like a mammy is going to be pretty funny to hear—she’s not much use as a token.”⁹² Even a supposedly friendly, liberal publication like the *Texas Observer* dealt in the visual stereotypes of the mammy. Jordan’s inclusion of the quote in her biography proves that she was well aware of public commentary about her physical appearance at the time. In what was termed her “meteoric rise” into national politics, Jordan was referenced as a “big, burly woman of 39 from Houston’s black ghetto, with the distinctly deep, resonant voice.”⁹³ As she emerged—and succeeded—on the national stage, her seemingly incompatible body became a focus of commentators trying to make sense of her character and success. Her physical appearance became a synecdoche for the unfolding drama of Jordan’s political character, choices, and relationships.

William Broyles Jr.’s article in *Texas Monthly* is typical of how the indescribability of Jordan’s rhetorical presence was ultimately articulated through recourse to the material aspects of her body. The article begins with a discussion of the tough task faced by Edsel Cramer, the artist commissioned to paint Jordan’s portrait for the Senate chamber. Cramer, who by virtue of

⁹² Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 192.

⁹³ Donald Lambro, “Barbara Jordan’s Meteoric Rise,” *Houston Chronicle* (February 14, 1976): 16. Quoted in Bryant, 80.

six two-hour sittings was able to study Jordan in great detail, read her face and body as a parallel to her character and personality: “her head is like a bull’s head; across her brow is a lump of bone that stands out like the forehead of a bull. That look of bull-like strength is part of her character.”⁹⁴ The comparison of visual images of women to animals is dangerous territory that often thinly masks disrespect and violence against both species.⁹⁵ The comparison of a black woman to a bull, conjures up a history of slavery in which black women were treated as chattel, a word that shares its etymological roots with cattle. Yet Cramer underlines the connotation of bull-like strength, hard work, and determination—not stubbornness—in his characterization of Jordan’s physical likeness. By simply studying her face, one can tell that she is no shrinking violet. He follows this description with a comment about how Jordan’s presence is paralleled by her bodily size. Though Cramer tried to paint the portrait to normal scale, her large size and personality meant that he “couldn’t help but make her larger than life.”⁹⁶ That there was barely room for her presence on the canvas, must have come as some relief to reporters, who were constantly foiled in their attempts to adequately express the experience seeing and hearing her, to fit Barbara Jordan onto the page. As Broyles Jr. put it, “verbal portraits” of Jordan were similarly larger than life. In telling the story of Jordan’s humble beginnings in Houston and her major political accomplishments to date, the article sought also to reveal something about that nagging question: what makes Barbara Jordan so special?

⁹⁴ Quoted in William Broyles Jr., “The Making of Barbara Jordan.” *Texas Monthly* (October 1976): 127.

⁹⁵ Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: a Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 1995), see especially chapters two and three. The imagistic link between of African American women and animals is a common advertising meme, usually highlighting the ‘exoticism’ of a product. See Lisa Wade, “Black Woman Posed as and Among Animals,” *Sociological Images* blog, entry posted August 19, 2009, <http://contexts.org/socimages/2009/08/19/another-photoshoot-places-a-black-woman-among-animals> (accessed March 1, 2010).

⁹⁶ William Broyles Jr., “The Making of Barbara Jordan.” *Texas Monthly* (October 1976): 127.

The article highlights the incongruity of Jordan's body in the predominantly white world of national politics for Texan readers by recalling the (unfortunately) familiar stereotype of the "mammy:"

She has been called Aunt Jemima by both her friends and her enemies, and although she doesn't like it, the metaphor is apt. In appearance she conjures up the common memories of a culture—she is every black maid, black cook, black mammy. She comes to us direct from *Gone with the Wind* or *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, an enduring stereotype of black women who lived closest with whites, who sustained the web of mutuality. The awesomeness of her presence is rooted in her explicit destruction of that image, as if every Aunt Jemima or black mammy had risen up with their rolling pins to take over the world.⁹⁷

Any mystery about how Jordan excelled so quickly in politics is linked back to the clash between her physical likeness to black maids, cooks, and "mammies." Although Jordan believed that her bodily size shielded her from some of these characterizations, Broyles Jr. found it convenient to draw upon them. In a nutshell, Jordan is special because she wields power but looks *different* doing it.

There was a pivotal moment in her career when the American public was first able to form their own opinions of Jordan apart from media commentary: her nationally televised statement on Watergate. Though she was a junior congressperson, President Johnson had facilitated her membership on the Judiciary Committee, and in the shining moment of impeachment commentary, Jordan was able flex her knowledge of the Constitution in her particular oratorical style. Noting that other statements had started by quoting the Preamble, her speech began there as well:

“ ‘We the people’—it is a very eloquent beginning. But when the Constitution of the United States was completed on the seventeenth of September in 1787, I was not included in that ‘We the people.’ I felt for many years that somehow George Washington and Alexander Hamilton had just left me out by mistake. But through

⁹⁷ Broyles, "The Making," 202.

the process of amendment, interpretation, and court decision, I have finding been included in 'We the people.'⁹⁸

In this moment, Jordan created a sea change. She built her ethos, and her mythos—she became “a myth of [her audience’s] own creating, an institution, a legend accountable to their prejudgment.” Rather than having to hear reports secondhand, viewers could experience her speech for themselves. She became “a primary source,” a relatively unfiltered image compared to the secondary source of news stories that dealt in stereotypes.⁹⁹

This sense of Jordan’s celebrity, ethos and power transferred over to interesting interpretations of other aspects of bodily difference. In Washington, Jordan chose a seat in the center aisle of the House floor rather than with the liberals or the Congressional Black Caucus because she wanted to be in the line of vision of the presiding officer.¹⁰⁰ She rarely left her seat to talk to others, instead waiting for her colleagues to approach her. This behavior was multi-layered. It was interpreted by some critics as a power move, a way to “hold court” and make people come to her.¹⁰¹ An alternate explanation, which may have functioned simultaneously, was linked to Jordan’s bodily ability. She was diagnosed with a form of multiple sclerosis in 1973. Chronic illness and disability are often equated with vulnerability and powerlessness: a dangerous association in a political culture where the fitness of a politician’s body habitually stands in for the fitness of their ability to lead.¹⁰² The binary system of disability/ability intersects

⁹⁸ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 186.

⁹⁹ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 192. The DNC address as a way to make sense of the artistry of the political theater at work as her televised image helped to secure her role as a national political celebrity.

¹⁰⁰ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 180-1.

¹⁰¹ Walter Shapiro, “What Does This Woman Want: Is Barbara Jordan Really Worth All the Fuss?” *Texas Monthly* (October 1976): 204.

¹⁰² The idea that a politician’s body performatively and metonymically stands in for the health of the body politic is discussed as an element of the Courtly Style in Robert Hariman’s *Political Style: the Artistry of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Davis W. Houck and Amos Kiewe explore the carefully orchestrated treatment of FDR’s disability and its relationship to the body politic in their text, *FDR’s Body Politics: the Rhetoric of Disability* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2003).

with race, gender, and sexuality, producing “subjects by differentiating and marking bodies.”¹⁰³ Already marked with the visual cues of a large, dark-skinned, female body, Jordan tried to maintain her public persona and personal privacy by keeping her medical condition under wraps until later in her life when she required a wheelchair. The public explanation provided by Jordan’s aides for her limited mobility was that she had an untreated injury that damaged the cartilage behind her knee. Eschewing any discussion of illness or disability, Jordan’s autobiography links mobility to bodily size, suggesting that it was well within her control to simply lose the extra weight that was exacerbating the injury. In doing so, Jordan highlights another critical moment in her lived experience in which she was able to invent a bodily rhetorical strategy.

In the year prior to the Democratic National Convention, she began to worry that the power usually attributed to her bodily aura, presence, and size had begun to work against her, undermining her efficacy. She noticed that the press had shifted from using words like “presence” to “hulking” and “massive”:

I did not like people saying I was fat; big to me was different from being fat. It’s a downer. It’s not an attractive thing. I had become a fat lady—that’s not the word they used but it was obvious that’s what they meant, because they did not present whatever words they used in a positive framework.¹⁰⁴

As a result, Jordan made another deliberate attempt to alter her body—she undertook a weight management routine. Her approach was not rocket science; she simply ate differently, dieting by avoiding the draw of heavy cocktail party hors d’oeuvres.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” *NWSA Journal* 14, no.3 (Fall 2002): 4-5. On the parallels between feminist rhetorics and disability studies, see Jay Dolmage and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, “Refiguring Rhetoric: Linking Feminist Rhetoric and Disability Studies,” in *Rhetorica in Motion: Feminist Rhetorical Methods and Methodologies*, edited by Eileen E. Schell and K.J. Rawson, 23-38 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).

¹⁰⁴ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 227.

¹⁰⁵ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 228.

After Jordan was asked to be a keynote speaker for the Democratic National Convention, she made a deal with her partner, Nancy Earl: if Jordan could lose sixty pounds by the DNC in July 1976, she would be rewarded with a bicycle. Together, they “set goals and made graphs,” charting weight loss after daily weigh-ins.¹⁰⁶ This routine allowed Jordan to exert control over the mediated image of herself that she would project to the 75 million Americans watching the DNC on television, many of whom would be seeing her for the first time. Jordan knew that a lot of the news coverage of her DNC speech would be about her sex and skin color. That much was an inevitable result of being “the first and only” African American woman faced with such a rhetorical situation. In recognizing that public commentary would focus on material characteristics of her body, Jordan’s size became a personal focus. She recognized that ideal bodily size differed culturally, calling her own mother’s insistence that she was healthy and beautiful “a black thing.”¹⁰⁷ Fat bodies— especially for women of color—are at risk for being unfairly associated with “reckless excess, prodigality, indulgence, lack of restraint, violation of order and space, transgression of boundary” in the predominantly white world of politics that Jordan was navigating. Losing weight would allow her to avoid negative connotations of the corpulent body as a site of psychological display, what Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco call “sympto-somatic” of an internal struggle.¹⁰⁸ Once again, she could be seen as manipulating her body as a way to secure her lasting presence within an exclusionary institution.

As she made other preparations for the DNC, Jordan learned that for the first time, there would be two keynote speakers, herself and astronaut John Glenn. DNC chairperson Robert

¹⁰⁶ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 227.

¹⁰⁷ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 252-3.

¹⁰⁸ Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco, *Bodies Out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 3.

Strauss's advisors had warned against putting Jordan in the spotlight alone.¹⁰⁹ Some read the move to divide Jordan's time with Glenn as discriminatory, suggesting that American politics was not yet ready for a black woman to occupy such a role on her own. Others drew on figurative connections in the choice of Jordan and Glenn, suggesting that, like an astronaut, "Barbara Jordan was an explorer of unfamiliar terrain" for African Americans and women.¹¹⁰ Just as Glenn had traveled into space, Jordan had, throughout her time in debate and her political career, broken barriers by traveling to and occupying space in places previously underexplored by black women.

National political conventions serve to formally nominate presidential and vice presidential candidates, adopt a party platform, and unite the party in order to gain momentum in an election season. In giving a keynote address at the DNC, Jordan was faced with the type of rhetorical situation that calls for "public, political, argumentative, powerful rhetoric—rhetoric in our most traditional(lly masculine) sense."¹¹¹ Full analyses have been published on Jordan's keynote address in its textual entirety, and yet we are unable to fully access the question of what made the speech so impactful, and what made Barbara Jordan so special without taking a more specialized view of how she strategically drew on her body as unspoken, visual evidence in the speech. What were the dramatizing media that enhanced Jordan's bodily aura? How did they interact with textualizing media in crafting Jordan's overwhelming yet intangible "presence"? Therefore, a focus on bodily rhetorical enactment—and cognate rhetorical concepts—is necessary to understand the mediated dynamics of the self-styled image that Jordan projected at the DNC.

¹⁰⁹ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 228.

¹¹⁰ Barbara Reynolds, quoted in Bryant, 59.

¹¹¹ Lisa Ede, Cheryl Glenn, and Andrea Lunsford, "Border Crossings: Intersections of Rhetoric and Feminism," *Rhetorica* XII, no.4 (Autumn 1995): 435.

4.3 THE 1976 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

On the evening of July 12, 1976, the Democratic National Convention was held at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Strauss had planned on orchestrating a grand entrance for Glenn and Jordan, with each speaker walking from their delegations to the podium surrounded by a cheering crowd. Citing the damaged cartilage in her knee, Jordan had nixed the idea, though she opted not to tell him that “if she hadn’t got so heavy to begin with it would have never have got in that shape.” So while John Glenn made his entrance from the Ohio delegation, special accommodations were made to allow Jordan to travel directly from backstage to the podium on the evening of her speech.¹¹² Amidst the buzz of noisy convention-goers, Glenn gave his address first. Strauss warned Jordan backstage that “this inattention was the natural order of political gatherings—telling her not to worry, that the people in the hall were going to be walking around and talking and not paying attention” and suggesting that she instead concentrate on the cameras that would broadcast her speech to television viewers across the United States.¹¹³

Prior to her entrance, a short film clip invoked Jordan’s biography, giving context to the speech, and reaching all the way back to her life in the Fifth Ward of Houston.¹¹⁴ Still riding the tide of credibility generated by her Watergate statement, Jordan took the stage, receiving a standing ovation and chants of “we want Barbara!” She was surprised by the audience’s response, realizing that they would not be talking over her keynote as they had with Glenn’s.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 229.

¹¹³ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 229.

¹¹⁴ Bryant, *Barbara Charline Jordan*, 65.

¹¹⁵ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 230.

When asked to narrate her entrance, Jordan's debate coach, Tom Freeman, described the event with his characteristic dramatic flair: "it would be as though a queen were entering, and the queen is presented to her court, and she charms the courtiers . . ." ¹¹⁶ Robert Hariman describes the "courtly style" as one that emphasizes the body of the monarch, where "power is defined by the immediate presence of the monarch" and one's relative power depends upon the physical distance between courtiers and the body of the king. ¹¹⁷ With Barbara Jordan assuming the role of symbolic monarch, or at least, political celebrity, in her DNC address, reporters viewing her live struggled to express the experience of being in her political proximity, and home viewers seeing Jordan for the first time experienced her presence, "an illusion that a mediated experience is not mediated." ¹¹⁸

Visual communication scholarship has demonstrated how there is no such thing as a truly unmediated or unframed image. ¹¹⁹ In contemporary political culture, media coverage "creates its own aristocracy of representation...conferred through fragmentary projections of the courtly style and confirmed when that style becomes reproduced in the organization of the celebrity's daily life." ¹²⁰ Media reaction to Jordan's physical illness, disability, and weight can be seen through this lens, from her supposed refusal to move from her "throne" on the floor of the House, to her weight loss. When she appeared on stage at the DNC, Jordan had almost—but not quite—lost the sixty pounds that she had set out to lose. Her green three piece suit was typical of

¹¹⁶ Freeman, interview by Sprengelmeyer.

¹¹⁷ Hariman, *Political Style*, 58.

¹¹⁸ Matthew Lombard and Theresa Ditton. "At the Heart of It All: The Concept of Presence," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 3, no.2 (September 1997): <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol3/issue2/lombard.html> (accessed March 1, 2010).

¹¹⁹ See for example, Cara A. Finnegan, "The Naturalistic Enthymeme and Visual Argument: Photographic Representation in the 'Skull Controversy,'" *Argumentation and Advocacy* 37, no. 3 (Winter 2001):133-50 and Michelle G. Gibbons, "Seeing the Mind in the Matter: Functional Brain Imaging as Framed Visual Argument," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 43 (Winter/Spring 2007): 175-88.

¹²⁰ Hariman, *Political Style*, 80.

the boxy attire she had worn ever since the bodily transformation that enabled her to start traveling with the TSU debate team, but it was significantly smaller than the Lane Bryant size 24 ½ that she had previously worn.¹²¹ Commentators took note of Jordan's size, not because she was "hulking," "massive," or "burly," but because of her weight loss. *The Houston Chronicle*, for example, juxtaposed before and after photos of Jordan, accompanied by a caption that read "a Svelte Jordan" in story published a week after the convention. It was followed by an angry column from Sam Wright, a Republican vying for Jordan's seat in the 18th Congressional District at the time. Wright bemoaned that not only was he an underdog running against a national celebrity, but that there was simply no way to compete when newspapers would publish stories about non-campaign issues like weight loss. Voters may not know his name, but they knew about Jordan's slimming body.

Jordan's DNC address was animated by her distinctive delivery style, words slowly spoken with punctuated pauses. Though the convention planners ran the speech through the teleprompter, Jordan insisted on having her speech printed out in front of her, so she had a concrete textual artifact that would allow her to "turn the pages and see what comes next."¹²² Balancing her Texas preacher drawl with a Bostonian accent acquired during her time on the east coast, she thanked the audience "for a very warm reception" and then launched into a keynote opening with these famous words:

It was one hundred and forty-four years ago that members of the Democratic Party first met in convention to select a Presidential candidate. Since that time, Democrats have continued to convene once every four years and draft a party platform and nominate a Presidential candidate. And our meeting this week is a continuation of that tradition. *But there is something different about tonight. There is something special about tonight. What is different? What is special? I,*

¹²¹ Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 227; quoted in Jordan and Hearon, 235-6.

¹²² Jordan and Hearon, *Barbara Jordan*, 229.

*Barbara Jordan, am a keynote speaker. When -- A lot of years passed since 1832, and during that time it would have been most unusual for any national political party to ask a Barbara Jordan to deliver a keynote address. But tonight, here I am. And I feel -- I feel that notwithstanding the past that my presence here is one additional bit of evidence that the American Dream need not forever be deferred.*¹²³

Here, Jordan combines adherence to civic tradition with a proclamation of a marked change in a history. She declares a historic moment, and she invites her audience to share it with her.

According to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, this is a prototypical moment of rhetorical enactment, where a person is an incarnation of their argument. Jordan was able to present her arguments vividly due to the “the very fact that she, a black woman, had achieved the stature to be asked to give the address was proof that blacks and women can reach the highest levels of achievement in America here and now.”¹²⁴ But this explanation doesn’t tell the entire story: the dynamics of the speech require a breaking down of the bodily and visual elements involved. Catherine Helen Palczewski has pointed to this moment in the speech as an example of where “the power of the (presentational) proof exceeds the (discursive) words.” Solely reading the words of such speeches “strips them of some of their power.”¹²⁵ In other words, one must see the visual evidence of Barbara Jordan’s black female body, and I argue, hear her distinctive voice, delivering this speech in order to experience the full force of her oratorical power. In doing so, we recorporealize enactment.

In making sense of how the body can function as proof in an argument, it is necessary to examine how audiences come to pass judgment. Valerie J. Smith has developed a working theory

¹²³ Barbara C. Jordan, “1976 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address,” *American Rhetoric*, 2010, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barbarajordan1976dnc.html> (accessed September 1, 2010). Emphasis mine.

¹²⁴ Campbell, *The Rhetorical Act*, 273.

¹²⁵ Catherine Helen Palczewski, “Argument in an Off Key: Playing with the Productive Limits of Argument,” in *Arguing Communication and Culture: Selected Papers from the Twelfth NCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation*, edited by G. Thomas Goodnight, 1-23 (Washington DC: National Communication Association, 2002), 7-8.

of how the classical concept of enthymeme can apply to contemporary visual phenomena, a useful rhetorical concept paralleling bodily enactment. She reminds us that Aristotle's enthymeme was based in probable premises and conclusions, and accommodates the ethical and emotional dimensions of arguments.¹²⁶ Visual messages can always be interpreted differently, and contain probable premises and conclusions. Multiple interpretations are possible, and "their effectiveness depends on agreement between messenger and audience, discovered in the common opinions shaped by the contexts and culture of the people addressed."¹²⁷ Aristotle called the enthymeme "the body of persuasion."¹²⁸ In this instance, Jordan used her body enthymematically for persuasion. Jordan could have made specific reference to her upbringing in Houston, her experience of being a black woman in the segregated south. Instead, by stating, "I, Barbara Jordan, am a keynote speaker" and "it would have been quite unusual for a national political party to ask a Barbara Jordan to deliver a keynote address" she places the onus on her audience to understand her argument. When the body stands as proof, an argument is polysemic. If one couldn't see Jordan, or didn't know who she was and where she came from, the idea that a national political party had asked "a Barbara Jordan" to give a keynote address would be rendered meaningless. Jordan believed that through bodily enactment, she was radically disrupting a common frame. Her very presence on the stage flew in the face of business as usual. She trusted, but did not explicitly say, that those listening to her address would see her in all of her bodily specificities, and agree that her presence enacted the change that the party was looking for. Given what we know about her lived experience—from trying to access the traveling debate team, to her days as the "first and only" in Texas and national politics—Jordan had been training

¹²⁶ Valerie J. Smith, "Aristotle's Classical Enthymeme and the Visual Argumentation of the Twenty-First Century," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 43 (Winter/Spring 2007): 114-123.

¹²⁷ Smith, "Aristotle's Classical Enthymeme," 122.

¹²⁸ Jeffery Walker explores this notion in his article, "The Body of Persuasion: a Theory of the Enthymeme," *College English* 56, no. 1 (January 1994): 46-65.

for this moment her entire life. She approached the rhetorical situation of the Democratic National Convention as another institution that black women had previously been excluded from, and through bodily enactment, transformed the possibilities of where they could successfully travel.

4.4 BARBARA JORDAN'S BODY

This chapter demonstrates how Jordan's early experiences in speech and debate provided a training ground for the bodily rhetorical strategies that would come to characterize Jordan as a national public figure. In our quest to better understand what made Barbara Jordan so special, it is necessary to explore how bodies are inventional resources in their sexed, raced, classed, sized, (dis)abled particularities.

What have we learned about debate? This analysis of Jordan's lived experience reveals the role of intercollegiate debate in developing corporeal rhetorical strategies of bodily enactment and delivery, skills that are rarely acknowledged in the debate skill set. She was able to learn to be extemporaneous—both in the debate round and out—a skill that would become important in her later speaking engagements. Debating societies are not always collaborative spaces where women help women. Sometimes, they are just what they are caricatured to be: masculine and exclusionary. Yet they remain worthy of our scholarly attention in the way that they provide formal rhetorical education and the possibilities for self-education. In Jordan's case, the TSU debate team provided a formal rhetorical education in the delivery style that came to characterize her political speech, and presented the challenge of being an exclusionary institution that she had to educate herself to navigate. Furthermore, as a member of the TSU debate team,

Jordan met people such as Tom Freeman, a lasting influence in her life. Through the experience of travel, she encountered a white world that she was determined to succeed in as a public figure.

What have we learned about the body? The history of rhetoric has suppressed the role of the body due to dichotomies such as mind/body, reason/emotion, and masculine/feminine. Through the lens of Barbara Jordan's rhetorical education and performance, this chapter has attempted to provide an additional stitch in the suture of those limiting distinctions, or at the very least, recover some of the strategic decision-making that goes into marrying body and text, style and substance when dealing with access to and presence in exclusionary institutions. As a recorporealized concept, bodily enactment helps explain what Freeman meant when he said that Jordan's "delivery may have been more than half of the power" of her DNC address.¹²⁹ It gives voice to those whose experience of reading Jordan's DNC speech in a classroom setting might be completely different from watching her address broadcast on television. Though she was undoubtedly special simply because she was Barbara Jordan, the first and only in so many areas, it was the ability to adapt to use her body as a contingent site and source for success in different rhetorical situations that set her apart. She had a unique ability to formulate rhetorical strategies that could be perceived as inartistic, given aspects of persuasion (i.e. her bodily appearance), yet were handled in artistic modes of invention (bodily adaptation through changes in dress, hair, weight, etc). In muddying and transcending these neat binaries, Barbara Jordan's case represents the need to take bodies seriously in our rhetorical historical analyses. It is only by taking into account the lived experiences of those bodies deemed irrelevant, dangerous, or excessive, that we can more fully engage and understand rhetors excluded from the mainstream.

¹²⁹ Freeman, interview by Sprengelmeyer.

5.0 ARGUMENT-AS-TRAVEL: PARTING THOUGHTS ON GENDER, ARGUMENT, AND HISTORY

“Simply being there put me in touch with the object of my research in a new way: I began to share her context. My contact with her, then, was not purely intellectual, but spiritual and emotional as well.”
– Christine Mason Sutherland¹

Christine Mason Sutherland makes the case for the importance of a connection between the researcher and the object of research, a connection that can be cultivated through travel and “liv[ing] the research.”² Yet she also suggests that feminist rhetorical historical methods offer an alternative to an academic stance “favoring debate, believing that if we are going to find out whether anything is true or good or beautiful, the only way we will do that is by arguing for opposing views of it to see who wins.”³ Here, I take the next step in showing that the two are not incongruous— that one can travel and live the research viewing debate as a common bond, and that feminist rhetorical and historical methods have revealed insights about argumentation and debate in historical contexts.

Travel emerged organically as a theme as I conducted archival research on historical argument and debate practices for this dissertation project. At archives in Edinburgh, Pittsburgh, Houston, and Urbana-Champaign, I learned about the women I was studying not only by reviewing the archival materials available, but also by traveling to the places that they dwelled,

¹ Christine Mason Sutherland, “Feminist Historiography: Research Methods in Rhetoric,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 113.

² Sutherland, “Feminist Historiography,” 113-4. In Sutherland’s case, researching the early Quaker Margaret Fell in the context of a cathedral close at the University of Durham provided her knowledge of her object of research.

³ Patricia Bizzell quoted in Sutherland, “Feminist Historiography,” 111-2.

imagining what these spaces must have been like when they debated and thus, in a sense, living the research.

In Edinburgh, a city steeped in history, I spent the majority of my time at the National Library of Scotland, right off of the city center, and close to Sarah Mair's childhood home. I traveled to 5 Chester Street to see the Mair residence where the majority of LEDS meetings were held. As a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh, I had long known what it was like to study at the Cathedral of Learning like Marie Hochmuth Nichols. Yet as I encountered information about her debate experience at University of Pittsburgh Archives and in her personal papers at the University of Illinois, I could imagine her lived experience within a city I knew well. As a debate coach at the University of Pittsburgh who traveled some of the very same routes, I could relate to Nichols's experiences as she traveled to debate tournaments. Finally, I traveled to Houston, where the experience of staying in the neighborhood where Barbara Jordan grew up and conducting research on the Texas Southern University campus challenged me to imagine what it must have been like to be educated in the segregated south, to not know anything beyond her own neighborhood, city, and state before she began to travel for debate tournaments. Of course, the researcher must acknowledge that this is a limited perspective. For a researcher to be able to physically travel to archives in the first place is a privileged position, and one that may not be available to other researchers and certainly was not always available to the people we study.⁴ And even when it is possible, travel does not always provide overwhelming insight: over time, city and campus landscapes become unrecognizable. Yet despite these limitations, it is still important to acknowledge the possibility of travel to stimulate one's imagination, searching for

⁴ As I mention in my acknowledgements, my own research travels would not have been possible without the financial support of internal and external funding for this project from the Carrie Chapman Catt Center at Iowa State University, the Frank and Vilma Slater/Scottish Nationality Room Scholarship, the Andrew W. Mellon Pre-Doctoral Fellowship, and the Women's Studies Student Research Fund at the University of Pittsburgh.

those opportunities where “imagination becomes a critical skill, that is, the ability to see the possibility of certain experiences even if we cannot know the specificity of them.”⁵

This dissertation demonstrates the rich possibilities that lie in studying women as they worked to access and sustain participation in argument cultures. Debating societies are sites of rhetorical education and performance prefiguring great careers, but they also capture the multiple types of performance—rhetorical, gendered, raced, classed, able-bodied—at play within the societies themselves. These historical cases demonstrate how women were able to actively shape their rhetorical experience and connect those practices to other aspects of culture. By studying debaters like Sarah Mair and other members of the LEDS, Marie Hochmuth Nichols, and Barbara Jordan within debating societies, I highlight the need to not only think about women rhetors as single orators who used traditional debate skills to command an audience of listeners, but also to consider the collaborative nature of communities, groups and organizations in the process of social identity construction.

This project has taken an initial step toward establishing women’s participation in debating societies as a worthy subject of scholarly attention. In doing so, I aim to leave readers with a study that acknowledges the critiques of the argument culture, but also probes the possibilities of a gender-sensitive middle ground rooted in historical argument cultures. In this final chapter, I offer preliminary implications and enduring questions, consider how the travel metaphor works as a conceptual bridge linking findings from the case studies, and indicate lines of continued thinking that might drive future research.

⁵ Jacqueline Jones Royster, *Traces of a Stream*, 83.

5.1 CULTURES, EXCELLENCE, BODIES: WHAT'S DEBATE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Each content chapter of this project was designed with three aims. First, it should add to our understanding about debate within historical contexts. Second, it should reveal insight about the historical women who debated (members of the LEDS, Marie Hochmuth Nichols, and Barbara Jordan). Finally, it should develop and extend additional concepts in rhetorical and argumentation scholarship (respectively: argument cultures, excellence, and the body). My hope is that the project might be fruitfully drawn upon and engaged with by readers from a wide range of perspectives—feminist rhetoricians, feminist historians, rhetorical scholars, argumentation scholars, debate practitioners, and those wishing to gain biographical insight into any of the participants discussed. While each case study had a particular focus and dealt with different phases of debate history, they are united by the fact that they were “women debating society” as they negotiated difference and garnered unexpected skills through debate participation.

In Chapter Two, “Women of Infinite Variety,” I examined the seventy year history of the Ladies’ Edinburgh Debating Society from 1865 to 1935. The chapter studied the debating society as an intergenerational argument culture whose members were constantly negotiating the optimal conditions for rational-critical debate. As an argument culture, the LEDS relied upon an epistemological richness cultivated through imagined *dissoi logoi* and the sharing of reasoned opinion.⁶ When possible, members drew on their personal experiences as argument. Where personal experience was limited, the debate and discussion format ritualized the process of

⁶ This conversation has ties in the Isocratic rhetorical tradition, in which *euboulos*, or deliberative excellence and wisdom was cultivated through psychological and external acts of debate. See Thomas M. Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 21. As Jean Nienkamp explains, for Isocrates, “calling people eloquent (*rhetorikos*) is equivalent to calling them prudent or well-counseled (*euboulos*), since the sage are those who best converse with themselves (*autous arista...dialechthosin*).” See her *Internal Rhetorics: Toward a History and Theory of Self-Persuasion* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 20.

robust consensus-building through the airing of different perspectives. Despite their impressive attempts to include identity-based and ideological diversity, we know that even by the standards of the time, the women of the LEDS did not always represent the “infinite variety” they claim. There were instances where they could not find debaters to take on both sides of a proposition; they gave up on certain topics considered argumentatively stale. In striving for “infinite variety,” there will always be axes of difference that a single group cannot achieve. Yet this examination reveals that the desire to negotiate difference can sustain an argument culture across time. Future studies might look to other examples of historical groups that similarly valued diversity: what did they do to encourage participation by debaters from a wide range of perspectives? How did they balance the desire for inclusiveness and cooperation with an ideal of rational-critical debate?

Chapter Three, “Your Gown is Lovely, but...” explored the historical relationship between debate history and the history of rhetorical criticism in the intellectual travels of Marie Hochmuth Nichols. Because she was a pioneer woman in the field who is often devalued or forgotten, part of the work of the chapter was to establish Nichols’s status as a figure worth studying within these histories. I traced Nichols’s experiences as a debater and debate coach in Pittsburgh, and followed connections to her academic post at the University of Illinois. In her epistle on women debaters, “Your Gown is Lovely, but...,” Nichols laid bare her thoughts on how women can achieve excellence within sometime hostile argument cultures. In promoting *conviction, criticism, curiosity, poise, and joy* in debate, we can see the beginnings of Nichols’s later approach to excellence in rhetorical criticism. With this knowledge and the benefit of archival materials, I imagined an exchange between Nichols and another debater-turned-rhetorical-scholar, Edwin Black. Many pedagogical discussions extend Black’s read of neo-Aristotelianism, grouping Herbert Wichelns and Nichols as the genesis of a monolithic approach

to rhetorical criticism. My research shows that such an understanding is inaccurate, simplistic, and excludes debate's constitutive role in forming the field of speech communication, not to mention underestimating Nichols's contributions to the development of rhetorical criticism. Including under-circulated texts like "Your Gown is Lovely, but..." and "Methods of Rhetorical Criticism Done by Rhetoricians" in our assessment of this pioneer scholar exposes important blind spots in disciplinary history that can be augmented through archival research. A model of disciplinary history that divorces life from scholarship is traded in for one that is much more vibrant, where lived experience and relationships developed in debate contributes to our understanding of Nichols's professional academic life. In the spirit of intellectual curiosity, we can continue to envision potential implications. Imagine if Nichols had 'won' the theoretical debate with Black—how would that change her status in the disciplinary memory of rhetorical criticism? We see evidence of the overlap in Nichols's theory of excellence in debate and excellence in rhetorical criticism—how did her vision manifest in other areas, such as her approach to rhetorical pedagogy? How might our understanding of rhetorical criticism change if we took a more sustained look at other historical figures that have been undervalued or overlooked?

Chapter Four, "The First and Only," spans Barbara Jordan's early life in Houston through her keynote address at the 1976 Democratic National Convention. Though she is well-known and often touted for her political speeches, Jordan herself underlined the importance of understanding her life before politics, the necessity of knowing that she was "the composite of [her] experience and all the people who had something to do with it."⁷ Chapter Four sought to deepen our understanding of Jordan's rhetorical style through the lens of her experience with

⁷ Barbara Jordan and Shelby Hearon, *Barbara Jordan: A Self Portrait* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1979), 2.

speech and debate at Texas Southern University. Through participation in debate, Jordan saw possibilities for a future outside of the segregated south. As I detail, she also recognized the importance of using her body as a resource in gaining access to and success within exclusionary spaces: the TSU debate team and the US Congress. Knowing that others would comment on her skin color, sex, and size, Jordan chose to draw on her body in rhetorical performance. Jordan's case demonstrates a truly unexpected part of the debate skill set: bodily invention and enactment. The body is not an essential or stable text; Jordan knew how to adapt her body to the situation strategically so that she would be listened to. This case indicates the need to pay attention to the role of the body in historical rhetorical situations. What does Jordan's story mean for other rhetors seeking to use bodily enactment in the service of social change? What are the rhetorical and ethical limits to alterations and transformations of the body in achieving these goals?

Undoubtedly, the women studied here garnered a traditional skill set through debate participation: through ritualized exercises in speaking, writing, thinking, and reasoning, they learned the skills of argumentation and advocacy. A major implication of this project, though, is the way that these historical cases also allow us to see how different participants used their debate experiences in unexpected ways. The stories of the LEDS, Nichols, and Jordan add texture to our understanding of what debate can offer. When we acknowledge the full range of diverse participation, the traditional debate skill set is expanded.

5.2 TRANSFORMING METAPHORS: ARGUMENT-AS-TRAVEL?

Throughout this project, I have drawn on studies in feminist rhetorical history that aim to “remap rhetorical territories” to include women in the history of rhetoric.⁸ A striking aspect of this subfield is the powerful and ubiquitous use of metaphors to articulate feminist rhetorical methods. In particular, geographical metaphors appear repeatedly. We aim to replace the “neatly folded history of rhetoric” with “new, often partially completed maps that reflect and coordinate our current institutional, intellectual, political, and personal values”;⁹ hoping to refigure some “canonical mappings,” to “stan[d] at the border” of rhetoric and feminism, ultimately, to traverse those borderlands;¹⁰ seeking to “walk and talk feminist rhetorics” where there are “no established paths to follow.”¹¹ As a methodological approach, the metaphors of feminist rhetorical history should be energized by movement, mobility, and fluidity. Rather than just creating another static map or re-canonizing women’s rhetorical activities, we must, as researchers, “live the research,” and think about the historical women we study as actively negotiating power structures as they navigated their ways through life. We need to, as Barbara L’Eplattenier argues, “questio[n] our

⁸ Glenn, “Remapping Rhetorical Territory,” 287-303. Following theorists like Kimberlé Crenshaw, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, I take intersectionality to similarly require attention to how gender, race, class, sexuality, geography, religion and ability blend to provide different people with unique ways of seeing and being in the world. Theorists of intersectionality have relied on the language of geography to explain the need to attend to multidimensional aspects of identity. See Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” in *Identities: Race, Class, Gender and Nationality*, ed. Linda Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003): 175-200; Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera=the New Mestiza*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003). Michele J. Kennerly argues that rhetoric itself has the ability to transport bodies and minds, where “words launch us on journeys of judgment.” See her “Getting Carried Away: How Rhetorical Transport Gets Judgment Going,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 288.

⁹ Glenn, “Remapping Rhetorical Territory,” 287.

¹⁰ Ede, Glenn, and Lunsford, “Border Crossings,” 401-2.

¹¹ Buchanan and Ryan, *Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics*, xiv.

methodological metaphors,” to, “...take into account how culture shapes whom we are studying—especially when that culture is outside the white middle-class norm.”¹²

Chapter One explained critiques of the argument culture, and its dominant conceptual metaphor of argument-as-war. How might the metaphor of argument-as-war be adapted or transformed? If we really “live by” metaphors, then studies of historical argument cultures ought to inform our understanding of how argumentation shapes lives, experiences, and relationships. I offer the alternative metaphor of argument-as-travel, in which both contemporary researchers and historical women debaters can be seen as travelers.

Travel emerges as a theme in the ways that women negotiated the historical access to and success in rhetorical activities. Mary P. Ryan has used the language of “circuitous routes” to describe the sometimes unorthodox ways that women found avenues to enter the public sphere in the nineteenth-century.¹³ The experiences of Ladies’ Edinburgh Debating Society, Marie Hochmuth Nichols, and Barbara Jordan also draw on this language in terms of both accessing and participating in debate. My research reveals that historically, women debaters have drawn on the resources of intellectual and actual travel.

Of the three case studies, the debates of the LEDS were the most geographically stationary in that they always occurred in the Mair family parlor and in the same city. In the retrospective volume, *Ladies in Debate*, Sarah Mair describes how she saw the LEDS functioning throughout the years: “All through the seventy years our dear old Society has been as

¹² Barbara E. L’Eplattenier, “Questioning Our Methodological Metaphors,” in *Calling Cards: Theory and Practice in the Study of Race, Gender, and Culture*, eds. Jacqueline Jones Royster and Ann Marie Mann Simpkins (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 141. L’Eplattenier questions the mapping metaphor that dominates feminist rhetorical history, but also admits to being unable to come up with an alternate metaphor that is more apt. Based on this project, I focus on the relevance of not mapping, but traveling—it is the focus on movement that animates the language for this project.

¹³ Mary P. Ryan, “Gender and Public Access, 218.

it were a roadside inn where weary travellers could stop and rest awhile.”¹⁴ Here, Mair posits the debating society as a structure providing shelter for the debaters who, as travelers, were expected to stop in for a while and then move on to other pursuits. LEDS members are described as mobile and constantly moving through, cultivating insights both inside and outside the Society. As a community-based club, the LEDS did not require travel in the same way that intercollegiate debating teams did. However, as class-privileged women, many did have access to travel for leisure. Members had enough experience with travel to be able to debate propositions such as “is a life of frequent travelling a better means of mental culture than a life spent at the house?”¹⁵ And as the previous section describes, debates allowed LEDS members to transport themselves to different geographical locations—by debating about the multiples sides of colonialism, for example, they had to imagine themselves in India—and thus became a way to explore the world through research and argumentation. One key finding to emerge from my analysis of the LEDS minutes chronicling these activities concerns the prominent element of reflexivity evident in the debating society's deliberations. In numerous meta-discussions and votes about debating procedure, topic selection, event formats and membership protocols, LEDS members shaped the evolutionary arc of their organization. They not only used debate as a vehicle for intellectual travel, they also continually redrafted the map charting where they wanted to go and how they wanted to get there.

In the cases of Marie Hochmuth Nichols and Barbara Jordan, intercollegiate debate necessitated physical travel to debate competitions but it also shaped their ways of thinking about the world. Debate travel physically took Nichols from her hometown in Western Pennsylvania and to places like Oberlin College, Cornell University, and New York University. Moreover, it

¹⁴Sarah Mair, “Foreword,” 11.

¹⁵ Minutes of the LEDS, June 2, 1877, MS 1725.

allowed her to cultivate a web of professional and social relationships that paved her intellectual path as one of few prominent women scholars in the field of Communication. Viewing Nichols's place in the history of rhetorical criticism through the metaphor of travel works to expand our one-dimensional perspective on her contributions to the field beyond "Lincoln's First Inaugural." An expanded view of Nichols's scholarship acknowledges that she dealt in the figurative language of "alpine climbing" by bringing in the contributions of Kenneth Burke, I.A. Richards, and George Bernard Shaw. Her vision demanded that we consider the role of rhetorical excellence as the field traveled the road to Ithaca: as it charted a path for dealing with the turbulence introduced by the political movements of the 1960's and 70's. Nichols saw intellectual developments as ways of scaling mountains and finding the correct path for the study of communication.

Jordan's connection to travel is perhaps the most evident. Like border crossing, in which individuals come to occupy spaces where they are unwelcome or illegal, Jordan traversed the segregated South, using debate as her vehicle. She also pushed the boundaries of what was accepted in her relentless pursuit to be able to travel with the previously all-male TSU debate team. For a young woman who had never left her neighborhood in Houston before, travel to and from intercollegiate debate tournaments provided a window into a whole new, albeit segregated, world. It was only by traveling to places beyond her home that Jordan began to realize that she could not only survive, but she could excel in a 'white world.' By preparing to debate students from elite, white schools, Jordan had to imagine what they would say. In this way, travel expanded Jordan's imagination. As Chapter Four details, debate can also be seen as transporting women by creating an "enlarged mentality." Later, she was able to use that knowledge as she strove to connect with and understand the people she was representing. Knowledge of Jordan's

early life experiences in traveling—and desiring to travel—to debate competitions help us to make sense of how Jordan used bodily enactment in her 1976 Democratic National Convention speech, a performance lauded as one of the greatest in the twentieth-century. These findings suggest that any attempt to answer the question of what makes Jordan so special in the history of public address is incomplete without more fully considering the traditional and non-traditional skills gained through debate participation. Such analysis lends insight into what enabled her to access and influence exclusionary institutions, and by recorporealizing rhetorical enactment, joins efforts to counter the “somatophobia” that exists in the history of western rhetoric.

Rooted in historical cases, the travel metaphor suggests that there are other options beyond the ultra-competitive, masculine, adversarial style of engagement that is often attributed to debate. It suggests that there are alternatives when it comes to attitudes towards debate and other debaters. At its best, like Brockriede’s arguers as lovers, the arguer as traveler embarks on trips with a spirit of adventure, tries new things, and has a genuine concern for engagement with new places and peoples. Like Brockriede’s arguers schema (arguers as lovers, seducers, rapists), the travel metaphor might entail attitudes such as the arguer as tourist, where arguers see the sights and buy some souvenirs, but remain largely indifferent to the people and places they visit; worse, the arguer-as-traveler can be a conqueror, exploiting new terrain and viewing people living there in purely instrumental terms. In other words, conceiving of argument-as-travel does not solve all of the problems of the argument culture. Instead, it seeks to point to the possibilities of argument cultures that allow participants to enact a spirit of curiosity and collaboration.

Debate continues to be seen as an activity that poisons the well of civil public discourse; it is seen as an enterprise bound to privilege the powerful and discriminate against the marginalized. Women, and especially women of color, have been thought to be incongruous

with the activity. Yet this project has illustrated that critiques of the hostility and combativeness of debate are not new. Debaters and debate coaches have recognized the value of the activity while also constantly attempting to change it for the better. Richard Murphy, the faculty advisor to the Men's Society in Pittsburgh and later, Nichols's colleague at Illinois, noted the need to transform militaristic metaphors in his 1929 radio talk on the rules and ethics of debating. Here, Murphy acknowledges the damaging effects of conceiving of argument-as-war, and charts his own vision for changing it:

Whether or not the debate is pleasant depends largely upon the general attitude of the debaters. The debater must remember that politeness is essential in argument. The debater's job is to riddle the question, not [their] opponents. In considering the etiquette of debating let us remember that debate is not verbal combat in which clever young men and women try to evade issues or trap their opponents. I think debating suffers from analogies of war that occur in our textbooks. Phrases like these mislead the debater: "when to use light cavalry"; "when to use artillery"; "how to plan an ambush, and how to retreat." Others are: "bottling up the enemy"; "drawing the enemy's fire"; "planting mines." The result is that the young debater sees debate as a verbal combat, a war of nouns and verbs. [S/]He draws the corollary that all is fair. [S/]He sees debate as a war with rhetorical bombs bursting in the air. [S/]He directs his[/her] efforts not toward the arrival at issues, but toward confusing or wounding the "enemy." [S/]He concentrates on hurling polysyllabic projectiles, and in floating rhetorical smoke screens. It is time for some disarmament in debating."¹⁶

That a faculty advisor in the 1920's agrees with some of the points made by contemporary critics in calling for debating disarmament is significant. Change may be slow within the argument culture, but Murphy's call serves as evidence that there are always people working for change within argument cultures.

Furthermore, the language of travel emerging from this project did not replace the language of combat in describing what happened during the course of a debate. The women studied here did not reject argument-as-war; rather, they used the ethic behind argument-as-

¹⁶ Richard Murphy, "The Etiquette of Argument: Rules and Ethics of Debating: Broadcast from the University of Pittsburgh Studio on November 14, 1929," in *Debating: A Series of Six Radio Talks*, ed. Theresa Kahn and Richard Murphy (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Radio Publication, 1929): 21-2.

travel to supplement and transform hostile environments. The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society negotiated this dominant metaphor over time. Writing from the perspective of the mahogany table in the parlor of the Mair residence where the LEDS met, Sarah Mair explains

And never as I 'summon to the sessions of sweet silent thought' the long array of debaters who have drawn swords as it were across my board, never does one painful clash, one unworthy thrust, one hit below the belt, present itself to my remembrance. Keeness and wide divergence of opinion, but never anything mean has marred the healthful combat of words. Pleasant raillery sometimes, but never bitter sarcasm; a skillful thrust, but never a mean advantage; a happy laugh, perhaps, when one side recognizes a specially good retort, but never a note of scorn of unkindness.¹⁷

In this configuration, debaters were still combatants who drew their argumentative swords. However, because the LEDS members saw debate as a collaborative endeavor aimed at knowledge production, combat was "healthful," not "bitter," "mean," or "unkin[d]." In recontextualizing combat, this description shows how disagreement can be thematized cooperatively. This case study muddies the distinctions that have become shopworn in critiques of argumentation: the normative distinction in an argument culture is not whether or not a person is combative or competitive in their approach, but rather, how they view debate holistically. If a person values an argument culture, then it does not make sense to think of co-arguers as people to kill or dominate, as such a destructive approach would threaten the vitality of interlocutors on whom the culture depends.

5.3 FUTURE CONVERSATIONS

This project suggests that rather than rejecting debate for its sometimes intimidating and exclusionary practices, we should instead see debating societies as spaces to discuss, reform, and

¹⁷ Mair in Rae, *Ladies in Debate*, 21.

revise them. The alternate metaphor of travel offers a more holistic view of the activity based on the experiences detailed in this dissertation. A challenge is to find other instances where debate physically or intellectually allows participants to travel in order to gain greater insight into how to better address the excesses of the argument culture (in Tannen's sense). What other metaphors might better represent the relationship between gender and argumentation? My hope is that this project opens up a space for future conversations on this issue.

In addition to expanding the search for alternate metaphors, there are a number of lines of continued thinking sparked by this project. The scope of the project was limited to pursuing three cases—but how might other researchers take up the project of providing a fuller picture of the history of women in debate? There are ripe opportunities for future research on women in debating societies in other historical periods and international contexts. I was only able to find one instance of transnational collaboration (when the LEDS received a letter of interest from the Chinese Christian Society), yet given the vibrant international debate exchange that occurs today, I believe that there must be further evidence of contact in the rich history of debate.

Another aspect worth pursuing in future research is the interpersonal dynamics of men mentoring women in debate. When studying gender and rhetorical history, I think the feminist impulse is to want to encounter instances of women helping women. But when negotiating exclusionary systems of power in an activity that continues to be dominated by men, this is often not the case. In co-educational debating societies, many women participants were and are coached by men. What effect does this have on one's debate experience? How can debate coaches dedicated to the cause of debate without discrimination nurture the interest and talent of

debaters like Jordan and Nichols? Future studies in this area might delve into scholarship on mentorship practices in education.¹⁸

Research in the area of argumentation and debate history must simultaneously express major trends—as I did in Chapter One by suggesting overlapping “phases”—but also allow for the radical contextualization of individual experiences. One area where this becomes a difficult historiographic concern is how to make sense of the advocacy put forth by debaters in debating societies. What is the speech act performed by uttering an argument in a debate? Is it an exercise in articulating one’s convictions or is it an exercise in role-playing a certain side of the proposition for the greater purpose of facilitating debates? This becomes a complicated issue, especially in debating societies that did both. As my discussion of the LEDS suggests, debaters often advocated for the side of the proposition that they believed in, drawing from personal experience to support their arguments. However, there were also occasions where they simply needed a person to volunteer to debate on a certain side so that the debate could happen. In intercollegiate debate, this issue played out in the pages of academic journals as faculty advisors tried to make sense of whether debaters should be forced to debate against their convictions in tournament settings. Some universities attempted to maintain policies similar to Parrish’s Pittsburgh Policy, in which conviction was valued over competition while others saw educational value in debating both sides of propositions. In either case, this type of oscillation between personal advocacy and imagination for the sake of debate makes it difficult for researchers to use the debates as evidence to make definitive claims about what debaters—or debating societies—believed.

¹⁸On the gendered dynamics of mentorship, see Janice Hocker Rushing, “Erotic Mentoring: Pygmalion and Galatea at the University,” in *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature and Aesthetics*, ed. Arthur Bochner and Carolyn Ellis (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), 122-149.

Finally, I expect that some might wonder about the implications of this study for contemporary debate practice. My hope is that debate practitioners will gain inspiration from these historical cases in their own projects of pursuing debate without discrimination. I urge rhetorical scholars and debate practitioners alike to give serious thought about what they might do to preserve the possibility of debate history research. Can we reach out to alumni in order to get a better sense of past debate practice at our universities through oral history interviews? Can we preserve materials from past debate seasons in places other than dark basements or crowded closets? What are the implications of trying to preserve what goes on at contemporary debate tournaments?

As we prepare to travel on from this study, I would like to end with a reflection. In my research approach, I was inspired by previous work in rhetorical history and feminist rhetorics. I learned about the experience of others in the archives and the power of oral history to give texture to women's lives.¹⁹ It was a slow and arduous task to piece together information about women's participation in debating societies because of the numerous forms and iterations that constituted women's rhetorical activities. In the end, I found that though it was possible to prepare by reading about the methodological triumphs and failures of others, there really is no learning experience like doing it yourself. Finding women's voices in a history where they have been undervalued or marginalized is difficult work. There were successful voyages and dead ends as I set out to find out about the women that animate this project. Readers can see evidence of the successes cited in the chapters, the frustration of dead ends masked by scholarly writing. I found the voices of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, Marie Hochmuth Nichols, and Barbara Jordan in letters, minute books, poetry, lectures, essays, speeches, and an autobiography.

¹⁹ See Kirsch and Rohan, *Beyond the Archives* and Sherna Berger Gluck, "What's So Special About Women?" in Susan H. Armitage, Patricia Hart, and Karen Weathermon, eds, *Women's Oral History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 3.

But even where their voices shone through in these materials, there were dilemmas. Oral histories with Jordan's debate coach and Nichols's mentee energized my understanding of both women. However, those recollections provide another level of interpretation; additional choices were made about how to narrate and frame ideas. Historiographical insight about the problems of memory can be gleaned from the archival materials themselves. As Grace Wood, a member of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society put it when trying to recall the subjects they debated: "I am ashamed to think how fragmentary and haphazard, despite all the advantages of my official position [as Secretary of the Society], are my recollections of the many debates on all sorts of subjects to which I have listened."²⁰ What can we do with this information as rhetorical historians? I engage in the feminist political project of traveling forward, wishing to make transparent its contingencies, but choosing to affirm it as a history worth writing and probing nonetheless. And of course, I am open to debate about it.

²⁰ Grace Wood in Rae, *Ladies in Debate*, 56-7.

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