ANNA HOWARD SHAW:
RHETORICALLY CREATING TWENTIETH-CENTURY WOMANHOOD

A Thesis in
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by

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ABSTRACT

The life and career of Anna Howard Shaw, prominent woman suffrage orator, contains a wealth of rhetorical material. In this thesis, I argue that Shaw’s rhetoric was not only a pragmatic effort to persuade audiences to support woman suffrage, but her speeches constitute a theory of gender that stipulated how women and men might share in the duties and responsibilities of a just society. Through a close reading of multiple speeches and archival material, I contend that Shaw recast the identities of homemaker, worker, and citizen. In the process, she made each of these identities into a public, social role that women were qualified to inhabit. Rather than deny or undermine the claim that women were nurturing, moral beings—qualities that defined the “cult of true womanhood” and nineteenth-century domesticity—Shaw embraced these characteristics as a rationale for why women’s opportunities should be expanded beyond the privacy of the home. Suffrage existed at the center of this social and civic realignment. The right to vote as women was not an end for Shaw, but a means for achieving a balanced society where the distinct strengths and weaknesses of each gender—males and females—were managed in ways that furthered human progress. I argue that in constructing the “modern woman,” Shaw simultaneously constructed a “modern” society in which difference and equality could co-exist. Anna Howard Shaw’s rhetoric at the beginning of the twentieth century was significant not only for its immediate appeal as an argument against patriarchy and oppression, but also as an imaginative vision of world in which women’s agency bettered the lives of women and men equally.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

In May of 1893, the city of Chicago hosted the great Columbian Exposition to celebrate Columbus’s arrival in the Americas 400 years earlier. The exposition took place at what would become the middle of the woman suffrage movement. Just three years earlier, the movement’s two competing factions reunited 21 years after a contentious split. The movement was nearly 50 years old by this time, but Dr. Anna Howard Shaw was a relative newcomer to the suffrage cause. Shaw had completed both seminary and medical school before her personal ambitions and her oratorical gifts led her to woman suffrage activism. After becoming a member of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), she quickly made a name for herself as the movement’s leading orator and Susan B. Anthony’s “right hand man.”

On May 21, 1893, Shaw was scheduled to deliver a Sunday morning sermon to an audience of at least five thousand at the World’s Congress of Representative Women, an impressive audience that Shaw found extremely intimidating.1 Furthermore, Shaw’s eighty-year-old father, who remained skeptical of his daughter’s life’s work, planned to attend the sermon. The magnitude of the event nearly overwhelmed Shaw and she recalls “laboriously” writing out her sermon and memorizing the script, a degree of preparation that was out of character for this extemporaneous speaker.2 The night before her sermon, Shaw practiced the speech in front of Anthony, her mentor, who immediately berated Shaw’s effort. Shaw recalls Anthony’s disappointed and frank response: “It’s no good, Anna…You’ll have to do better. You’ve polished

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and repolished [sic] that sermon until there’s no life in it. It’s dead.”

“Aunt Susan” instructed Shaw to create an entirely new sermon in the few hours that remained before the meeting. A frustrated and exhausted Shaw stayed up through the night, writing a sermon to encourage the congress’s women to “Lift Your Standards High.”

The resulting address, Shaw biographer Trisha Franzen argues, was “exquisitely appropriate for the day, while subtly critical of the sexist, racist, and ethnocentric prejudices that were a subtext to the exposition.”

In contrast to the diversity of audience members at the event, Shaw spoke of unity. She inspired them to celebrate women’s unique, magnificent morality. The address “contented” Anthony and brought Shaw’s father to joyful tears, for he finally understood the “earnestness of purpose” that drove his daughter to dedicate her life to the woman’s cause.

Looking back on her career at the end of her life, Shaw considered this address one of just a few speeches with which she was satisfied.

The event’s lesson, it seems, was that Shaw should allow her gift for reaching audiences to shine while not overthinking what came “naturally” to her. By trusting her instincts, success was sure to follow.

Shaw’s experience at the Chicago World’s Fair invites contemporary reflection on two types of problems that face scholars who study her life and work. First, in this moment we encounter a problem with distant time and must wrestle with the question of how best to explain Shaw’s historical significance. Because of her mentorship under Susan B. Anthony, scholars sometimes describe Shaw as Anthony’s accomplice or a secondary suffrage actor who assisted

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3 Ibid., 177.


7 Ibid., 175.
more important activists. In this historiography, she deserves to be remembered but does not merit recognition for her individual accomplishments or personal leadership. Other scholars focus on Shaw’s religious significance: She served as one of the earliest ordained female Methodist ministers. In this rendering, Shaw’s suffrage efforts are unremarkable when compared to other activists, but her ministerial career is lauded as groundbreaking. Third, the incident that begins this essay suggests that we might remember Shaw as a magnificent orator. Shaw took direction from Anthony and then used her oratorical skill to amaze her audience. Shaw’s historical significance, then, might lie with her rhetorical leadership and skill. Finally, the narrative that begins this thesis demonstrates Shaw’s dedicated passion for women’s rights in a diverse society. Shaw’s devotion to universal suffrage for women transcended many of the race and class issues that plagued the movement during her tenure. Her tireless commitment to the cause manifested itself in small acts like staying up through the night to prepare a new sermon that would best reach her audience. But even this remarkable achievement pales when one realizes that she gave a total of 8,000 speeches throughout her lifetime on suffrage alone. Although the question of how best to remember Shaw persists; her contributions are numerous and difficult to ignore.

The second problem that emerges from the narrative that begins this study involves a question of criticism. That is, how should scholars interpret and then judge the significance of Shaw’s rhetoric? Was her rhetoric significant because of her ability to speak extemporaneously? She typically prepared a basic thesis for a speaking event but then adapted her message to meet the immediate needs of the audience and situation. Shaw’s rhetoric might sustain critical attention for its ability to reach both receptive and hostile audiences, bringing many to her cause. In the

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case of the World’s Fair, for example, Shaw spoke to female representatives from around the world, unifying the diverse, international audience under a common cause of women’s rights. Further, Shaw’s discourse exhibited clear logical structures and a unique sense of wit and humor. This combination of logic and wit helped Shaw refute anti-suffragist arguments in an unthreatening, lighthearted manner. Finally, Shaw might deserve rhetorical study for the popularity of her oratory. Throughout her career, she consistently drew large crowds, and the published evaluations of her speeches suggest that contemporaries regarded her as the movement’s greatest orator.10

In the years since Shaw lived and spoke, scholars from the disciplines of rhetoric, history, women’s studies, and sociology have addressed these concerns and offered many, but also varied and conflicting, answers. In articulating Shaw’s importance, scholars have called her an “able speaker who unrelentingly protested injustices,”11 “a robust and eloquent minister who became the great orator of the generation which achieved woman suffrage,”12 “a complex figure with great strengths and serious flaws as a leader, someone who could not easily be framed as a saint or a scoundrel,13 and a woman “more determined than most other women to eradicate [women’s] injustices.”14 Most often, scholars have framed Shaw within one of three major narratives: Shaw as influential public speaker, Shaw as ineffectual yet prominent movement leader, or Shaw as pioneering, working class feminist. After a discussion of Shaw’s pertinent biographical details, I will describe each of these accounts in depth.


11 Ibid., 3.


13 Franzen, Anna Howard Shaw, 4.

Rhetorical Biography

Woman suffragist Anna Howard Shaw’s (b. 1847 d. 1919) accomplishments are impressive by today’s standards, but seem even more so considering the constraints she faced as a female activist in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After her family of six emigrated from the United Kingdom in 1851, Shaw spent much of her adolescence living in the Michigan wilderness. From an early age, she adopted tasks and family responsibilities typically reserved for boys as well as the traditional duties assigned to girls. She worked tirelessly to help her family thrive on the Michigan frontier. Both her open-mindedness toward gender roles and her indefatigable nature were formed during her childhood.

Shaw’s determination led her to pursue an impressive education. After reaching the highest level of education available to her in rural Michigan schools, Shaw moved to Big Rapids, Michigan to live with her sister and attend Albion College in fall of 1873. During her college years, she honed and developed her speaking skills, delivering lectures on temperance for a few dollars each.15 Her overwhelming desire to preach led her to attend Boston University Seminary in 1876, although this decision meant losing her family’s affection and financial support. Throughout seminary, Shaw faced hardships because of her gender and class. Her family did not support her, and her school did not provide her with room and board like it did for her male classmates. At times she nearly starved, but Shaw persisted in her journey towards ordination, driven by a keen sense of purpose. Shaw’s progressive interests led to a conviction that she might help more people by lecturing in public than to preach in a small church, Sunday after Sunday. Fueled by her seminary experiences and the overwhelming belief that women’s oppression was

15 Linkugel and Solomon, Anna Howard Shaw, 6.
attributed to the social factors that, today, we call patriarchy, Shaw joined the woman’s rights crusade.\textsuperscript{16}

It did not take long for woman’s rights activists to recognize Shaw’s oratorical skills and discipline. She briefly lectured for the Women’s Christian Temperance Union before accepting an appointment as lecturer for the American Woman Suffrage Association.\textsuperscript{17} Shaw met Susan B. Anthony during an 1887 suffrage campaign, and in 1890, Anthony recruited Shaw to join the newly formed National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Shaw and Anthony formed a bond of friendship and mentorship, and in 1892 Shaw ascended to the position of vice president of NAWSA, serving under Anthony. As a NAWSA officer, Shaw continued to travel the country and lecture for a living. Because she remained unmarried and did not receive familial support, Shaw’s lecture earnings supported both her and her longtime partner, Lucy Elmira Anthony. Shaw lectured tirelessly, often delivering hundreds of speeches each year and speaking as many as eight times in one day.\textsuperscript{18} Her public lectures did not cease even when she served as president of the NAWSA for eleven years.

Shaw’s NAWSA presidency was filled with controversy and difficulty. She accepted the role in 1904 after Carrie Chapman Catt’s frustration-filled four-year tenure. In order to serve as NAWSA president, Shaw needed an income. Without a spouse, family, or inherited wealth, Shaw


\textsuperscript{18} Linkugel, “Woman Suffrage Argument,” 166.
felt that she could not accept the unpaid NAWSA position. Susan B. Anthony worked behind the scenes to secure funding for the position, and Shaw remains the only president to receive such a salary. Unlike other officers, Shaw did not come from a financially stable middle or upper class family, and financial disagreements between she and other NAWSA officers persisted throughout her presidency. At times it seemed as if Shaw rose to her position only because of Anthony’s advocacy; after Anthony’s death in 1906 Shaw lost her most supportive advocate. The rest of Shaw’s tenure took place in what historians have labeled “the doldrums,” a period with few legislative gains for woman’s suffrage at either the state or national level. Shaw exemplified a more independent, self-sufficient, and progressive persona, what Shaw called the “modern woman.” Traditionally minded activists outnumbered her, however. Although the movement did not experience great tangible gains during Shaw’s leadership, she broadened the movement to reach women of different classes and races. She also brought a sense of professionalism to the movement, establishing its national reputation and moving the NAWSA headquarters from small-town Ohio to New York City in 1909. Despite the fact that her tenure was controversial, she served for the longest of any NAWSA president.

Although she was nearly seventy years old by 1915 when she retired the NAWSA presidency, Shaw’s labor on behalf of women continued. In 1917, in the midst of World War I, President Woodrow Wilson recruited Shaw to chair a women’s committee of the Council for National Defense. This call evinces both the importance of woman’s rights at that time, and Shaw’s national reputation as a leader. As chairwoman, Shaw organized all of the nation’s women’s societies engaged in war-related work. She also continued to use her rhetorical gifts to lecture on women’s war service and encourage women to become involved in war efforts

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wherever they were able. Shaw believed that the fight for universal suffrage and women’s war efforts were compatible, and that both women and men should defend the nation’s interests. After the dissolution of the committee in March of 1919, she received a Distinguished Service Medal. After her death just four months later, Shaw was buried with the medal pinned to her clothes, symbolizing her life of service.\(^2\) The common threads of hard work, dedication, and oratorical charm clearly weave throughout all of Shaw’s life and work.

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**Focus and Rationale of Study**

This thesis seeks to understand and explain how Anna Howard Shaw’s rhetoric fashioned a comprehensive theory of women’s potential role in three distinct public spaces. Through close reading and interpretation, I argue that Shaw established a unique public role for women in the domains of the home, the workplace, and civil society. In the process of envisioning a role for women in these places, her rhetoric constituted three identities—homemaker, worker, and citizen—for women. I claim, further, that Shaw’s rhetoric crafted the manner in which women inhabited these identities as distinct from men but always of equal value. To understand her implicit theory of women’s ideal public character, I analyze her published speech manuscripts, transcriptions of Shaw speaking in front of audiences, and Shaw’s own speaking notes. I gathered this textual evidence from Wil Linkugel’s 1960 dissertation and from the Anna Howard Shaw papers in the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College.\(^3\) By using a textual analysis method, I hope to gain a sense of Shaw’s rhetoric as she intended it to be spoken. This approach, combined

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\(^2\) Ibid., 376.

with my reading of the secondary literature on Shaw’s biography, provides a sense of how Shaw’s life experiences informed her work.

One rationale for this thesis is that there is relatively little contemporary scholarship on Anna Howard Shaw. Even in the scholarship that currently exists, we seem to lack a consensus on both Shaw’s historical and rhetorical significance. As the next section demonstrates, Shaw is too often analyzed as a one-dimensional historical figure. This is especially problematic because her understanding of gender involved so many different dimensions of women’s lives. While a great deal of rhetorical research considers women’s suffrage, its protest methodologies and ideologies, and its iconic heroes, Anna Howard Shaw remains largely unexplored for the unique contributions that her life and oratory embody.

Secondly, this project contributes to a theory and methodology that views gender as an **intersectional** experience involving race, class, and other factors. More to the point, this project prioritizes oratory and rhetorical criticism as perhaps the best means for understanding a complex and diverse theory of gender’s intersection with the public sphere. By studying how Shaw defines the spaces that women should occupy and the identities that they may embody in those spaces, I hope to uncover how gender interacts with the spheres of work, the home, and the civic arena. Within these spaces, gender also intersects with issues of class and race. Understanding these interactions will help me overcome a singular and simplistic view of gender around the turn of the twentieth century. There is much more to Shaw’s activism than the fact that she was a woman, and her rhetoric demonstrates the complex workings of her public persona.

Third, this project seeks to demonstrate how a focus on rhetoric can, at some points, reorient the historiography about Shaw, which tends to represent her in unflattering ways. While Shaw’s life and career certainly contains blemishes and unrealized opportunities, I contend that a focus on her rhetoric, which exists at the intersection feminist ideology, progressive politics, and a robust imagination for humanity’s future, reveals just how remarkable Shaw was. In the section
that follows, I discuss how scholars have offered primarily one-dimensional descriptions of Shaw. My review of this literature provides the background necessary for understanding how my thesis, a multi-dimensional analysis of Shaw as a speaker and theorist, attempts to re-evaluate who and what Anna Howard Shaw represented.

Three Established Conceptions of Anna Howard Shaw

Scholars of rhetoric have repeatedly acknowledged and discussed Shaw’s oratory. In their book-length rhetorical biography, Wil A. Linkugel and Martha Solomon write that Shaw’s rhetoric allowed her to enact a “new woman” for her audience.24 When Shaw spoke, she displayed the female citizen-voter that was the subject of her speeches and, in this way, she offered a tangible example of the thing for which she argued. Linkugel and Solomon write, “Shaw was extraordinarily impressive as a lecturer in an age filled with other skillful speakers.”25 They argue further that because “her ideas and causes were often not popular with the audience, which invariably praised her as an orator, at least part of her effectiveness must stem from factors other than the substance of her speeches.”26 The authors credit Shaw’s oratorical success to her dignified and conservative physical appearance, animated delivery, pastoral persona, and plain, direct language style.27 Linkugel and Solomon’s work creates a compelling picture of this orator through a discussion of her most famous speeches on suffrage and other women’s rights.

Trisha Franzen, in her recent biography of Shaw, recognizes the foundation Linkugel laid for rhetorical studies of Shaw, but she argues that scholars have not considered adequately the

24 Linkugel and Solomon, Anna Howard Shaw, xiii.
25 Ibid., 11.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 11-20.
magnitude of Shaw’s rhetoric. Shaw delivered more than fifteen thousand speeches over the course of her lifetime and reached roughly one million people directly. This is a remarkable accomplishment in any age, but during a period when radio was not yet a staple of America’s rhetorical culture, the reach of Shaw’s rhetoric is astonishing. Franzen remarks that it is difficult to measure the impact of one woman’s speeches; nevertheless, ignoring the impact of Shaw’s rhetoric “leaves our scholarship incomplete.” However, not every discussion of Shaw’s oratory or her impact on suffrage is positive.

Several scholars have argued that Shaw played only a supporting role in the woman suffrage movement and more visionary leaders overshadowed her. In her seminal 1959 text on women’s history, Eleanor Flexner acknowledges that Shaw was “unmatched in eloquence and effectiveness.” Flexner adds, however, that when Susan B. Anthony retired and Shaw stepped into a larger leadership position, “suffrage needed an orator less that it did an organizer and a leader who was free to give the cause her undivided efforts.” For this reason, Flexner argues, Carrie Chapman Catt assumed Anthony’s vacant seat as president of the NAWSA, rather than Shaw. Flexner argues that Catt possessed greater leadership skills and that she had more time to devote to the suffrage movement. Shaw, unlike Catt, traveled almost continuously to lecture about suffrage, giving little time to organizational efforts. Shaw’s continued speaking was due, in part, to her concern for women’s well being but also out of financial need. She could not accept the NAWSA presidency without a salary, and Flexner suggests that her strength in oratory was not sufficient to overcome other flaws in her leadership.

Beyond the simple claim that Shaw’s rhetoric may have undermined her leadership opportunities, Flexner and others argue that as a leader, Shaw was ineffective because she created

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29 Ibid.

30 Flexner and Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle*, 231.
conflict. Flexner writes that Shaw’s lack of leadership skill worsened the inevitable difficulties of managing an organization as large as the NAWSA. When Shaw became president in 1904, Flexner claims that Shaw was “easily prejudiced and aroused to hostility,” which necessitated a great deal of “voluminous, inconclusive, and irritating” correspondence among the NAWSA board members.31 Elsewhere, Flexner writes of Shaw’s “largeness of spirit and devotion to the cause,”32 but Flexner is clear that these positive attributes did not mitigate the problems that her leadership created. Writing just a decade after Flexner, Aileen Kraditor and William O’Neill offer similarly negative analyses of Shaw’s contribution to the woman suffrage movement.33 The women’s histories of the 1950s and 1960s became the foundation of women’s rights scholarship and, as a result, a narrative that Shaw was combative and organizationally incompetent led to a near consensus that she was a poor president.34 Writing over fifty years after Flexner, Trisha Franzen contends that Flexner’s biased account of Shaw has influenced decades of women’s history. Franzen states, “There is something amiss in how Flexner views Shaw,” and claims that Flexner’s emphasis on Shaw’s organizational ineptitude to the exclusion of her other contributions has caused other scholars to do the same.35 Scholars in recent decades continue to

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31 Ibid., 241.
32 Ibid., 266.
use, uncritically, the scholarship of Flexner, Kraditor, and O’Neill as the basis of their information about Shaw. In the absence of further research or new interpretations, Shaw’s position in the historiography of woman’s suffrage has languished, Franzen claims.  

Susan Schultz Huxman’s study of Anna Howard Shaw is more positive than Flexner’s assessment, but it still follows the logic that undergirds Flexner’s position. Shaw, according to Huxman, translated the movement’s ideology to a mass audience. She states that this facility was “unparalleled in women’s rights advocacy.” Further, Huxman argues that Shaw’s charisma was her greatest contribution to the movement. Huxman’s argument places Shaw’s leadership in conversation with the leadership skills of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Carrie Chapman Catt. Huxman writes that the women’s three leadership styles were different yet worked in harmony to propel the movement toward eventual success. Stanton served as the movement’s visionary, Catt as the pragmatist, and Shaw as the charismatic speaker. Although Huxman’s evaluation of Shaw is more positive, it still lines up with Flexner’s narrative, because Huxman affirms that Shaw’s oratory was her main contribution, and considers Shaw as a secondary leader, worthy of attention only for her contributions as one part of a suffrage movement leadership team. Huxman neglects Shaw’s role in crafting her own, progressive women’s rights ideology, and paints Shaw more as simply a skilled translator.

In addition to the charismatic nature of Shaw’s presence on the lecture platform, Huxman argues that Shaw is remarkable because of her “longevity and devotion to the cause.” Shaw was the NAWSA president for eleven years, from 1904 until 1915, and she was the vice president for

36 Franzen, Anna Howard Shaw, 10.


38 Ibid., 312-313.

39 Ibid., 311.
twelve years before that period. Simply in terms of her formal leadership positions, she devoted over two decades to the cause. Although the woman suffrage movement experienced its “doldrums” during Shaw’s tenure as president, she remained the head of an active organization. Huxman recognizes the leadership difficulties that existed between Shaw and the other NAWSA board members, but she contends that this conflict may be attributed to the different roles each woman played in the movement. Because the women each played a different leadership role, they were bound to encounter differences of opinion. Ultimately, Huxman’s description makes clear that the study of Shaw’s movement leadership requires a multifaceted approach with attention to her background, class status, personal strengths, interpersonal relationships, and an understanding of the movement’s social and political contexts. However, there is much more to Shaw’s character than simply her formal movement leadership. Her rhetoric was not just about leading a large, national movement. Fundamentally, she was concerned with human rights, bettering women’s lives, and using the channels of suffrage and the NAWSA to do so.

Finally, scholars have discussed Shaw’s unique position as a working class feminist. Barbara R. Finn, for example, contends that many suffrage activists, especially those in leadership positions, belonged to the upper-middle and upper classes of U.S. society. Shaw was the first NAWSA president to come from humble beginnings and, more importantly, the first president who let those beginnings influence her vision for activism. Finn argues that while Shaw believed that suffrage was important, equal work opportunities were, perhaps, a more important issue. Shaw believed that suffrage was just a stepping-stone leading to work equality, according to Finn.40 Because of her experiences as a woman who worked as a schoolteacher, minister, lecturer, and administrator, Shaw understood the inequality of opportunities granted to men and

women in the workplace. These personal experiences informed Shaw’s activist position, and feasibly allowed her to argue more convincingly for women’s equality.

James McGovern also recognizes the influences of Shaw’s childhood on her later career. He argues that Shaw came to resent how her father maintained his own authority as the ultimate power in their family; yet, he made questionable decisions that impacted the family negatively.41 McGovern claims, further, that Shaw’s ministry and suffrage activism were instances of rebellion “against what she perceived to be an extremely unjust social order in which men denied freedom to women and yet victimized or threatened to victimize them with impunity born of their conventional role supremacy.”42 If true, then perhaps Shaw’s decision to leave home knowing that the decision would alienate her from her family, was motivated not only by an intense urge for gender equality, but also by her own personal experience with patriarchy’s negative consequences. Shaw’s experiences were tied intimately to her gender and personal observations of oppression. Understandably, once Shaw recognized that this oppression was made possible by social structures, like the exclusion of women from suffrage, she moved her advocacy to that arena.

In this project, I intend to address each of the areas of scholarship I identify above and offer my own interpretation of Shaw’s historical and rhetorical significance. I am guided by previous scholars’ interpretations of Shaw as an authoritative speaker, a controversial leader, and a new class of feminist. Because Shaw was a powerful speaker, her rhetoric was the main avenue for disseminating her ideas about women’s rights. Shaw’s use of rhetoric as a medium justifies my choice to study her work. As a rhetorician, I operate with the belief that discourse serves as a tool for creating meaningful action. This belief will guide my study of Shaw’s rhetoric, as I

41 McGovern, “Anna Howard Shaw,” 140.

42 Ibid.
consider how her public discourse might realistically have created genuine feelings that led those who heard her speak to take action on behalf of women’s rights.

**Chapter Preview**

The three critical chapters of this thesis discuss Shaw’s theory of women’s role in the spheres of home, labor, and civic life, respectively. It begins with chapter two, a discussion of Shaw’s rhetoric as it articulates a theory of women’s proper function in the home. In this chapter, I argue that Shaw forwards two understandings or conceptualizations of the “home:” the home as a private space where a woman lives with her family, and the “home” as a public space of the nation. The behavior of women in both spaces is similar, as women are tasked with the care, feeding, and proper security of the “home.” In the case of the traditional home, women protect husbands and children. In the case of the nation as home, women are a force to protect the country in time of war. Indeed, Shaw’s theory of women’s place and identity in the home is tied intricately with her rhetoric during World War I. That conflict prompted Shaw to articulate a vision for the home that sustained the traditional role of women as the nurturers of children, but it also allowed her to extend the home and women’s responsibilities to the nation-state. Two speeches form the basis of the analysis that appears in chapter two: “Woman in Industries,” delivered in either 1917 or 1918, and “The Degradation of Childhood and Womanhood,” delivered in 1918. Through an analysis of both speeches, I illustrate, historically, how Shaw used WWI as a context that justified woman’s suffrage and, more important, how her rhetoric during that period re-conceptualized what domesticity meant for the modern woman.

Chapter three contains a study of Shaw’s theory of women’s current and potential role in the labor pool of the twentieth century. I begin, first, with an analysis of “Working Women and a Living Wage,” a 1913 address Shaw published in response to a pamphlet authored by the former
president of Harvard, Charles W. Eliot. Shaw’s response to Eliot not only addresses how patriarchy structures an oppressive position for women in the workplace, it also demonstrates Shaw’s skills at refutation. Chapter three continues with a study of the 1915 address, “The Other Half of Humanity.” Using this speech, I demonstrate how Shaw extended her labor argument from a negative critique of current practices to a positive vision of men and women working together in separate but equal capacities. Shaw believed not just that women should be allowed to work, but that women, all women, had a duty to labor for the betterment of society. Where and under what conditions women labor should be, in Shaw’s view, a matter for women to decide.

In chapter four, I shift my attention to the civic sphere. At one level, the fact that Shaw constructed a role for women in this sphere is not surprising; she spent most her life advocating for women’s political rights. However, I believe a deeper examination of Shaw’s suffrage rhetoric reveals that her advocacy for women’s political agency was tied to her construction of women as a moral agent of human progress. That is, Shaw viewed suffrage not as an end, but as a means to transform society, balancing out the negative characteristics of men who had caused the progress of humanity to stall. By analyzing “The Bulwarks of the Commonwealth,” (approx. 1908) and “Feminism,” (1918), I contend that Shaw constructs a non-threatening but necessary role for women in the civic sphere. Her explicit goal in these speeches is to provide audience members with a vision of the future that includes not just women at the ballot box, but women as civic leaders of a brighter future.

In my conclusion, chapter five, I revisit Shaw’s theory of gender, how she envisions a very specific role and place for women in the public sphere that now includes the “home,” the workplace, and the civic realm. When Shaw spoke of a woman whose labor was valuable, who fostered a healthy private and public home, and participated as an active citizen, she described the “modern woman” of her ideals. This type woman was far from the norm in the early twentieth century, however. Women faced gender discrimination in both public and private areas, and
Shaw’s description existed as in sharp contrast. Before women could adopt these roles, I believe that the roles and the spaces in which they might exist had to be created. The significance of Anna Howard Shaw lies in the fact that she did specifically that—through rhetoric she constructed three intersecting public spaces where women could be homemakers, workers, and citizens. Unlike the “separate spheres” ideologies that constrained the experiences of women at the time, Shaw’s envisioned or imagined places and identities that were distinct yet interrelated. To be a good homemaker might mean that one was also a good factory worker. To be a good citizen meant using political judgment to protect the national home from militarism and greed. Throughout her rhetoric, Shaw contrasted what women currently experienced with what she thought was the ideal but truly possible female experience. The notion of what a woman should be in the twentieth century began in discourse and extended to material reality.
Chapter 2

Women’s Role as Caretakers of “Home”

“Every suffragist I have ever met has been a lover of home; and only the conviction that she is fighting for her home, her children, for other women, or for all of these, has sustained her public work.”

-Anna Howard Shaw, *The Story of a Pioneer*, 1914

By 1916, Anna Howard Shaw had resigned her position as president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), but the seventy-year-old’s public career was far from finished. Shaw would live for three more years and during that time she continued to participate in NAWSA activities, promoted women’s service during World War I, and advocated for peace internationally. By the time that she retired, the woman suffrage movement had become a national force and Shaw had played a crucial role in expanding its public image. In the process, Shaw became regarded as the movement’s stalwart leader.

Also by 1916, World War I occupied much of the public discourse, and suffragists began to alter their rhetoric to adjust to new international concerns. The NAWSA continued its activities throughout the war, but at the 1916 NAWSA convention, President Woodrow Wilson appealed to the delegates to exercise greater patience and work on a state-by-state campaign, rather than force the federal government to address their concerns directly. NAWSA president Carrie Chapman Catt asked Shaw to respond to Wilson’s address, for Shaw’s rhetorical skill made her the best choice to impress upon Wilson the urgency of nationally mandated action. Trisha Franzen writes

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of Shaw’s response, “In a masterful stroke, [Shaw] turned to President Wilson at the close of her talk, and with one of her ‘irresistible smiles,’ stated that women had been patient and that they hoped their long wait would be ended under his administration.” The context of war was ripe for a discussion about negotiating conditions of citizenship, and Shaw’s rhetoric helped to ensure that the circumstances of that war were leveraged as an argument for women’s rights.

One year earlier, after her term as NAWSA president ended in 1915, Shaw had entered a pseudo-retirement and moved to Florence Villa, Florida with her partner Lucy Anthony. Part of this retirement included a break from public lecturing and, for a couple of years, Shaw attended only the major suffrage meetings and conventions. However, when the United States entered World War I in April of 1917, Shaw’s leisurely life ended. On April 20, President Wilson called Shaw to Washington. Wilson had created a women’s committee of the Council for National Defense (CND) and appointed Shaw as its chair. This appointment had many implications, for although Shaw no longer served as the NAWSA president, her involvement with the committee signaled not only her personal support of the war but NAWSA’s approval, as well. As a strong believer in peace, her place on the committee troubled Shaw. Nevertheless, she decided to support the war as a vehicle for raising awareness about women’s rights. On the committee, she was positioned as a public figure with opportunities to reach women across the nation, and Shaw recognized the importance of motivating these women to continue the fight for their own rights as they also supported the war effort. If the movement stopped suffrage activities, Shaw worried that the suffrage campaign would slow.

At an organizational level, Shaw’s tenure as chair of the women’s committee was successful. The committee organized and mobilized women’s clubs around the country to help with the war. More important for my analysis, however, is that Shaw used the trope of militarism

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and the circumstances of WWI to fashion a new argument about women’s nature and usefulness in both the public and private spheres of life. Specifically, Shaw’s wartime rhetoric advanced two distinct conceptualizations of “home.” The first home that Shaw described was in the private sphere, the traditional place where women took care of their families. The second “home,” however, was a public space; that is, Shaw described the nation as a “home” that needed women’s special expertise and care. According to Shaw, the spirit of militarism was not only a pressing concern abroad but also in the United States. Women, she argued, needed to play a greater role in the national home to protect the United States from the militarism that had led Germany and the Axis powers to such barbarism. Through these arguments, I contend that Shaw extended the feminine domestic ideal of the nineteenth century from a private space of the domestic sphere into a public space of the nation. It was only when society recognized the nation as a “home” that needed the nurturing, moral protections of women that a future without war was possible.

Shaw’s rhetorical mobilization and the subsequent efforts of women across the country did not go unnoticed. On December 2, 1918, President Wilson publicly urged the nation “to support woman suffrage in recognition of American women’s war work.” Further, on May 19, 1919, just a month before Shaw’s death, she received the Distinguished Service Medal for her efforts during the war. The government’s highest civilian award, Shaw considered this medal a great honor for all of the women who had supported the country during the conflict. When she died, she was buried wearing her medal, signifying a life of distinguished service.

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3 Ibid., 177.

Anna Howard Shaw presented the two speeches that are the focus for this chapter—“Woman in Industries” and “The Degrada­tion of Childhood and Womanhood”—in the midst of American involvement in World War I, (between 1917 and 1918). Women’s evolving relationship to that conflict constituted the primary context for her rhetorical situation and some attention to that relationship and history is warranted here. Indeed, women’s public responsibilities during WWI expanded considerably. Whereas their sphere of influence was, normatively, confined to the home, the war forced women into public positions that they had not occupied previously. Women took jobs that men vacated to serve in the army. They served as both moral support for soldiers and as logistical support for the war effort (e.g., nurses, seamstresses, and hostesses). Finally, women continued to shoulder the responsibility of supporting the nation’s war efforts by raising patriotic children. A number of historians have analyzed the social expectation that women of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries were expected to be stalwart patriots, educators of trustworthy citizens, and the selfless nurturers of soldiers. Frequently in U.S. history, the “good mother” of peacetime morphed into the “patriotic mother” in times of war. The greater a mother’s level of service and sacrifice to the nation, especially as she encouraged her sons to volunteer and die for the nation, the more

5 Franzen, Anna Howard Shaw, 170.


patriotic she seemed. In the case of WWI, for example, the federal government sponsored a propaganda campaign that praised mothers who willingly sent their sons to war. Furthermore, the national press downplayed the voices of activist women who opposed war.

Shaw and other woman suffrage activists faced the difficult choice of whether to critique or at least abstain from war related activities or lend their support, becoming the good patriotic women of a nation that still refused to let them vote. Those women who refused to support the war effort did so for various reasons. Some women were principled pacifists who opposed war under any situation, no matter how just it might seem. Proponents of this philosophy believed that the world’s problems could be solved more appropriately through conversation and negotiation rather than through fighting. Still other women refused to support the war, because the federal government denied women the right to vote. These activists argued that war might, in fact, be necessary, but no individual was obligated to support a country that refused to recognize her or his rights. Among the suffragists who chose to support the war, many still feared that women’s rights would fade from public attention due to the war and they might be partially responsible. In Shaw’s case, her desire to see suffrage succeed outweighed her opposition to war, so she chose to support President Wilson in the hope that he would, in turn, support suffrage.

As is often the case, the federal government and media framed anti-war expression during WWI as anti-patriotic and even radical, dangerous opinion. On June 15, 1917, the passage of the Espionage Act made public criticism of the war illegal. Some female activists continued their anti-war activities, but government officials eventually shut down most of the newspapers.

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9 Ibid., 6.


pamphlets, and protests that opposed America’s war involvement. After the government silenced dissenting views, the cooperative women in the public eye, like Shaw and the NAWSA, served as representative examples of what “good” women should be doing. Some historians, such as Garner and Slattery, claim that if Shaw and others had not supported the war, their views would have been successfully censured. As the national press demonized dissenters and praised patriotic examples of women sending their sons to war, the power of the media likely skewed the percentage of women who actually supported war.

Similarly to anti-war advocates, women who supported the war did not do so for the same reasons. Some women activists supported the war on principle. To support World War I was to support democracy, and to support democracy was to support women’s rights. During the war, women could exercise a democratic éthos by showing compassion for soldiers and their families. In fact, because they were denied full citizenship, women who supported the war effort could claim moral superiority; they, like African American soldiers, were willing to sacrifice for a nation that did not treat them as it should. Rather than providing unqualified support of war as a fight for democracy, some women activists offered their support to President Wilson as a strategic gesture to gain his support for national woman suffrage. These women took the war as an opportunity for renegotiating ideas of citizenship or asking questions about the proper responsibilities and reward of citizenship. During times of peace, women were commonly expected to act first and foremost as mothers, but during war, their duties expanded to include service to the nation. As I soon demonstrate, the tension between women as mothers and women


as citizens provided an important backdrop for Shaw’s discourse and her own articulation of women’s appropriate role in society. If women successfully participated in war activities that stretched beyond their peacetime obligations, then suffragists like Shaw could argue for expanded roles for women in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{16}

Regardless of whether or not they supported America’s entry into WWI, suffragists understood that it was important not to let the movement falter during the war. During the Civil War, suffrage movement activities all but ceased, and the movement lost momentum as a result. Shaw, in particular, felt that the movement must continue its activities alongside this war.\textsuperscript{17} Additionally, the war offered an opportunity for women to prove that they could handle both suffrage activities and war activities—advocacy for individual rights and advocacy for the nation. Trying to manage both successfully meant an expansive amount of work for suffragists. However, the war shone a spotlight on woman suffrage activities, and it may have served as an important catalyst for moving the woman suffrage movement out of the “doldrums” of the first decade of the 1900s. The conflict and the opportunities the war created breathed new life into a movement that had spent many years without significant legislative gains.

Furthermore, as the war drew to a close in 1918, discussions about post-war readjustment served as a vehicle for addressing women’s expanded roles. Because women had succeeded in their public roles during the war, did it make sense for them to return to simply a private, domestic sphere of influence? Was the home still the most appropriate place for women? Shaw argued that women’s domestic influence was extremely valuable and that they could not abandon the duties of the home. However, she extended this argument to claim that women’s domestic skills could benefit the public sphere, as well. In the following discussion of her two wartime


\textsuperscript{17} Franzen, \textit{Anna Howard Shaw}, 172.
addresses, I demonstrate how Shaw used the pressing concerns of WWI and militarism to establish her theory of women’s duties in multiple spheres of the “home.”

**Shaw’s Theory of Expanding Domesticity**

In two speeches Shaw gave during WWI, she explicitly discussed women’s relationship to war, but she also included arguments about how women’s current domestic skills and activities translated into public war service. Shaw delivered the first speech, “Women in Industries,” in either 1917 or 1918; the exact date remains unclear. Despite the explicit reference to “industry” in the title, this address considered why women’s skills in the home were useful outside of the home. In the address, Shaw argued that women’s domestic skills translated into a kind of service that was important for both the workplace and the war effort. The speech was given at a conference where most of the other speakers were male. Consequently, Shaw fashioned her address as an argument to men in favor of increased public involvement for women. Importantly and likely as an accommodation to her audience, she established women’s public utility in a manner that did not directly threaten men. She claimed that women had unique abilities that arose out of their domestic experience but that should not be limited to that place.

The second address affirmed the importance of protecting the domestic sphere so that women could continue to cultivate their domestic skills. Shaw delivered “The Degradation of Childhood and Womanhood” on May 16, 1918 at the Win the War for Permanent Peace convention in Philadelphia, PA. In this address, Shaw described women’s future role in post-war readjustment efforts. Shaw faced a complex rhetorical moment, because women had adopted increased responsibilities and proven useful to the war efforts. She hoped to persuade others that

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women deserved permanently expanded roles and responsibilities. Shaw argued that women should translate their domestic skills into the public sphere to defeat a spirit of militarism that remained despite the formal end of WWI. Women’s moral disposition was useful beyond the home, she argued, to address militarism everywhere. After the war ended, while the world tried simultaneously to recover from the evils of a militarist spirit and also to fight for democracy, women could continue to help with these efforts. Women’s usefulness as a natural caretaker and peacekeeper stemmed from their domestic role of nurturing children in the family. Taken together, both of these addresses demonstrate how Shaw used the rhetorical situation of World War I to establish her theory of women’s usefulness in the home, both as a private and national caretaker; a usefulness that the war highlighted and, according to Shaw, that the world should not ignore.

**Prussian Militarism as Analogy for Women’s Oppression**

In her WWI speeches, Shaw uses the subject of militarism in two ways, but both definitions extract militarism from the specific confines of war. First, Shaw establishes the immediate threat that continued militarism poses to a healing society. She highlights women as ideally positioned to help with the fight for democracy and against militarism. Second, Shaw uses militarism as an analogy for women’s oppression. While the war was being fought for democracy overseas, Shaw highlighted the relative absence of democratic principles on U.S. soil, signified by the lack of woman suffrage. To make both of these points, she forwards that idea of a militarist spirit, which she then attributes as the driving social force behind conflict. Further, Shaw contends that the spirit of militarism must be eradicated on a social level. Concerning acts of war, she claims, “These unthinkable offences and crimes against all the ideals of decency and humanity did not have their rise in a moment of war-maddening fury, but they are the result of the
degrading ideals which underlie and give birth to the spirit of militarism wherever it controls the life of the people (emphasis added).”\(^{19}\) In addition to locating the root of militarism within society, Shaw also asserts that militarism is a moral issue. Militarism may be attributed to “degrading ideals” or a lack of morality.

Shaw claims that the militarist spirit is taught to children at a young age, and thus positions women as the solution to its progression among young children. With respect to Germany, Shaw states, “Children are taught from their earliest infancy in institutions, which are their only home, the lessons of national pride and national glory and strict obedience to autocratic rulers; and in addition to that, hatred and contempt for the people of all other lands.”\(^{20}\) When a nation, Germany in this case, does not rely on its mothers to teach children, it builds a hostile nationalistic spirit that is difficult to overcome. In Shaw’s rhetoric, the militant spirit in German children arose because these children were raised in institutions. Importantly, when setting up the first part of her analogy, Shaw uses an example of children outside the traditional “home.” Institutionalized education makes room for the spirit of militarism, which, in turn, undermined German society and threatened the world. Because Shaw first establishes that this problem affects Germany at the public, societal level, she may eventually argue that women in the U.S. face discrimination at a similar level. Shaw, therefore, convincingly argues that the social problem faced by Germany and the U.S. may be solved through the establishment of women “homemakers” in a similarly social context. By extension, Shaw implies that better care of this “home” would lead to a less militant society.

In making the previous claims, Shaw draws attention to a problem that, she argues, society tends to ignore. She is speaking, specifically, of militarism among those who live in the


\(^{20}\) Ibid., 2.
upper classes. Again using Germany as the exemplar, she states, “That the educated and influential classes are apparently indifferent to these acts of cruelty, accepting them without repugnance or protest, proves that the poison of military necessity and military arrogance has permeated all Prussian life.” As the Germans prove, it is not enough to be educated or influential. It is not enough to have wealth and refinement; in fact, it was among the elite class of Germany that the spirit of militari

sm was allowed to develop. The harms of a militant spirit cannot be overcome without the focused attention of the “educated and influential.” Shaw thus establishes two problems that face the German nation: a spirit of militancy among the masses and indifference among the elite. The two problems are connected, and this connection is essential to her overarching argument. As will become clear, Shaw argues that because female influence is the solution to militari

sm, it is also an important dimension for prohibiting indifference.

Although she uses Germany as her example, Shaw includes language that implies American women also have a responsibility to fight militarism. For example, she states, “There is no escaping the fact that the whole nation, with its false ideals of what constitutes culture, must bear the stigma of its shame and moral degeneration.” Because Shaw does not specify which nation she means in this statement, she might reasonably be referring to any nation or, perhaps, the United States. In other locations within the text, Shaw argues that the U.S. government’s militaristic treatment of women is a subject of shame and that U.S. leaders are apathetic to the subjugation of the women. Given these later statements, we might interpret the quotation above and its lack of referent for the term “nation” as a subtle reference to America and role that women must play in fighting militarism at home. Unfortunately, she admits that many U.S. women are

21 Ibid., 3.

22 Ibid.
unaware of their own oppression, because they have been brainwashed to think that the spirit of militancy is normal.

The initially vague analogy that Shaw constructs between Germany and the United States is made explicit later in the essay. She warns,

We must save our children from the debasing spirit of militarism, if American men and women are ever again to hope for the things they have cherished, and from which their ancestors sought to escape when they defied the tyranny of the domination of might and gave to the world the democratic ideals of justice and equality in the immortal Declaration of Independence to which our flag and our country are now dedicated. 23

This statement resituates the discussion of militarism from German shores directly to the United States. Further, by invoking the Declaration of Independence, Shaw identifies militarism as a threat to the idea of equality and the true purpose of the nation. This shift has several potential consequences. First, it implies, though does not explicitly argue, that the elite men of the United States would be hypocritical to fight against German tyranny and not turn their attention “homeward,” toward their own deficiencies where the rights of women are concerned. Further, Shaw implies that the spirit of militarism takes different shapes, but women’s conditions in the United States are ultimately no different than the victims of Germany. Finally, this assertion has a practical or immediate consequence: It establishes the claim that if, after the war, elite men of the United States refuse to support woman suffrage, then they will have abandoned their democratic values.

In further establishing that those who support the war should also support woman suffrage, Shaw explicitly addresses the work of reconstructing U.S. society after the war. Shaw’s rhetoric makes clear that women’s service to the nation should not be limited to wartime. In doing so, she ensures that as the rhetoric of war fades, the issues related to women’s rights will not. She states,

23 Ibid.
The wisest men and women are beginning to understand that the things against which we are fighting…are those things in the world’s affairs from which women have heretofore been excluded, and that in the adjustment after the war, when the final settlement takes place, all who have suffered, all who have served, all who have shared in the horrors of our day, must share in the process of readjustment.24

Here Shaw predicts that the post-war period will require an “adjustment.” By claiming that the “wisest men and women” understand that women must play an important role in adjusting to post-war society, Shaw endows her position with wisdom. If the wisest people understand her vision of readjustment, then those who think otherwise seem less astute. Shaw also importantly refers to post-war America as the “final settlement,” invoking notions of manifest destiny. She implies that, once women’s peacekeeping and caretaking skills have been put to good use in the spheres of the home, the U.S. will be more progressive and expansive, just like the desire for more physical land to enrich the nation. Finally, Shaw makes the process of post-war “readjustment” seem non-threatening. To claim that the “adjustment after the war” will be a “readjustment” implies, logically, that a similar adjustment has taken place already. Americans successfully adjusted to a wartime condition in which men served abroad and women adopted expanded roles in the industrial and civic spheres. Since men and women alike have “suffered,” served,” and “shared in the horrors” of war, both groups should be able to keep similar nation-serving roles after the war ends. In the fight for democracy, once it was secured abroad, the situation at home should be an easy remedy.

Women’s Righteousness as a Counter to Militarism

In the paragraphs that follow, I discuss Shaw’s particular construction of women as moral and nurturing beings. In addition to establishing that militarism abroad and in the United States

24 Ibid., 6.
posed an immediate threat, Shaw discusses women’s spirit as counter-influence to that threat.

Shaw briefly discusses women’s nature, establishing that there are certain things only women can do. Women’s skills have been shaped by their designated place in the private sphere. However, when war broke out, men were called away from their civilian jobs to serve the nation as soldiers. Women sometimes took the place of men in the jobs they left, so that manufacturing, production, and other vital operations did not cease. Women thus proved they could adapt to roles outside of the home. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly in Shaw’s case, the war created new opportunities for women to serve the nation. Women were enlisted to sew uniforms, organize food and supplies, and even offer direct care to soldiers training at camp. The war leveraged, in a public setting, the skills that women had developed in the home. This provided a unique opportunity to consider how the habits of the private home might be relevant for spaces beyond the home.

Shaw argues at length that men and women differed in important ways, including how they worked. She says, for example, that people who think women have no business serving the public fail “to recognize the difference between the manner in which men work and women work.” Thus asserting a fundamental difference between the work habits and abilities of men and women, Shaw aligns her argument with the popular notion of “separate spheres.”

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26 Brandimarte, “Hostess Houses.”


28 My understanding of separate spheres stems from Barbara Welter’s essay, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 151–174. Welter discussed the mid-nineteenth century as a time when families no longer needed to produce all of their own necessities for living. Families looked outside the home for food, household products, services, etc. and men left the home to work. During this time, the “separate spheres” ideology emerged, arguing that men occupied the sphere outside the home and women remained inside the home. The behavior of women was governed by “the cult of True Womanhood,” which Welter discerns from an extensive study of magazine depictions of women during this time period. Welter writes, “In a society where values changed frequently, where fortunes rose and fell with frightening rapidity, where social and economic mobility provided instability as well as hope,
rather than take presume that women belong only in one sphere, Shaw argues that women’s natural gifts and virtues—such as morality and organization—were so useful beyond the private (domestic) sphere, that they were now precisely what the nation needed. Women could serve the nation in ways that men could not.

According to Shaw, women have come to realize how their skills and character benefits the nation during wartime. Shaw describes her experience as chair of the women’s committee of the CND, a committee primarily responsible for the organization of women’s committees on war around the country. In her description, Shaw talks at length about women’s eagerness for service. They joined war organizations in vast numbers: “Now, on any order issued by the government to the woman’s committee here in Washington, the information can be sent directly to these state divisions, and, through them, issued to all the organized women of that state. The organization has been so perfected that we are now able to put the women upon any drive which the government requires.”29 This efficient logistical strength highlights three important features about the nature of women, according to Shaw. First, women are skilled organizers. Women of the CND are not only organized at the national level, but they also have counterparts of equal brilliance in every state, and, furthermore, women across each state remain connected to their organizations, ready to serve if needed. Second, this passage highlights the adaptability of women. Whatever “Washington” might need from women, Shaw and her committee can accomplish. There is always someone or, in fact, a set of women who can meet any need that the government might have. This level of adaptability and responsiveness signals that, although they share common skills as women, within the larger network they possess different specialties.

one thing at least remained the same—a true woman was a true woman, wherever she was found” (1-2). The attributes of True Womanhood—purity, piety, domesticity, and submissiveness, would provide the True Woman with power and happiness in the home. The notion that women’s sphere was the private home and men’s sphere was the public workplace remained throughout the turn of the twentieth century, and I argue informed Shaw’s ideology even though she was a progressive woman in many ways.

Finally, women are eager to serve. The numbers of women necessary to comprise this chain of volunteers around the country shows their eagerness to participate in the war efforts.

While women are eager and able to participate in war service, Shaw assures her largely male audience that women are not neglecting the duties of their private home. They act publically only as need and circumstances allow. If women cannot serve the war directly, they perform a patriotic duty by nurturing their family at home. In drawing connections between the sphere of the home and the national public sphere, she proclaims,

The first duty of a woman today is a duty which has always been ours, to conserve our whole life, to conserve home life, to conserve the moral forces of society, to seek for the higher education and cultivation of the minds of our children, to fit them to do the work of the world which will fall upon their shoulders by and by, and then to be so trained in the things which the government shall need that they will be ready to respond.\(^\text{30}\)

Shaw forwards the idea that women have their own unique area of life, the area of womanly duties. In claiming that these duties “have always been” women’s, she makes women’s public involvement seem less threatening, as if it does not actually entail anything new. Furthermore, she actually refers to only one “duty” in this quotation, “the first duty of a woman today.” Because the second three clauses begin with the same words, “to conserve,” Shaw equates woman’s “whole life” with “home life” and “the moral forces of society.” The home life thus consists of anything concerning the moral forces of society. This definition of “home life” expands women’s sphere of influence far beyond the four walls of her immediate, material house. Finally, Shaw predicts that “the work of the world” will fall upon women’s shoulders. She constructs a government “need” that women will eventually fill and, in doing so, further ties women’s “home” duty to the national space.

Although Shaw supports women’s efforts to nurture the country’s war efforts publicly, she does not abandon the subject of woman’s continued work in her own private home. In fact,

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 6.
she claims that woman’s work in her home should come before her service to the country. Only if a woman feels she can adequately serve both her family and her country should she work in both spheres. Women work in their homes as patriotic mothers, caregivers raising children who can be faithful future citizens. Any work outside a woman’s own physical home would be in service to her country as a national home, ensuring the success of education, morality, organization, and any other area of influence that Shaw gives to women.

Of course, the idea of a patriotic mother is not new. This idea is relevant in almost any discussion of how women are situated relative to war, ancient or modern. Journalism scholars Ana C. Garner and Karen Slattery trace the image of a “patriotic mother” to the ancient Spartan mother.31 During times other than war, this mother acts as a respectable Republican mother who would support the nation by nurturing her children at home. The counterpart to a patriotic mother is a “good mother,” who will protect her child at all costs.32 Garner and Slattery compare the good mother to the ancient Thetis, who suffered extreme panic at sending her son to war. The good mother, while she uses an acceptable parenting strategy during times of peace, fails to meet the nation’s needs during times of war.33 As the national news narrative praised patriotic mothers during World War I, women’s development of patriotic children became a public issue. Shaw’s notion of patriotic motherhood both recognizes the nurturing element of women’s nature and highlights how this nature might be most beneficial to the nation.

What is particularly important about Shaw’s articulation of the patriotic mother ideal is that the activities of this mother do not end at her own doorstep. In fact, Shaw’s rhetoric not only strengthens the importance of domestic home life, but also calls for its extension. The proper role of women may begin in the home, the private domestic sphere, but Shaw is clear that the

31 Garner and Slattery, “Mobilizing Mother,” 57.
32 Ibid., 58.
33 Ibid., 6.
women’s role does not end in a private experience of husband and children. It can and must extend outward to the social sphere. This extension does not demand new forms of labor or even a different woman. The same skills and virtues of the private sphere are applicable to the nation for the purpose of combating militarism and protecting democracy. When the war ends, if it ends favorably, the United States will be responsible either for implementing democracy where militarism previously ruled, or, at very least, providing a shining example of democracy for the rest of the world.

As previously outlined, Shaw discusses the roots of militarism on the level of society, and bemoans that Prussian institutions taught children harsh and hostile ideals at an early age. Women, in Shaw’s discourse, are situated to be the vehicles of morality and righteousness in teaching democratic values not only in the home but throughout all of society. Shaw claims, “In the work of Reconstruction, women must have a large share, for it must begin in the home; it must be carried forward in the common schools where most of our children finish their school education. It must be taught in the social life of the people, for these are the centers of regeneration and the source of civic and political justice.”34 The geographical expansion that exists in this quotation is crucial. Beginning in the traditional sphere of female domesticity, Shaw expands the proper influence of women’s power from the home to the school to all of social life, including its civic and political dimensions. Thus, Shaw’s rhetoric provides an important public purpose for women after the war, a public purpose that blurs the line between a traditional home and the social home of the nation.

While Shaw clearly argues for a larger role for women in social life by enlarging what constitutes both the home and the appropriate spaces for nurturing activities, she makes this argument through a conservative emphasis on the relationship between women and their

dependents. For example, she states, “While we are urging all the other philanthropic work for the people abroad, we must remember our own people at home, because the future health of our own people depends on the care not only of the aged, but the care of the children. That is the principle business of women to-day.”

Children and the aged need protection and they are the primary “business” of women; nevertheless, this “business” is connected to the battle for democracy at home and abroad. She claims, “However we may have underestimated, in the past, Germany’s desire to crush the democratic ideals of the world; now that these things are known, they must be overcome, if womanhood and childhood are to be saved anywhere!”

High ideals and a democratic spirit are key in fighting militarism, and according to Shaw, “the only foundations, security and stability for any people, Germany included, is in righteousness.” The nation needs the influence of women to fight militarism. Furthermore, women and children around the world need democracy and a strong nation-state for their own protection. If, after the war’s conclusion, the United States recognizes women’s true potential and society changes its ideals to resemble a true democracy, in Shaw’s logic, future wars would be unnecessary. The militarism that allowed wars to form would weaken if women were more engaged in the social and public life of the nation. In short, women are the key to peace and prosperity in the future.

To accomplish these goals of peace and prosperity, Shaw argues that women need an education that will enhance their already present nurturing virtues. Pragmatically, if women must serve the country during wartime and educate children always, then they should first have the education necessary to do so. Shaw states, “The thing that the country needs today, and the great call is for certain kinds of employment by the government which women can readily do, and especially educated women…where women are called upon by the government to do technical

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37 Ibid.
work they shall have every opportunity for education and training for that work.” Better-educated women could better serve the nation, doing the technical work that is necessary during wartime and peace. Shaw’s call for increased women’s education has two components, reflecting her discussion of women’s role in wartime. First, the nation needs women to manage production that is essential until the war is over. Women will eagerly help, and their skills, combined with increased education, will provide the nation with support while men continue to fight abroad. Second, women’s virtuous judgment is necessary to change the social makeup and prevent future instances of militarism and war. This shift in the status quo involves an increased focus on education of children as future patriots, as well as recognition of women’s place in the public sphere as citizens. To recognize the latter would contribute, in Shaw’s estimation, to the ultimate goal of a truer democracy.

Rhetorical Creation of a Unique Feminine Role

In many respects, Shaw maintains a fairly traditional distinction between men and women, because she defined women, in part, by their domestic qualities. She positions women as public servants whose unique capacities are tied to their duties in the home. Although Shaw discusses women’s war service to the nation at length in both of the aforementioned addresses, she is careful to emphasize that women’s public duties can never come at the expense of their family or children. Strong homes would lead to patriotic, moral children who could be good future citizens and leaders. Shaw claims, “The work of women, their first work, is to maintain existing standards of education among our children, to maintain standards of moral ideals among the children, keep up their health, and see to it that no women enter upon any kind of work that

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would interfere with the health of women and the integrity and unity of women everywhere."

Shaw’s rhetoric grants women the jobs of education, morality, health, integrity, caring for children, and banding together with other women. Importantly, these types of work are not forms of labor that men typically do; yet they are important to the nation’s health. Therefore, women have a unique space in which to operate.

Shaw believed that only after a woman met her duties to her family should she serve in a public capacity. There were exceptions to this rule, of course, namely in the form of single women. As an unmarried and childless woman herself, Shaw might have seemed hypocritical in much of her discourse about the home. However, Shaw perhaps believed that she best developed her womanly characteristics through her public speech. The average woman’s fulfillment could still come from her fostering of a strong home environment for her family. Nonetheless, Shaw had strong relationships with several children in her life, including nieces and nephews of her own as well as those of “Aunt Susan’s.”

If women operate efficiently in their roles as homemakers in either sphere, Shaw’s rhetoric implies that they can help restore public sentiment and education to a war-torn nation. Further, women might then also feel called to public service. Shaw calls for recognition of women’s potential and protection of their efforts. She declares,

If we are seeking to protect the morals, the integrity, and the honor of men, we cannot do it unless the same protection is given to the young women who are called to the governmental service. That again is part of the women’s work of this country, so that while our own work is not the same as that of men, it is equally important, and unless we do our work, and do it equally well, the result will not be that our country will be safe for democracy.

39 Ibid., 5.
40 Franzen, Anna Howard Shaw, p. 84. Here Franzen discusses Shaw’s relationship with her nieces and nephews as well as the nieces and nephews of Susan B. Anthony. Franzen calls Shaw the head of the “younger branch of this blended family.”
Shaw first establishes that men’s morals, integrity, and honor need protection. Then, she calls for the protection of the same characteristics in women, implying that these are qualities that both men and women possess. The care of women’s morals, integrity, and honor has been neglected, however, and attention to these characteristics is necessary if women are to serve the government. Next, Shaw claims that the care of morals, integrity, and honor specifically belongs to women. Because these are characteristics that apply to both men and women, yet women have not been present in the public sphere, men’s ability to work has been undermined. Shaw’s argument establishes the necessity of women’s care not just for their own sex, but also to ensure that men can perform their jobs most successfully. Thus, Shaw is able to argue that women’s work is “equally important” as men’s because it affects all of humanity. Finally, in bestowing women’s abilities with national importance, Shaw connects women’s cultivation of morals, integrity, and honor with making the country “safe for democracy.” As the nation fights for democracy abroad, women can work to ensure that the home front remains respectably democratic, as well. Unless both men and women recognize the importance of women’s work, the status of the country’s democracy remains at risk.

I established earlier that Shaw argued for women to play an active role in post-war readjustment, because during this period democratic forces would be instituted to combat militarism. Therefore, the act of reconstructing in this context is a feminine endeavor, based on women’s advantageous qualities. Shaw refers to the “Temple of Reconstruction which is to make this world safe for democracy,”42 using language that suggests the holiness of democracy and asserts reverence toward this institution. She then describes a second temple to be constructed within the temple of reconstruction, one containing “a base upon which shall be inscribed the names of men and women who have given their lives in defense of human justice, of education,  

of civic righteousness, and the humanities which are manifested in the lives of common people in service, in comradeship, in loyalty, and in patriotism.\textsuperscript{43} The values that Shaw describes exist within the act of reconstruction and are therefore part of making the world safe for democracy. Further, all of the characteristics Shaw describes as part of this inner temple are feminine characteristics she previously associated with women and the domestic sphere. The logic of this quotation suggests that men are fighting for the characteristics that women can supply to help the world heal during reconstruction. The temple imagery also implies a sturdy structure that will not fall easily. Shaw’s prediction of the nation after war, as well as the roles women play in this nation, is thus made with strong certainty. Her message exudes a tone of inevitability. She positions women as waiting and ready to serve when the end of the war dawns, and shares a sense of confidence in the peace and righteousness that is to come. Shaw is confident that the praiseworthy democracy of the United States surely must include women’s natural abilities, grown out of the home environment, and her rhetoric urges other men and women to recognize this fact.

**Conclusions**

The context of World War I offered rhetorical muscle to Shaw’s woman suffragist arguments. Her discussion of war emphasized the evils of a militarist spirit, which Shaw used as an analogy for women’s oppression. Shaw constructed a picture of women’s character as uniquely positioned to combat militarism, for women were righteous, moral beings in ways that men were not. Women, Shaw argued, had developed a particular character and skill set because of their position in the traditional family home. Through her war rhetoric, Shaw maintained this

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
distinction between men and women. Rather than implying that women should serve the public in the same ways as men, she argued that women’s position as “homemaker” was unique and necessary to maintaining social order. The U.S., then, suffering from its own sort of militarism, needed the care of women. Because women did not fight physically in the war, their difference was already on display for the nation to see. Shaw used the difference to her advantage, expanding the role of homemaker to one of national importance.

These conclusions lead to several implications. First, in Shaw’s arguments for woman suffrage and rights, “equality” did not mean “sameness.” It is clear that Shaw did not construct men and women as the same, but she did argue that they deserved equal opportunities as patriots. For example, Shaw depicted men as less moral than women, and criticized men’s mindset that favored solving problems through war. Exactly which equal opportunities women and men should share was not clear from her speeches, but Shaw clearly implied that suffrage should be one such opportunity. Suffrage was the tool women could use to better systems of education and meet other social needs of women and children. Men long had the chance to make these improvements through voting but had failed to accomplish significant moral reform. Shaw’s rhetoric also established that the right to vote did not simply concern the physical act of voting. The vote stood as a symbol of social equality, better educational opportunities for children and women, and better care for the family, among other issues. Furthermore, the issues of education and public service to the nation meant that the domain of women could no longer be confined to just the individual family. It was not enough for women to act as patriotic mothers to their own children, raising children to be good future citizens. Women must also care for their nation on a broader scale. They must ensure the health and continuance of the institutions that protected everyone’s family, not just their own.

Women’s unique skills that grew out of the home became the starting point for much of Shaw’s suffrage rhetoric. Women in Shaw’s time were traditionally treated as homemakers, but
Shaw worked to redefine this role into a positive womanly feature, as well as one with great possibility outside of the physical space of the home. Rather than arguing that women’s domesticity hampered their ability to participate in public life, Shaw proved that women’s morality, organization, and nurturing spirit were advantageous qualities. In the next chapter, we will see how Shaw recognizes the negative constraints women face in the workplace because of their gender. She works to remove these constraints, and redefine industrial labor as a worthy enterprise even for women. Women should all work, according to Shaw, because their gender provides unique skills that are assets to the nation in the business of life.
Chapter 3

Women’s Role as Valuable Laborers

“It is simply rose water morality when we begin to talk virtue to a starving girl.”
-Anna Howard Shaw, “Working Women and a Living Wage,” 1913

The quotation at the start of this chapter highlights two related issues—the overlap between women’s history and labor history, and Anna Howard Shaw’s belief that one could not discuss the first without also addressing the second. This important area of Anna Howard Shaw’s rhetoric remains largely unstudied, however. One distinctive element of Shaw’s career and advocacy was that she was willing to combine two issues that at the time were often considered separately. Despite the common feeling that woman suffrage organizations and women’s labor unions should not work together, Shaw made efforts to dissolve boundaries between the groups. For example, in December of 1909, Shaw spoke at a mass labor union meeting in New York City. The meeting of the Ladies’ Shirtwaist Makers’ Union might have led to a productive alliance between union and suffrage organizers; however, the socialist women of the union rebuffed Shaw’s overture and the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). They declared that the organized woman suffragists were bourgeois, belonging to the “capitalist class,” and therefore could never have anything in common with laborers. The leaders of the Ladies’ Shirtwaist Makers’ Union seemed to believe that suffragists only wanted to recruit

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1 Anna Howard Shaw, “Working Women and a Living Wage,” Folder 114, Shaw Papers, Radcliffe Women’s Archives, 4.


women laborers for the suffragists’ self interest—benefits for laborers added an extra layer of leverage to the woman suffrage argument. Regardless of the diverse intentions that existed within NAWSA, Shaw was sincere. She believed suffrage would have true benefits for working class women. In her vision of women’s future, working class female laborers were a special group, a distinct identity who needed not just protection but political agency.

Working women of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries encountered patriarchy at two distinct levels. First, gender ideologies shaped the opportunities available to women as workers. When women worked, they were forced to adopt tedious roles that mirrored the work of the home. Further, they were expected to leave the workplace as soon as they could marry and become a man’s dependent. Second, the history of labor in the United States illustrates that women, when they did work, rarely determined the conditions of their own labor. They were subject not only to the interests of their employers, but, more precisely, to the interests of their male supervisors. The historian Alice Kessler-Harris characterizes the relationship among gender, labor, and citizenship as follows: “In the late nineteenth century, the capacity for citizenship inhered in the dignity and independence of the working person…to deny women such independence, not only created a different meaning for female citizenship, but generated male solidarity and guaranteed male control of the household.” At the beginning of the twentieth century, women faced challenges securing and maintaining work, but perhaps even more importantly, their experiences within the labor pool reinforced the patriarchal systems of oppression that women faced in the domestic sphere.

In this chapter, I examine Shaw’s rhetoric as it pertains to female labor. In the process of doing so, I illustrate how she actively questioned and refashioned the role of woman workers. As noted in this thesis’s introduction, Shaw was an immigrant, a former minister, a medical doctor, a

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and a working-class woman. Her passion to help women of every class was a great asset in her quick rise to prominence within the woman suffrage movement, but it was also a point of conflict. Trisha Franzen writes that Shaw’s class status allowed her to speak credibly on working women’s issues and to carry that message to the more elite women leaders of the suffrage movement at her time. At the same time, Shaw’s class-consciousness caused her to embrace progressive views that her contemporaries did not always share.

In this chapter, I argue that Shaw’s rhetoric created a public space in the sphere of industrial and service labor for women to inhabit. Specifically, Shaw constructed an identity for women as valuable laborers, workers that might potentially contribute as much as men to businesses, corporations, and society. But although Shaw made this radical argument for “equality” in the workplace, she was equally clear that the specific jobs that women occupied would be different than that of men. This chapter begins with a discussion about the lack of attention that has been given to the intersection between women’s labor history and suffrage. I then offer a feminist historiography that synthesizes the unique concerns of twentieth-century female workers with the objectives of woman’s suffrage. I next perform a close textual analysis of two of Shaw’s suffrage speeches that demonstrate how she created the subject position of the “workingwoman.” Finally, I discuss elements of Shaw’s biography that influenced her rhetoric and her theory of women’s work in an attempt to contribute to a notion of women’s rights activism as biographically informed.

Franzen, Trisha, *Anna Howard Shaw: The Work of Woman Suffrage.* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014). On pages 186 and 187, Franzen argues that Shaw’s background as a woman who needed to work cannot be overlooked, for she managed to earn the respectability of elite women despite her immigrant background.
Problem of Patriarchal Labor Structures

Though it is widely understood that patriarchy played a significant role in women’s working conditions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is necessary to consider how gender ideologies constrained the opportunities available to women. Women’s work in cities around the turn of the twentieth century often was temporary and unskilled in nature. The social expectation that women belonged in the home applied to working-class women as it did to middle and upper class women; however, many women, especially among the poor and immigrant communities of urban areas, needed to work to support their families. Historians Lois Rita Helmbold and Ann Schofield write that women participated in the social norms that made their work temporary. Women’s supposed “desire for marriage and family legitimated their low wages- why pay single women a decent wage when they would shortly leave the workplace to become dependent on a working man?” Even women who wanted more permanent, skilled jobs could not find them; consequently, many women had to marry and rely on men. It was very difficult to make a decent living as a single woman. Women would often enter the workplace only to leave it and re-enter again at a later date. This cycle was toxic for women’s opportunities for advancement, because they rarely stayed at any single job for long. Further, Helmbold and Schofield argue that women’s “presumed tolerance for tedium” afforded them only the most basic, monotonous manufacturing tasks. Historian Nancy Woloch writes that the abundance of women applicants, especially among arriving immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, meant that factory owners hired women for the “low-level, unskilled jobs in which one worker could easily replace another.”

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7 Ibid.

employment, no employment, and under employment again, led to a tangible lack of motivation in female laborers.

Due to the temporary and limited conditions in which they worked, many female laborers did not take pride in their work, nor did they believe that they could achieve a better situation for themselves. Woloch writes, “Working girls were hardly committed, whether to pickle bottling, personal advancement, or proletarian causes.” Helmbold and Schofield add, “Women are perceived and indeed frequently perceive themselves as inherently domestic creatures suited for marginal types of waged work which mirror the work of the home.” Not only did a patriarchal ideology influence the tangible workplace roles available to women, but it also crippled working class women from thinking that they could strive for anything different. For an activist such as Anna Howard Shaw, the solution to the terrible working conditions experienced by women was not simply to address the symptoms of the problem. The solution was to address the ideological and political foundations of these conditions simultaneously. She understood the plight of women workers, because she also worked for her wages. She shared working class women’s stories with upper and middle class suffragists and, in the process, Shaw’s rhetoric became “intersectional.” It functioned to bridge both class and gender gaps.

A study of Shaw’s rhetoric makes clear the interconnectedness of women’s history and labor history. Women workers posed a threat to male workers. As Woloch argues, because employers easily exploited women, they were “always associated with the lowering of wages in whatever industry [they] entered and with the consequent demeaning of the work that [they] did.” Even if a historian were to approach labor history with an eye to men’s work, the influence of women’s work on male opportunities would form part of this history. If women were willing to

9 Ibid., 155.


work for menial wages because they did not believe themselves to be worthy of something better, then men felt threatened by the reality that women could perform the same jobs for less. In contrast, Shaw urged her audiences to see women’s work as valuable and additive. She sought to change how society valued female labor by undermining the presumption that women were a threat to men’s jobs and by arguing that women’s labor was unique and distinctly valuable for society.

**Shaw and Feminist Historiographies**

Shaw’s rhetoric about women’s labor expanded the potentially narrow question of women’s voting. For Shaw, the vote both served as a gateway to greater freedom in the domestic and public spheres, and it represented the need to provide civil rights for women generally. In the analysis that follows, I am guided by history of rhetoric scholar Christine Mason Sutherland’s multi-faceted approach to feminist historiography, which she defines as research employing “the feminist method of engagement with, not detachment from, the object of research…[trying] to present the author’s ideas in her own context.” Rhetorician Barbara Biesecker also argues for the importance of a multi-dimensional approach to history and writes that the feminist historiographer must “take on the full burden of the notion of unequal or nonsynchronous development,” and not only “write the story of differences between women’s and men’s subject (re)formation but also to write into that account the story of differences between the positionality

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of different women."\textsuperscript{13} I approach Shaw’s work with an eye for uncovering details that demonstrate her particular context; nevertheless, I also recognize that my understanding is partial, for my analysis of her rhetoric transpires more than a century after she delivered it.

It is important to acknowledge this perspective, because a feminist historiography highlights one of the most important dimensions of Shaw’s rhetoric—its intersectionality. Shaw, more than most first wave feminist leaders, approached women’s rights as a complicated contextual experience of gender, domestic expectations, class, politics, labor, and race. Many of the leaders and activists of the first wave were upper class women with leisure time to spend on activist work, circumstances that most working class people did not enjoy. The fact that Anna Howard Shaw was a working class woman who had no income other than her lectures is significant because of how those lived experiences bridged a class divide. Shaw also notoriously supported \textit{universal} suffrage, believing that suffrage should apply to all genders, races, and immigrant communities. Shaw becomes a model for feminist historiography because she used rhetoric to, as Sutherland writes, attempt to erase boundaries among gender, race, and class.\textsuperscript{14}

A second benefit of a feminist historiography for this chapter and for the thesis, generally, involves its emphasis on primary texts in the telling of history. By including texts from women activists like Anna Howard Shaw that discuss women’s labor, we see how patriarchal labor ideologies were challenged and a new subject position for female labor was created. Primary texts and the study of their context add a sense of presence to the study of history. Biesecker claims of feminist history, “The plurality of practices that together constitute the everyday must be conceptualized as a key site of social transformation and, hence, of rhetorical


\textsuperscript{14} Sutherland, “Feminist Historiography,” 112.
While history can never be objective, it can represent the rich, pluralistic, and sometimes-contradictory positions of its subjects. Historians and critics should consider how subjects interacted with their surroundings. Sutherland argues that the use of primary texts is an important part of a feminist approach to history, for the study of secondary research typically takes an “adversarial stance.” Rather than drawing on secondary articles, a feminist historiographer brings previously understudied texts, especially those that have been excluded by patriarchal points of view, to the forefront of history and argues for their significance.

Finally, a feminist historiographical approach to Anna Howard Shaw’s rhetoric about women and work reflects one of the major characteristics of Shaw’s own discursive practice. That is, Shaw articulated a cooperative rather than competitive role for women in the labor sphere. In using what Sutherland terms a “cooperative” rather than “competitive” approach to writing history and conducting criticism, I partner with other scholars and with Shaw, herself, to fashion a more complete account of women’s voices. Because I argue that labor issues are intimately connected with first wave feminist issues, I recognize the role that these ideologies played in shaping women’s opportunities. Further, by highlighting the role of rhetoric in women’s labor issues, I aim to show how Shaw challenged a patriarchal labor system. She influenced actual opportunities available to women by rhetorically creating a space for them to operate as valuable workers. I examine two of Shaw’s texts, “Working Women and a Living Wage,” and “The Other Half of Humanity,” because these two texts contained the most complete representation of Shaw’s theory of women's work.

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16 Sutherland, “Feminist Historiography,” 111.

17 Ibid., 112.
“Working Women and a Living Wage”

In October of 1913, the former president of Harvard University, Dr. Charles W. Eliot, published an article in the *Harvard Theological Review* on female and child labor in the United States. Eliot’s essay, “The Churches and Prevailing Social Sentiment,” addressed the role of churches in ridding society of the evils experienced by working class women and children. Among these evils, prostitution reigned supreme. Although Shaw was no longer an active minister, she still followed the major theological arguments and events of her time. She was outraged by Dr. Eliot’s suggestion that a deeper commitment to morality among working girls and women was a solution to the social ills he identified. Shaw responded to Eliot’s essay with her address, “Working Women and a Living Wage.” In this speech, Shaw draws attention to the social and ideological structures constraining women’s opportunities for work. She argues that to address the social and personal ills experienced by women in the workforce, activists should not seek to change their moral nature, but, instead, work to change the economic structures that victimized women. Shaw directly criticized Eliot: “it is not remarkable that [Eliot] should permit himself to hold such a one-sided view of the subject of women and children’s labor as his article seems to convey.” Through her speech, Shaw offered an alternative to Eliot’s “one-sided” view.

**Shaw Argues that Women Are Not to Blame for their Condition**

The primary argumentative function of “Working Women and a Living Wage” is to shift responsibility for women’s oppression in the workplace from workingwomen, themselves, to

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those agents who are capable of changing the women’s circumstances. Dr. Eliot claimed that prostitutes must be exposed to morality, or be evangelized, to combat their current practices. This perspective makes individual women the problem, and implies that women could simply choose to act differently. Shaw refutes Eliot, arguing that oppressive social forces forced prostitutes into that line of work. She contends:

When we consider the conditions under which so many of these toiling girls are born and reared, the environment of their early years, the lack of home comforts and training, the brutalizing influences with which abject poverty surrounds them, we must realize that, from the very beginning, they are handicapped in the race of life.\(^\text{20}\)

Poor women workers are “handicapped” not by a sinful nature needing spiritual redemption, but by intersecting social and labor conditions that undermine their potential and material opportunities. Through this argument, Shaw moves the fault for female immorality from women to society, and, in the process, she highlights how inequality and injustice constrained women’s roles. Further, this quotation demonstrates how Shaw reconceptualizes the role of working women from one where they are completely autonomous moral agents who choose prostitution to women who are forced into their situation by “the present commercialized inhumanities of crushing and debasing toil.”\(^\text{21}\)

**Shaw Argues that Women’s Work is Valuable**

Once Shaw establishes that society creates the problems of women’s working conditions, she advances a second claim that women’s labor is inherently valuable. However, Shaw faced several barriers to this claim. She accomplished her task through numerous sub-arguments and, in the process, accused the current social system with a lack of recognizing women’s value. One

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 2.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 4.
idea that Shaw believed stood in the way of society being able to see women’s work as valuable, was the belief that women could “work their way” out of poverty. To counter this idea, she established that the physical reality of women’s working conditions and their lack of opportunity made the American Dream impossible for them. If she could remove the stigma from impoverished women laborers then society would stop blaming them for not bettering their own conditions.

Shaw worked to remove blame from women and instead prove that women laborers were good for business. In his essay, Eliot articulated a common argument that women should not be paid equal wages, because they would become greedy and try to displace men in the workplace. For example, Eliot claimed, “Poverty is a far safer moral condition than inordinate wealth.”

To refute this point, Shaw states, “Those who demand fair wages for women, do not seek to enrich them beyond their power to resist the temptations of ‘inordinate wealth,’ but what they do demand is that when a woman gives an honest days work she should have a fair days wages.”

Here Shaw directly quotes Eliot in her refutation, demonstrating her skill in crafting an argument that would simultaneously forward her cause and break down her opponent’s case. Shaw contests this argument directly, but she is also careful in how she refutes it. She does not pretend that workingwomen are models of propriety. She admits that they, like all human beings, can be greedy and dishonest. However, Shaw argues that whether or not an individual woman exhibits the vice of greed should not determine whether or not she should receive good wages for an “honest days work.” The phrase, “honest days work” implies a dissociation, a difference between labor and virtue. Even if an individual is selfish or greedy, their moral character does not matter as much as the work that they perform. Honest work deserves a “living wage,” regardless of the

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23 Ibid., 3.
character of the person who performs that work. Shaw strengthens this argument by stating:

“Poverty is responsible for the lack of education, and ignorance breeds crime. The girl born of ignorant parents, reared in an environment of vice, must be far above her environment if she is to become an honest decent member of society.”24 Through this argument, Shaw inverts the logic that Eliot and, by association, much of society favored. Rather than assume that the vices of poor and working women were inherent to their character and that better wages would make those vices worse, Shaw argues that the vices result from the lack of good wages. Poverty breeds dishonesty and vice; vice and dishonesty are not sufficient reason to keep people poor. Shaw’s arguments make it possible for her audience to see impoverished women as victims of a corrupt social system, rather than corrupt individuals.

In addition to arguing that women’s work is inherently valuable for its contribution to businesses and corporations, Shaw asserts that women’s work is valuable because it will strengthen the health of society. She states, “Is not the physical and moral health of the [community] the sum of the moral and physical health of the individuals who compose it, and does not that which improves the physical and moral health of the individual improve like conditions in the community as a whole?”25 Through these and similar statements, Shaw makes the moral and physical well being of working class women the concern of the entire community. She charges the community with helping move girls from their desperate current position to a better position in society. In the process, Shaw implies that women’s work is valuable enough to concern the entire community.

Shaw offers woman suffrage as a solution to the ills so often associated with women’s work. When Shaw paints woman suffrage as a tool to solve the community’s problems of


25 Ibid., 5-6.
poverty, she constructs a hypothetical base of widespread community support for her suffrage cause. She stresses,

Suffragists…demand that women shall be given the power to share in legislation, to secure their own protection in labor, and to control the conditions under which they toil in factories and shops, and to guard against over work not only for women before and after confinement, but for the thousands upon thousands of potential mothers who are forced, by the present economic conditions, into our factories, our sweatshops, and the scores of employments in which they are presently engaged.26

This quotation stresses the importance of legislation in solving women’s problems. In doing so, Shaw constructs women’s work as a national problem and woman suffrage as a national solution. The workingwoman is a future mother, and thus future citizens depend on the mental and physical health of these women. Shaw expands the scope of the problem from an immediate temporal scale to a problem that affects the nation in the present and the future. This broadening helps to instill a sense of value associated with women’s work. This quotation also serves to tie women’s work issues with suffrage. A constitutional amendment in favor of suffrage thus seems an appropriate solution to such a large-scale labor problem. According to Shaw, women must “be given the power to share in legislation” regarding women’s work. This sentiment reflects Shaw’s belief that women must act to ameliorate women’s conditions. Male legislators have not accomplished enough. Only women understand the plight of their sex, and therefore women must be the ones to correct their problems through legislation.

The last way that Shaw reconstructs women’s work as valuable is to discuss the entirety of women as a group of voters, implying that all women, regardless of class or working condition, must be treated equally to men. She does so by continuing to stress the importance of woman suffrage legislation that will solve women’s work problems. She states, “Experience and common-sense agree that if ameliorating conditions can be secured through legislation, that the

26 Ibid., 7.
most important thing for wage-earning women, and for all women who seek the higher good of humanity, is to put forward every effort to secure the means by which they may enforce legislation.” 27 Shaw establishes that working-class women’s labor is sufficiently valuable to deserve better pay, but also women’s potential contribution to the “higher good of humanity” makes them valuable enough to vote. Shaw argues that women deserve full citizenship status and implies, thereby, that they are as valuable as men. Shaw’s argument here should be read in light of a common argument of the time period—that women should participate in the public sphere through civic clubs and similar means other than voting. Shaw quotes journalist and co-founder of the NAACP Charles Edward Russell when she says, “Lady-like reforms will not quell these evils…degrading poverty must be abolished by wise and humane legislation secured by the exercise of the political power which inhere all the people of a republic.” 28 We will see more of Shaw’s theory of women citizenship in the next chapter.

Shaw’s speech, “Working Women and a Living Wage,” addressed the social ills plaguing wage-earning women and offered a different conception of these women. Shaw established that female workers were not solely responsible for their own poverty, prostitution, or other moral evils. She sought to shift the blame from the individual female worker to society for constraining the opportunities available to such women. Shaw combined these arguments with an explicit call to women’s suffrage, arguing that suffrage would help address the structural and social oppression that led to the many faults that critics like Eliot attribute to women. In doing so, Shaw implied that the health of women workers was important and valuable enough to concern the entire nation. Ultimately, in this address, Shaw constructed a role for women as both laborer and

27 Ibid., 8.
28 Ibid.
citizen. This citizen was valuable in her own right, but she was also valuable for what she could contribute to the economic and civic life of the nation.

“The Other Half of Humanity”

In 1915, Shaw delivered an address in which she continued to develop her theory of women as worker-citizens. In “The Other Half of Humanity,” she defined work as a worthy undertaking that all women should dutifully pursue, rather than inevitable burden of the lower classes. She delivered this address on April 16 in Birmingham, Alabama. It was recorded by a stenographer and then printed as a pamphlet.²⁹ The process of turning Shaw’s ideas into a pamphlet to distribute demonstrates the circulation of her message. By transforming the speech into a distributed pamphlet, Shaw influenced those in her immediate audience and many others who read her message. This address falls at the end of Shaw’s NAWSA presidency and demonstrates her continual drive to lecture for woman suffrage. Even after eleven difficult years as president of the national organization, she continued to travel, lecture and work for women’s rights.

Women’s Unique Gifts and Responsibility to Work

The claim that women possess distinctive talents and qualities from men, but, nevertheless, must be given equal opportunities as men is one of the most important themes of Shaw’s oratory. It is a theme that has and will reemerge throughout this thesis, but in this chapter is has a very specific application. In “The Other Half of Humanity,” Shaw argues that women do possess unique and useful gifts that explain their success as wives and mothers. At the same time,

²⁹ Shaw, “The Other Half of Humanity,” 208.
she argues that these gifts should be used in the labor pool in an equal capacity as men. In particular, Shaw argues that women possess both organization skill and a moral compass that would help business and society. To establish these arguments, she skillfully uses metaphor to describe the kind of equality that she envisions: “The fundamental reason for the prejudice that the average man brings to the discussion of woman suffrage today… is that he has not yet grasped the fact that women are women… in the compass of the human voice there is a soprano as well as a bass.”\textsuperscript{30} The musical metaphor of this passage serves Shaw’s interests well. It allows her to assert that women are necessary for the workplace “symphony,” but women’s presence does not compete with the labor interests of men. Women are different, yet women are necessary, for an opera that lacked a soprano voice would sound incomplete. Further, as she affirms that women have no desire to steal the bass role. Shaw constructs a powerful basis for her argument to include women workers in a separate capacity than men.

In addition to establishing that women have unique talents to bring to the sphere of work, Shaw argues that women also have a duty to work. In doing so, she extends her sphere of argument from simply working class women to women of all classes. She expounds,

\begin{quote}
I believe so much in women’s working, that I think no woman has a right to occupy space in the world who does not give valuable service for the space she occupies. Something, either of brain, of brawn, or of heart, something the world needs, something a woman must give, either inside the house or outside the home, wherever duty calls her; and she is to be the judge of her call to duty.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

With this quotation, Shaw accomplishes several goals simultaneously. First, she acknowledges that service in the home is actually work. Mirroring an argument that we hear today, Shaw argues that the efforts of homemakers are a form of labor that is not substantially different from what takes place outside the home. Second, Shaw creates the possibility for all women, regardless of

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 209.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 215.
their backgrounds, classes, and races, to participate in some type of work for the betterment of society. Because she leaves the particular type of work open to a woman’s judgment, any woman may belong. Third, Shaw constructs women’s work as a responsibility. A woman has the responsibility to work so that she can occupy a space in society. If all women must work just as all men were expected to work, the role of women in society would become more valuable. If women’s work were more valuable, then the enterprise, women’s labor, would need protection.

Although she asserts that women have the responsibility to work, Shaw does not strip individual women from the agency they need to shape their lives and future. The individual woman must choose her own sphere of labor, according to Shaw. For some women, this might be the home, but for many others it will be a space outside the domestic scene. What seemed to matter for Shaw was that the work women performed, regardless of its location, benefit “the world.” It is crucial to recognize that this argument and its emphasis on the agency of women complicates what Shaw had said earlier about the character of poor women who Eliot censured. When she discussed how women were sometimes apathetic or dishonest about work, she claimed that such behavior was caused by oppressive circumstances. After she reconstructs women’s work as a valuable enterprise for society, she returns agency to the individual. It is not women’s fault that society has created conditions that oppress them. Society must change those conditions and recognize female labor as valuable; thereafter, individual women have the responsibility to participate. The reconstruction of women’s role and agency depends on society’s recognition of their equality, but once that equality exists and the circumstances of female labor are transformed, women must embrace the opportunity to work for the benefit of all.

In this speech, Shaw addresses one of the major counterarguments to women’s involvement in the labor pool, the neglect of the home. Anti-suffragists often argued that if women participated in the sphere of work or citizenship, they would neglect their domestic duties and the family would suffer. Shaw counters that the family suffers already because of the
conditions that oppress women’s labor both in and out of the home. She argues that if women could participate equally in both spheres, both spheres would benefit. Women should work in a way that strengthens their home life and be able to earn wages that allow them to support their family without physically harming the home. She argues,

I believed then, in work, but under the conditions that left the worker human after the day’s toil was done, in work which, instead of crushing out the vital energies of a young woman and leaving her with stooped shoulders, atrophied heart, and downcast eyes, would leave her capable of feeling in her soul the joy of living, of lifting her eyes to the sky and knowing the blue was for her, the flowers of the field and the sun of comfort were for her, the laughter of little children, the love of husband and home and the joys of comradeship were for her.\(^{32}\)

Shaw establishes that employers must treat women as human beings. She opens up the sphere of women’s work to include all women, even those who have families. Since many women left the sphere of work to marry, and thus women’s workplace opportunities were temporary and fluid, Shaw’s discourse seeks to instill a sense of permanence in women’s work. Work must leave a woman capable of experiencing joys other than work when she is finished. Work is part of the home, including women’s jobs as homemakers and mothers, but also part of the public sphere of labor. It a worthy endeavor for women and men, but it is not the only important area of life. Outside of work, a woman must be able to enjoy nature, her children, her husband, and other comrades. With this quotation, Shaw links the workplace to the rest of life, meaning that unhealthy working conditions would affect all of life. Combined with Shaw’s argument that unfair working conditions were caused by inappropriately gendered social expectations, Shaw completes a circle of cause and effect. The situation in which women work under “crushing” oppression was caused by lower expectations of women as workers, but if the situation continues, all of humanity stands to be affected negatively because of women’s integral role interacting with her world.

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
As she speaks, Shaw constructs work as suitable for all humans and argues that women’s humanity should not suffer just because they work. She argues, “Working women should have life in this human satisfaction, which we all need, of friendship, love, home, and comradeship. That is why, then as now, I wanted to do my share to see that other toilers got an equal day’s pay for an equal day’s work regardless of whether they were men or women.” Shaw ties men and women together through common bonds of friendship, love, home, and comradeship, implying that men and women desire the same basic human experiences that bring joy. Importantly, Shaw also offers herself as an example of a workingwoman. When she writes that she wanted to do her “share” to see that “other toilers” could experience equality, she implies that she is a toiler as well. This argument is strengthened by the fact that it comes at the end of Shaw’s career. Having just served eleven years as the president of a national organization and continuing to lecture throughout that time, she is the embodiment of someone who embraced her duty to work.

In her most robust call for equality, Shaw reframes the seemingly particular issue of women’s work to be an issue defining all of humanity. Before women’s work may be considered valuable, she argues that women must be seen as equally human. The issue of whether or not society will recognize the common humanity of women pervades Shaw’s rhetoric as she defined a role for workingwomen. If employers do not consider women fully human, women will never experience better working conditions. Shaw states:

So long as women are branded the inferior sex, and men are distinguished as the superior sex, there is no hope in the market of the world of an equal day’s pay for an equal day’s work; there is no hope for a fair chance of the opportunity of rising; there is even no hope that, under the government, the one who can pass the examination will get the government position; there is no fair chance anywhere, until that stigma is removed which declares women an inferior sex in the business of life.34

33 Ibid., 215-216.
34 Ibid., 216.
In an interesting twist, Shaw defines life, itself, as a business. Through this definition, she suggests that the problem of women’s work is really the problem of a woman’s life. The debilitating working conditions under which women toil hamper their ability to live, regardless of what sphere women occupy. Without better conditions in which to work and more opportunities to work, women’s lives will be inferior. This quotation implies, as well, that women are “branded the inferior sex,” language that connotes an artificially constructed hierarchy. Women are not naturally inferior; they are simply branded as such. Shaw seems to believe that this mark may be removed, however, which ultimately gives her message a hopeful tone. Shaw’s discussion of branding compliments her invocation of language of business. She refers to the “market of the world,” “the opportunity of rising,” and “the business of life.” If life and the workplace are understood as business models, then an inferior class of worker is bad for business. The “company” of the United States is disadvantaged because of the way it treats half of its workers. This language allows Shaw to construct female workers not as defective male workers, but as their own underserved class.

In “The Other Half of Humanity,” Shaw thus works to rhetorically shape women’s labor as complimentary to men’s labor. She first argues that women have unique talents and skills to offer in the form of female labor. Their service is valuable, but it is not a usurpation of the positions normally given to males. Further, women workers are necessary, because life itself is a business. Women have the responsibility to work, no matter their class or race. Work is not to be survived. It is to be embraced as a responsibility through which women pay for their individual positions in society, according to Shaw. Finally, Shaw establishes how her vision of workingwomen would benefit society. She assuages fears that women will neglect their homes if they join the workforce and argues, instead, that women’s working conditions must be reconstructed in a way that leaves them free to enjoy the pleasures of all human life. Society in
general and men, in particular, have constructed women as an inferior sex in the workplace, and this construction must be undermined in the name of bettering humanity.

A Biographically Informed Theory of Gender

Shaw’s progressive views on gender and labor resemble attitudes she developed as a child. Her encounters with different progressive individuals as well as her family’s difficult living situation in the Michigan wilderness exposed Shaw to the possibility, as well as the plausibility, of nontraditional gender roles. In this section I use Shaw’s autobiography, which she dictated to Elizabeth Garver Jordan in 1915, to draw connections between her early beginnings and her later activism. I first highlight Shaw’s childhood relationships with a shipyard worker and a prostitute while she lived in Massachusetts, and then discuss her distaste for her father’s dominant role in the family.

In her autobiography, Shaw remembers fondly the first friend she made in the United States. Her family had completed a difficult immigration voyage from the United Kingdom and arrived in Massachusetts in 1851. One of Shaw’s neighbors worked at a shipyard and allowed her to accompany him to work. Equipped with a toy saw and hatchet, Shaw worked alongside the men at the yard and “was very, very busy” as she “worked unwearyingly at his side all day long and day after day.”35 During this early time in her life, Shaw first discovered that gender conventions restricted her ability to work in the manner she wanted. She recalls, “Discovering that my tiny petticoats were in my way, my new friend had a little boy’s suit made for me.” “Thus emancipated,” she states, she worked freely.36

36 Ibid.
Shaw’s experience at the shipyard demonstrates not only her childhood confrontation with gender conventions, but also her propensity for hard work. In reference to her work at the shipyard, she writes, “I have always maintained that I began to earn my share of the family’s living at the age of five—for in return for the delights of my society, which never seemed to pall on him, my new friend allowed my brothers to carry home from the shipyard all the wood my mother could use.” From the age of five, Shaw experienced the success that came from hard work. As an adult, she devoted the same energy to her suffrage activism. Further, Shaw recognized the importance of this experience in developing her attitude toward gender roles. Shaw considered them artificially constructed and unnecessarily constraining. She calls her saw and hatchet toys “fatidical gifts,” which foreshadowed her work alongside her brothers in building their family’s frontier home.

In another section of her autobiography, Shaw recalls her second friend from Massachusetts, a prostitute that lived next door to her family. She watched the woman thoughtfully for weeks before they finally made contact. Shaw asked her parents if she could visit the woman, and they reluctantly agreed. Shaw surmises, “Probably they felt that the slave next door was as much to be pitied as the escaped negro [sic] slaves they so often harbored in our home.” During their time together, Shaw and her newest friend shared fantastic stories. The woman never visited the other members of Shaw’s family, nor did Shaw ever see any of the other men or women that passed through her new friend’s home. Their friendship existed in a sort of liminal space. Shaw remembers this friend fondly and recognizes the life-long influence of her companionship: “I have never forgotten her; and whenever, in my later work as a minister, physician, and suffragist, I have been able to help women of the class to which she belonged, I

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 11.
39 Ibid., 17.
have mentally offered that help for credit in the tragic ledger of her life, in which the clean and blotted pages were so strange a contrast." This friendship demonstrates Shaw’s early open-mindedness not just toward gender conventions, but also toward class status. Importantly, her ideas about the worth of poor working-class women and prostitutes, discussed earlier in this essay, closely mirror her relationship with her childhood neighbor.

After eight years in Massachusetts, Shaw’s father decided to move their family to the Michigan wilderness, a supposed land of promise. This move led Shaw to witness the skewed gender dynamics present in her family. Her father asked the family to move, but then sent them ahead to inhabit a cabin home for eighteen months while he remained in Massachusetts. During this time, Shaw, her siblings, and her mother faced serious hardships trying to settle in their home. Moreover, once Shaw’s father joined the family in Michigan, he served as the head of the household in decisions rather than in actions. Shaw described her father as follows: “Though his nature was one of the sweetest I have ever known, and though he would at any call give his time to or risk his life for others, in practical matters, he remained to the end of his days as irresponsible as a child.” Shaw’s father made household decisions simply because he was a man, and Shaw realized early in life that this was unjust. In particular, Shaw does not seem to have believed her father embraced the duty of work and his responsibility of bettering society. He acted on whims and did not follow through with his actions, leaving the rest of the family to deal with the often-negative consequences of his impulsiveness. As a result, Shaw decided her father did not deserve the family’s decision-making power, and she became frustrated that he was given it purely on the basis of his gender.

40 Ibid., 18.
41 Ibid., 27.
As a teenager, Shaw grew more frustrated with such systemic gendered power. Once, after spending the day reading in the woods, she returned home to find her father livid that she was gone all day. Ironically, Shaw recalls, her father spent many days lost in books. She writes, Father reproached me bitterly for being beyond reach—an idler who wasted time while my mother labored. He ended a long arraignment by predicting gloomily that with such tendencies I would make nothing of my life. The injustice of the criticism cut deep; I knew I had done and was doing my share for the family, and already, too, I had begun to feel the call of my career.42

Shaw observed firsthand the inequality involved in her role in her family. With respect to the themes and ideas of this chapter, it is possible that Shaw’s belief that all human beings had a duty to work for the benefit of the world might be less an injunction for women than a statement directed toward men like her father. Most certainly, Shaw decided early in her life that she did not want to be limited by a man. Shaw knew that she wanted to accomplish great things and that great things required hard work. She writes, “For some reason, I wanted to preach—to talk to people, to tell them things. Just why, just what, I did not yet know.”43 Shaw’s activist nature began to develop at this early age and informed her oratorical career. Her theories about gender roles in society, particularly in work, seem to have stemmed from these childhood experiences.

Conclusions

Anna Howard Shaw occupied an interesting position at the intersection of women’s history and labor history around the turn of the twentieth century. Her rhetoric highlighted women’s oppression in the workplace and claimed that patriarchal ideologies and social circumstances were to blame. Once she established women’s horrible working conditions as symptomatic of the overall health of the nation, she offered woman suffrage as an effective

42 Ibid., 44.

43 Ibid.
nation-wide solution to this problem. Shaw also drew attention to the large-scale problem of women’s poverty through her speeches. Women’s poverty was not result of poor character or women’s inherent weakness, but of social structures, she claimed. Importantly, Shaw then reconstructed the subject position of a woman worker into someone with valuable skills that society needed. By first speaking about women’s value, Shaw opened a space for women to adopt the role of respected worker. Most notably, this research demonstrates how Shaw’s class identity as a prominent, yet previously working-class, woman bridged the gap between the elite “new woman” citizen-activists and wage earning, lower class women. She did not fit neatly into either category and could thus speak of the workingwoman’s plight while remaining relevant to the majority of women’s rights activists.

These findings demonstrate the importance of a multi-dimensional historiographic approach. We cannot speak of women’s history, labor history, or any other history as a one-dimensional narrative. Women’s and men’s experiences as laborers were intimately connected, and working class women’s experiences became increasingly important to the woman suffrage movement during Shaw’s time as an activist. By implying that woman suffrage was necessary for wage-earning women as well as other classes, Shaw expanded the reach of suffrage. Shaw’s rhetoric represents a different discussion in which the health of women and, by extension, the health of the nation, depended on the vote.

According to Shaw, the health of the nation also could be measured in terms of women’s involvement in the civic sphere. In the next chapter, we will see how Shaw diagnoses the United States as civically inept because women do not possess full access to citizenship or the public sphere of civic relations. Similarly to her arguments that women’s feminine characteristics would translate favorably into the workplace, Shaw also establishes that women’s domestic skills and expertise would be an asset to the nation’s civic sphere. She once again faced the problem of women lacking power or agency in their public activities. The power to vote and hold office
became key to Shaw’s theory of women’s civic duty. Without this power, the nation would never progress.
Chapter 4

Women’s Role as Complete Citizens

“The shibboleth of the 20th century woman is not time to work for soup kitchens, but the power to annihilate the necessity for soup kitchens.”
–Anna Howard Shaw, “Bulwarks of the Commonwealth,” 1908

Anna Howard Shaw did not live to see woman suffrage fully realized in the United States. She died in June of 1919, about one year before the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified. Nevertheless, prior to her official retirement from the woman’s suffrage fight, Shaw had great faith that the movement would succeed. In the last chapter of her autobiography, Shaw reflects on her career as a suffragist. Writing in 1914, she says she feels nothing but “gratitude and elation” over the growth of the movement, for in the previous ten years of her National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) presidency the movement had “advanced from its academic stage until it [became] a vital political factor.” She further reflects, “Splendid team-work, and that alone, has made our present success possible and our eventual triumph in every state inevitable.” At a point in Shaw’s life where she was preparing to move beyond holding a formal leadership position, she reflects on her career, not entirely unlike we do today, a century later. Shaw asks of her life and calling, “What did I accomplish?” and “What does it matter?”


3 Ibid., 336.
Shaw begins to answer these questions by recognizing her successes and acknowledging her failures. Of her relationship with other suffragists, for example, she states, “I do not claim anything so fantastic and Utopian as universal harmony among us. We have had our troubles and our differences. I have had mine.”

She gives a realistic, yet optimistic, account of the movement and also stresses the lasting personal impact of her suffrage work. She reminisces, “Nothing bigger can come to a human being than to love a great Cause more than life itself, and to have the privilege throughout life of working for that cause.”

She closes her autobiography, “Neither the world nor my Cause is indebted to me—but from the depths of a full and very grateful heart I acknowledge my lasting indebtedness to them both.”

Shaw’s optimism reflects her attitude about the future effects of suffrage for women. The vote was not a single or simple action to Shaw, but rather it represented a step toward a more balanced human race.

In this chapter, I analyze two of Shaw’s addresses that construct an identity and place for women as agents in the civic sphere. Specifically, I argue that Shaw envisioned suffrage as an entry point to a particular kind of civic behavior, behavior that went beyond the traditions of education and moral reform. Although Shaw characterized the moral and educational missions of women as important contributions of her gender to the public, she argued that women were destined to contribute to the upward progress of the entire human race. Women were necessary additions to the civil sphere as voters precisely because they were needed to balance the particular, sometimes negative, qualities of men. In this respect, Shaw’s argument is circular: She argues that equal female citizens were needed in the civic sphere to further the development of humanity, but she also argued that it was women’s basic humanity that justifies, at the level of principle, their inclusion in the civil sphere. However, Shaw also made the pragmatic argument

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., 337.
6 Ibid., 338.
that while women’s basic humanity was sufficient to justify the right to vote, the practical advantages that would result from their inclusion was its own reward.

The two speeches that I examine in this chapter are, first, her address titled, “Bulwarks of the Commonwealth,” given in 1908, and, second, “Feminism,” given ten years later in 1918. Taken together, the two speeches evince Shaw’s theory of women as active citizens. Both speeches are compelling because they not only argue that women must fill in the gaps left by male civic leadership, but that women will reinvigorate the civic sphere with their uniquely feminine characteristics. By becoming involved this way, women would help humanity move toward a more balanced state. According to Shaw, securing the vote for women represented the next step of human progress, but it was also just the beginning of the work that women could and would do in the civic sphere.

**A Brief History of Women’s Civic Participation**

The civic sphere around the turn of the twentieth century was multifaceted. Women already were involved in this sphere, but not equally or in every aspect. Shaw faced a challenge to prove why their involvement should expand. The civic sphere, as I understand it here, is a broad public sphere of action related to the exercise of citizenship. This sphere included moral and educational reform movement activity, social work, volunteer labor, church and club activities, local, state, and national government, voting, and political activity of various types. At the time of her speeches, Shaw recognized that women occupied only a small part of this sphere—the area of civic reform and religious organizations. However, Shaw had greater ambitions. Women never would become full citizens until they expanded their role to include voting, campaigning, public office and the exercise of political power. Thus, Shaw wanted to expand women’s role in the civic sphere to include not just a fraction of this sphere, but its totality.
The women’s civic club movement highlighted the reform potential for women if they received the vote, while remaining a more respectable form of social activism than suffrage. Nancy Woloch states that civic clubs “drew women into association, at first mainly for cultural purposes, but later to support an agenda of civic reform,” while still allowing “middle-class women to enter public life without abandoning domestic values.”\(^7\) Women’s clubs highlighted female activities and, according to Woloch, created a “separate space for women in public life.”\(^8\) The club movement gave women an opportunity to participate in the public sphere without seeming to be as radical as suffragists or compromising their womanly persona. This respectability was key for making women’s civic participation appeal to a wide population.

Broadly, advocates of woman suffrage faced the challenge of proving that the vote would be a meaningful tool to help solve women’s concerns without disrupting, too significantly, the norms of civic life that had existed to that point. Aileen Kraditor writes that women’s reform efforts began to gain political significance during the Progressive Era, when women could “turn to the men who had made [their] projects the subjects of legislation and offer their experienced aid in accomplishing the reforms.”\(^9\) Because women were successful in furthering some of the goals of various reform movements, suffragists and women’s rights activists were better able to make the case for how well women would use the vote once they received it. They could argue that because of women’s present involvement, they already understood the goals of the civic sphere and were capable of offering wise political judgments as voting citizens. However, as the women’s club movement gained public attention suffragists had to demonstrate why women’s civic involvement at the club or church level was not a sufficient form of civil involvement. Shaw

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\(^8\) Ibid., 184.

would answer that women devoted time and energy to significant civic causes within their clubs, but they did not have the voting power necessary to bring their proposed changes to fruition at the legislative level. Women’s lack of enfranchisement meant that they had to rely on men to accomplish their goals at the legislative level. The vote would help women more efficiently meet their civic goals. Thus, the reform movements of the nineteenth century grew the suffrage cause, bringing middle class women into the public sphere where their reform work made them realize the necessity of woman suffrage.\(^{10}\)

While Shaw used her argument for the vote to advance many other women’s rights issues, including those in chapters two and three, advocating suffrage as a fundamental citizenship act remained a central issue for Shaw. Over the course of Shaw’s career, she used both an argument from justice and an argument from expediency to justify woman suffrage. Shaw’s argument from justice centered mainly on the definitions of three terms: “democracy,” “citizen,” and “republic.” She argued that the United States was not a democracy if it did not consider women to be citizens; rather it was an “aristocracy of sex.” She also argued that the “fundamental principle of a republic” was that every person who met certain qualifications for citizenship should be given the vote. This definitional style, according to Wil Linkugel and Martha Solomon, allowed Shaw to avoid questions of consequences or circumstances and, instead, construct a nearly irrefutable argument based on foundational American principles.\(^{11}\) However, her argument from definition did little in the way of tangible gains for woman suffrage, for it only considered the supposed justice of treating women as full American citizens and offered little in the way of substantive evidence that women would strengthen the civic realm.

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 65.

Fortunately, instead of operating solely in the ideological realm, Shaw also discussed women’s tangible opportunities.

I believe that Linkugel and Solomon overestimate the importance of Shaw’s definitional arguments. While these arguments from justice played a large role in her earlier rhetoric, expediency arguments also held great significance for Shaw.\textsuperscript{12} She connected women’s work in the home with their civic sphere possibilities, arguing that specific womanly duties and skills would translate favorably. Shaw, like other suffragists Kraditor discusses, actually overestimated the good that the vote would do for women.\textsuperscript{13} She predicted that, through voting, women could cure social ills through education, morality, and organization. Some of her war discourse even implied that, with women in leadership roles, future wars would be unlikely. As Woloch writes, these types of expediency claims helped women “attract the largest possible base of female support and to convince the public of the suffrage movement’s good intentions.”\textsuperscript{14} In Shaw’s case, particularly, expediency arguments for the vote helped to fuel her refutation of anti-suffragist arguments. Highlighting the benefits and successes of public sphere women served as key evidence to refute claims that women had no place in the public sphere.

Shaw understood that the vote was critical to achieve women’s equality, but also that it was not the only measure of success for the woman’s movement. She experienced a great deal of success during her tenure as a movement leader in areas other than voting. Although her years as president of the NAWSA (1904-1911) are often termed “the doldrums” because the national suffrage movement experienced few gains in terms of voting legislation, Shaw’s leadership contributed to many symbolic successes and can be seen as a time of important transition for Shaw, the NAWSA, and women’s rights.

\textsuperscript{12} Kraditor, \textit{Ideas}, 44.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 63.

\textsuperscript{14} Woloch, \textit{Women}, 217.
One of Shaw’s major accomplishments as a suffrage leader was to grow the movement nationally. In 1909, she relocated the NAWSA headquarters from Warren, Ohio, to New York City. Trisha Franzen writes that, after this move, “positive press coverage increased substantially, and the next year brought promising developments in the western states.” The move served as a catalyst that carried the woman suffrage movement to its final victory.\(^\text{15}\) Further, because Shaw brought national attention to the suffrage movement and focused on women’s unique civic involvement capabilities, she extended the movement to a new group of women. Woloch argues that working and middle class women, especially, had very little interest in the “largely symbolic, remote vote.”\(^\text{16}\) Once news about woman suffrage successes reached the national level, widespread suffrage also became more acceptable and mainstream.

Franzen refers to this period as a “suffrage renaissance,” a time when the movement’s supporters began to grow and leadership relied on the “new women” of middle and lower-class reform to help popularize more progressive goals.\(^\text{17}\) Shaw, in particular, devoted a great deal of energy to expanding woman suffrage to women of different races and classes. She was a more progressive leader than many other suffragists, who believed in suffrage only for educated, white women. Franzen writes that Shaw grew frustrated with much of the NAWSA leadership, who were influenced by social Darwinism and believed that woman suffrage was only for the “fittest” of society.\(^\text{18}\) Shaw, therefore, spent much of her presidential term conflicting with other NAWSA leaders over issues of class and race. As the head of an organization aiming to gain popular

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\(^{16}\) Woloch, *Women*, 206.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 130.

support, Shaw’s more radical views concerning who should vote clashed with her own desire to achieve widespread, popular support for suffrage.

By World War I, therefore, the vote had grown to symbolize women’s rights. Woman suffragists recognized the benefits of capitalizing on women’s public involvement to both prove to men that women were necessary in the public sphere but also to show women why they should be active civically. Woloch calls the suffrage campaign “a crusade in political education, by women and for women, and for most of its existence, a crusade in search of a constituency.” Shaw’s rhetoric not only created a civic role for women, it constituted that constituency. She proved why the women needed to vote, and who the future female voter actually would be. The vote represented a host of women’s rights and, according to Shaw, it was most crucial to help women become more civically active.

**Shaw Advocates Humanism**

Although Shaw’s two addresses in this section were delivered ten years apart, her theory of women’s role in the civic sphere remains consistent. By 1918, when she writes “Feminism,” her theory of women’s civic identity is more urgent and wide reaching. In this speech, one of the last of her career, Shaw argues that women’s expanded role in the civic sphere has implications for all of humanity. In balancing the characteristics of men already present in this sphere, women help humanity improve and progress. Shaw’s definition of excellence is “true humanism,” a balance of masculinity and femininity. Besides discussing women’s role as full civic participants, Shaw also stresses a counterargument to the belief that women could participate in civic clubs and thus influence the civic sphere. Shaw enumerates the importance of the vote in helping to

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expand women’s role. She forms an important argument that the vote is the key to solving the problems plaguing women, especially working class women and the degrading moral spirit, as discussed in the two previous chapters. Because she speaks of women as voters, Shaw creates a role for women as unique influencers in the civic sphere, balancing men’s civic influences and thus filling the gaps that prevent true humanism.

**Women’s Constructed Inferiority**

Before making an argument for women’s increased participation in the civic sphere, Shaw establishes that the federal government of the United States views and treats women as “inferior.” She does so through a direct comparison of women to men: “If all the vices, follies and weaknesses claimed for women actually exist, that would not prove their disqualification for citizenship, nor their disenfranchisement just, unless it can be shown that similar follies, weaknesses and vices do not exist in men in an equal, and in many cases, a greater degree.” She highlights the common argument that women are unsuited to participate in the civic sphere and separates women’s feminine qualities from their civic participation abilities. This rhetorical move will prove important to Shaw’s later arguments, when she will claim that a person’s identity as a human being is the only sound basis for equal civic participation. To be clear, Shaw does not argue that women and men possess equal qualities and skills, but that their uniquely feminine and uniquely masculine characteristics should not determine whether or not they can legally vote. Furthermore, Shaw argues that women’s treatment as inferior within the civic realm harms all of humanity. She claims, “The denial of the power of consent to women is subversive of every principle of equity and is one of the chief causes of the corruption and the disregard of the rights

of both men and women in our national life.”

Through this claim, Shaw establishes that women should not participate in the civic sphere only for their personal benefits, but for the benefit of men and women. She states that women need civic power in order to solve national corruption. This argumentative distinction subtly allows Shaw to construct the situation as one that only woman suffrage can fix. Women already possess the skills to help humanity; they simply lack the power to make laws and other binding judgments in the civic arena.

The main problem contributing to women’s treatment as inferior, according to Shaw, was the patriarchal belief that women’s functional sex service was their only contribution to the civic sphere. As several scholars have argued, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the primary “civic” responsibility of women was thought to be the birth and education of children as patriots and honorable citizens. We saw in chapter two that Shaw supported this particular duty; however, she also argued that women have more to contribute than just maternity. For example, she states, “While recognizing that maternity is a distinct service to the world, we can no more bound the life and usefulness of women by it than we can bound the duty of the male by paternity. In order to estimate woman’s relation to the world we must consider her as a human being apart from the mere function of sex.”

This quotation highlights Shaw’s major argument about the civic sphere: participation in the civic sphere should be based on humanity and activity within the sphere should be based on either masculinity or femininity. Both men and women deserve full civic participation, because both are humans. Shaw could thus construct the sphere of

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21 Ibid., 119.


civic activity as a sphere of common human participation, one that should include both the characteristics of masculinity and femininity, yet one lacking female participation.

Shaw asserts that existing laws and social customs actively oppress women and place them in an inferior position relative to men. However, she additionally declares that natural forces are beginning to thwart this constructed oppression. She argues that until women are no longer considered inferior, society cannot judge their true usefulness. Further, Woman is the result of the suppressing processes of the past and all that she has accomplished has been through the refusal of nature to be dwarfed and completely atrophied…women are proving that the thumb-screws of social criticism, the fires of persecution, the barbarism of unjust laws, the inspirational restraints of religious dogma combined, are unable ultimately to prevent nature from asserting itself.”

In this passage, Shaw compliments the work that women already have done to overcome inferiority. She establishes that women have influenced the public despite negative stigma about their participation. Then, importantly, Shaw labels women’s perceived inferiority as artificial—a result of the way society has treated women historically. She thus implies that the “inferiority” can be reversed. Woman’s public involvement in her community on a local, national, or international level, although previously looked down upon, is a natural condition and thus cannot be ignored. Therefore any woman who forces herself into the civic sphere, such as women who voted before they were legally sanctioned, were not acting against nature but instead were claiming natural rights they had been long denied. Shaw’s rhetoric serves as a warning or preparation for women’s involvement to come, and she paints a picture of inevitability by calling it natural involvement. Finally, because the current structure of the civic sphere is artificial, it can be changed or rearranged, as Shaw prescribes.

In the process of establishing women’s proper role in the civic sphere, Shaw defines a new feminism for the “modern” era. She distances herself from traditional feminism’s association

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24 Ibid., 11-12.
with “false prejudice,” or animosity towards men, and forwards a definition of modern feminism that would secure the recognition and opportunities they deserved and counteract the negative conceptions that the public held. Her definition of feminism takes into account past feminist efforts and builds on these efforts. She states,

By feminism I understand the development of those qualities in human nature which we have generally attributed to the female, as love, sacrifice, gentleness—but which we also find in large degrees in the highest type of male, and the qualities which modern feminism demands all in addition to these—honesty, honor, loyalty—those qualities which heretofore have been largely dormant in woman, but which, under new and changing conditions, she is evolving and bringing into practical service in the business of life.25

Shaw first acknowledges the qualities that guided past feminists, those that are traditionally considered female. Shaw’s contribution involves an important distinction between “female” and “feminine” and “male” and “masculine.” She claims, in part, that some traditionally feminine characteristics may also be seen in “the highest type of” males. Shaw also argues for the expansion in women of characteristics that have traditionally been seen as masculine. The well-rounded human race, therefore, must effectively balance the gendered characteristics of masculine and feminine, rather than the sexual and biological identities of males and females. However, the fact remains that females tend to have stronger feminine characteristics, and the opposite is true for males. Women could most helpfully contribute their femininity to the civic sphere, but they are also not limited by these characteristics just as the “highest” men are not limited by their masculinity.

Shaw’s argument that certain characteristics are inherent to sex and other are not leaves room for the conclusion that women can develop those masculine characteristics that are important to the civic sphere—honesty, honor, loyalty, etc. This was an especially important point for Shaw. An early, unpublished draft of her speech manuscript reads “but which we also

25 Ibid., 1-2.
find in large degrees in the highest type of male the qualities which modern feminism has
developed as honesty, honor, and loyalty.” Shaw decided to replace the words “has developed”
with “demands,” marking an active and urgent shift. The new term, “demands,” heightens the
sense of urgency that women must move into the civic sphere. If Shaw argues for the inevitability
of women’s participation, then the qualities that modern feminism now “demands” seem much
more difficult to ignore. Furthermore, in claiming that modern feminism demands honesty, honor,
and loyalty “in addition to” love, sacrifice, and gentleness, Shaw makes clear her expanded
expectations for women. Women can and must evolve, however that evolution does not require
that women abandon their traditional feminine characteristics.

One of the arguments used against woman’s suffrage was that women’s involvement in
social reform clubs was, itself, a sufficient contribution to civic life. Shaw addressed this claim
directly and argued that the motives of those who support women’s reform efforts but not
suffrage are suspect. She declares,

One almost questions either the sincerity or intelligence of such men as the enlightener of
the Society of Civic Education who decrys [sic] the power of the ballot, and at the same
time claims great results through the activity of a non-partisan organization, without
pointing out the fact that all of its members are men prominent in financial and public
life, and that even when their appeals are made they are made to voting and not to non-
voting bodies for the remedy.\[26\]

Though participation in civic reform organizations is important, it is not sufficient. Shaw asserts
that the vote is necessary for the changes that are required. This quotation also highlights the fact
that Shaw sees the vote as essential to “public” life. She argues that expanding women’s civic
role is essential to helping the public. Women who want to make civic change must be active in
public life, a definition Shaw will continue to address and clarify. Civic, “non-partisan
organization” activities may lead to meaningful reform, but only if the members of the
organization all have power as voting citizens. Civic reform groups appeal to voting bodies, and

therefore women still do not have consequential political power, for they must appeal to male voters to establish laws that promote reform.

Shaw establishes that the civic role of women is where feminists must begin if they want to make meaningful changes to the public arena, the space that affects all humans. In discussing the goals of modern feminism, she begins, “Feminists set about the task of removing that brand of inferiority from the brow of woman, and determined the place to begin was with the government, which at her birth, deprived a female child of her citizen’s rights to a voice in her government in a country declaring that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.”27 While an increase of women’s influence on humanity remains modern feminists’ ultimate goal, the civic sphere is their starting place. The government controls the civic sphere, as Shaw defines it here; consequently, by defining the civic sphere this way, she makes the vote the only viable solution for solving women’s treatment as inferior. Unfortunately for Shaw and for other feminists, the solution to their problem lies in the hands of men who staunchly support and benefit from women’s oppression.

Expanding Women’s Civic Role and the Physical “Ease” of Suffrage

Shaw argues for an expanded role for women in the public sphere by first dissociating a civic role from women’s educational and social duties. She states, “In civic life she is forging ahead until in our own land we have to look upon her as the initiator and leader in civic reforms, and in all parts of the country we find that women initiate and carry out almost all the plans for civic improvement.”28 Shaw separates the idea of civic duty and progress from educational efforts, which, she claims, include all “departments of learning” and from social efforts, where

27 Shaw, “Feminism,” 19.

28 Ibid., 12.
woman “is expected to be honest, courageous, self-controlled and guided by…honor.” This dissociation serves several different purposes. First, it preempts counterarguments that women already contribute sufficiently to the civic sphere through their moral actions or educational efforts. Second, Shaw constructs the civic sphere as one in which women prompt decisions and lead reforms, yet currently lack respect and power. Third, she again argues that the proper role of an ideal civic woman necessitates sufficient power to influence others: “The lack of political power…has been used to retard rather than to advance real civic development.” Finally, she uses this dissociation to attribute blame. She states that woman’s current lack of power is due to “the hands of ignorant and corrupt politicians,” a phrase that she added to this speech after the first draft was written. The addition of this phrase constructs a villain in the woman’s situation, and it implies that the civic sphere is corrupt and in need of reform. That reform, not coincidentally, will come through women.

Shaw contends that the corruption that exists in civic life demands women’s capacity to, figuratively, “clean it up.” More than simply educational work or moral actions, women must play a role in governmental decision making. Shaw justifies her claim by discussing the exigence of current changing domestic, economic, and industrial conditions. She enumerates a series of civic problems: a declining marriage rate, declining birth rate, a greater number of unmarried women needing employment, the removal of industry from the home, exploitation of women’s work, improved methods of production, and raised standards of education as impetuses for women’s increased civic participation. All of the problems that Shaw discusses align with her argument about the unique, beneficial characteristics of women and what women can offer to the

29 Ibid., 12-13.
30 Ibid., 13.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 17-18.
world through civic, public service. Shaw constructs the problems of the world in such a way that the eventual solutions she discusses align perfectly, and she can make a strong case for civic women.

In addition to the strong exigencies that demand women’s participation in the civic sphere, Shaw again cites women’s war service as evidence of their immediate usefulness and necessity. After discussing women’s efforts to have a say in the policies that affect their families during wartime, she claims, “The effect of the war will be not only to increase this effort but will prove to men their own inefficiency and increase in them a greater respect for the service rendered by women.”

Just as she used the war as a catalyst for discussing women’s role in the home (see chapter two), she uses the situation of women’s war service as evidence to prove their unique skills that address the needs of good government.

Shaw’s emphasis on the potential political agency of women positions the vote as the only solution for women’s unequal treatment. Shaw recognizes that other, smaller women’s rights successes must not be overlooked on the way to achieving the movement’s ultimate goal of woman suffrage. Although the movement may progress in other ways, full success comes with the vote. With the capacity to vote, women may access avenues that allow them to create all matter of social change. Women’s potential for change will be unlocked with the vote. In her typical fashion, Shaw refutes the notion that voting would be a burden for women by sharing humorous anecdotes of women voters. She ends these narratives by claiming, “So of the burden of the ballot, a woman who endures the burden of bad laws, pays exorbitant taxes and suffers from an unjust and dishonest government, has strength enough to deposit a piece of paper in the box.”

The physical act of voting takes negligible effort, especially when compared to the civic

33 Ibid., 22-23.
labor that women already perform. The act of voting, itself, is a physical behavior that should be open to all humans. While the specific manner in which men and women contribute to the civic sphere may differ, neither sex should be excluded from its most basic activity: suffrage. Shaw stipulates that the physical differences between men and women have no relevance on the act of casting a ballot.

It is of particular interest that although Shaw sees no physical difference between men and women during the act of casting a ballot, she does argue for intellectual differences that may lead to different judgments and behavior at the ballot box. Specifically, she argues that women’s knowledge of the domestic world and their “natural” interest in the home make women a distinctive authority on policies that impact that area. She concludes, “Is domestic happiness so insecure, and the position of the wife so slavish, that it is feared that the expression of an intelligent and authoritative opinion upon measures which effect [sic] the home and its security would create discord and destroy its peace?” Shaw encourages her listeners to consider that the cognitive opinions that separate men and women actually might be beneficial rather than problematic. Female suffrage would, in fact, benefit the home, since women could judge issues that affect the home more successfully than men.

Just as the physical act of voting seems effortless in Shaw’s rhetoric, the effects of women’s voting also seem to reach the level of society with ease. This line of reasoning supports her argument, previously outlined in this chapter, that the vote will do much more good than women’s charity work. In outlining the ease of woman suffrage for solving social problems, she proclaims, “What the people of this country need is not charity, but opportunity; and what women need to know, who are now overburdened with the demands upon their time to repair the damages of society and the results of bad government, is that there is no lever so potent for lifting

35 Ibid., 130.
these burdens as the intelligent and well directed use of the ballot.” She paints women’s charity work as time-consuming and laborious, and then implies that women’s time would be better spent on educated voting. She therefore makes it seem like women would not exert any more energy in voting than they currently do for through reform and club labor. Woman’s suffrage will save energy in the long run.

In addition to proving that the vote will not be a burden for women, Shaw ties the vote to wage labor, a pressing social issue for women that moved beyond the home. As we saw in chapter three, Shaw believed that the working conditions experienced by women were a strong impetus for social change and women’s rights. Shaw discussed woman suffrage as a solution to the terrible conditions of woman workers. To expand this argument, Shaw argues that the vote for women workers is vital so that they can better all areas of their life. She again refutes the idea that women should be discouraged from working: “There is little use in arguing that women must be kept from the necessity of wage earning occupations. The necessity is here and now and millions are feeling the pinch of it.” Wage-earning women should not be considered less important to the civic sphere than women who do not have to work. She concludes that the limited civic work of women would not lessen the burdens of their condition. Wage-earning women need the vote to improve their situations. Additionally, because women appreciate best the peculiar experiences of their own work, Shaw argues that they must exercise political authority in a manner that benefits their own laboring conditions. Shaw is critical of how the men of the civic sphere make women’s work difficult: “The government sets its seal on cheap woman labor and the financial world follows its lead. Those who have really studied this question know the relation between wages

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 132.
and the ballot and the cost of disenfranchisement.” Without the vote, according to Shaw, women will continue to suffer unfair conditions in the workplace and face an imbalance of power at home. Further, without the vote, women will expend even more energy to fight injustices through limited civic activities that can never achieve their ends.

**Women as Fit for Full Civic Participation**

Throughout her rhetoric, Shaw provides a vision of what women’s civic role will look like after the vote. In doing so, she makes it easier for her audience to imagine a future with women voters. First, Shaw makes clear that women will participate rationally in political dimensions of civic life. A common misconception about women in the early twentieth century was that they were too emotional to handle important public matters; their emotions would cloud reasoning and judgment, according to opponents of women’s suffrage. It was therefore important for Shaw to establish that women were human beings, and then to argue that rationality was a human trait, therefore indicating that it applied to women as well. She claims, “Upon what then does this trinity of right, privilege and duty, represented by the suffrage, rest? There can be but one answer, and that is—it inheres in the people, not because they are men and women, but because they are rational beings, susceptible of ideas and capable of reasoning upon them.”

Because she argues that women are rational beings, Shaw establishes not only that women are capable of judgment, but also that they might know best how to meet the needs of the homes and the workplaces where they labor. Men cannot make decisions for women as well as women can make decisions for themselves.

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38 Ibid., 132-133.

39 Ibid., 122-123.
Once women are involved in the political dimensions of the civic sphere, their unique skills will come to light. Shaw claims that women’s involvement in the civic sphere would not simply duplicate the efforts of men in that same sphere. She states that woman suffragists cannot “fail to emphasize this fine and vital contrast between the nature of men and women which will manifest itself and enrich with ever increasing power the domestic service and political life of the nation.” Shaw, “Feminism,” 20.

Women’s political agency will benefit the nation and this benefit is not unrelated to “domestic service.” In fact, the terms “domestic service” in the quotation above were added later to the manuscript. This addition signals how Shaw saw a close symbiotic relationship between women’s agency in the home and in politics. Men cannot reasonably legislate to benefit the domestic sphere, since they have little experience with its concerns. Shaw further argues that man is “more impersonal and is guided in his conduct by a cause or purpose regardless of individual personal relation,” and “women are more largely influenced by personal relations and immediate needs.”

41 Ibid., 20-21.

The interpersonal skills of women, likely linked to their duties as mother and wife, are important to Shaw. It isn’t women’s alleged “emotional” nature that matters for the vote, but their relational intelligence as Shaw reframes it.

Shaw decided to eliminate a significant part of an original draft of “Feminism,” and it is important to consider why. In the deleted section, Shaw narrows the realm of women’s influence to affirm that it would be felt most directly in local and moral issues, “just as it has influenced social and civic life more generally than has the masculinity of men, as far as women have been able to use their influence and service, hampered as they are by the lack of political power to enforce upon reluctant [sic] officials their opinions and will.” Shaw argues, as she has done numerous times before, that women are more moral than men. Here, however, she ties issues of

42 Ibid., 21-22.
morality to local issues, and suggests that men do not care for local issues, because they have more national interests. Shaw paints men as prideful and self-interested, becoming involved in politics so that they continuously strive for higher office. Shaw further suggests that, in remaining self-interested, men have neglected local interests. Women, in Shaw’s estimation, will be able to fill in these gaps caused by narrow-minded men.

There are several possible reasons why Shaw crossed out this portion of the speech, each signifying her thought process in creating the delivered address. She might have decided that the passage was redundant, because she spoke often on the morality of women. She might have also decided that her message might be offensive to audience members. We do not have specific information about Shaw’s audience, but it is reasonable to assume it contained men with an active role in local politics. Ultimately, I contend that it is most likely that Shaw decided that her emphasis on women’s local expertise ran counter to her argument for national suffrage and her claim that women should contribute at that level. To argue that women were interested primarily in local issues might backfire because an opponent could argue that state suffrage, rather than national suffrage, was more important.

To complete her vision of a civic sphere with politically empowered women, Shaw discusses their beneficial organizational skill. She uses women’s service in World War I to demonstrate this point: “The effort of women to secure political power has taught them the necessity for and advantage of organization, and nothing has surprised the governments in the warring nations of the east more than woman’s ability to carry out in perfect detail large plans for governmental service and support through systematic organization.”

She connects women’s organizational skill to the recent war, a fight against democracy in which the United States

43 Ibid., 22.
emerged victorious, due, in part, to the efforts of women. In their new civic role, women will offer their organizational skills to help the government run more smoothly.

**Women as Model Civic Participants**

Shaw, in addition to outlining the characteristics that make women fit for civic participation, forwards a well-developed prediction of the effects of women’s greater involvement in the civic sphere. As rational human beings, attune to unique needs, concerned with moral issues, and skilled at organization, Shaw posits that the benefits of women’s involvement will be numerous. Shaw discusses both immediate effects as well as long-term benefits, highlighting the bright, progressive future of a nation with female voters. This progress results from cooperation between men and women, each working toward separate yet equally important goals: “My experience has convinced me that the enfranchisement of women destroys the too highly developed sex consciousness between men and women, and makes them good comrades and friends in their common service for the State.”

She maintains the difference yet compatibility of men and women to work together, painting her plan as the most desirable option for the whole of the nation. Not only does Shaw foretell the benefits of women’s enfranchisement for the present day, but also for future generations of Americans, predicting “a great number of men and women cooperating for the best good of the home and the highest interest of the State and Nation, and the bulwarks of the commonwealth will prove all the stronger and more lasting because women, as well as men, are working on them, and helping to transmit them ever broader and firmer from generation to generation.”

Along with the tone of certitude that exists in this quotation, Shaw ties the health of the home to the health of the nation, further bolstering her claims that women

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should increase their national civic activity. However, Shaw predicts, as women begin to develop a civic conscience, they will make mistakes. As their human nature dictates, “The mistakes pass but the spirit that animates the life lives and by its mistakes learns as men and women have learned in all time.” As women’s interests and opportunities expand, Shaw states, “the fear which has withheld women in the past from self-expression” will be rapidly removed and women will begin “to express themselves naturally without being in constant fear of losing the particular spiritual insight which has always been theirs.”

Shaw’s message about women’s inevitable mistakes encourages women to participate in the civic sphere without fear of failure. She anticipates a “great body of women who will seek to serve their country as citizens” and also predicts that women will “surprise and overthrow the old theories in regard to them” with “their solidarity, their unity of purpose and action when ever necessity calls for it.” This message serves as much to encourage women to act as it does to prepare men for their actions. She creates a role for women to step into, making this step easy to imagine. To make her immediate predictions tangible, Shaw gives women the responsibility of expanding education from the household to the civic sphere. She explains,

The interest in and care of children’s education will not be limited by the household, but will extend beyond the dooryard fence into the larger world of temptation and secure for the child without as well as within the home that measure of protection and education which will provide a more healthful moral and spiritual environment. Women will bring to bear upon public life those elements of our human nature which are in them so much more largely developed than in men.

Shaw not only establishes that women could develop whatever skills were necessary for civic life, but she also highlights women’s current capabilities that will be immediately of use. In the last

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48 Ibid., 28-29.

49 Ibid., 29-30.
sentence of this quotation, Shaw originally wrote “political life” but changed the phrase to “public life.” This move is perhaps intended to make the political or civic sphere less intimidating for women, or to make their expanded civic role easier to imagine. The “political” realm has never belonged to women, and thus it is challenging to construct women as fit for this sphere. Shaw implies that women’s current duties in the home—specifically education and morality—will translate easily to the political sphere, and by calling it “public,” it sounds less formally different than women’s current place. They can continue their domestic activities and maintain the same type of expertise, but do so in public, rather than in private.

The long-term effects of women’s civic involvement are numerous, according to Shaw, but all fall under the ultimate goals of a balanced society and human progress. Shaw says that women’s complete and equal civic involvement is the main goal of modern feminism, and in the process feminists must strip the phrase “feminism” “of all association with false prejudice, tradition and custom which have blinded the mass of people to its true significance.”\(^{50}\) Thus the goal of feminism will not just be the physical involvement of women in the civic sphere, but also a change in ideology, which now presumes that women will have an active involvement in human matters. This is a change from the customary belief that women should be concerned only with those matters limited to their maternity. Shaw claims, “True feminism is simply the aspiration for true humanism just as true masculinism is the same aspiration.”\(^{51}\) She implies that men must make the same efforts to achieve true humanism as women currently are, and men cannot do so until they abolish their false prejudices about women’s capabilities. There are several areas of life considered sex-specific, yet Shaw distinguishes areas apart from these: virtue, honor, honesty,

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 2.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 10.
and courage. In particular, Shaw argues that women have not developed fully their sense of honor. With the recognition of the division between male and female characteristics, as well as human characteristics, Shaw draws attention to specific areas both men and women may work to develop.

In the process of this development, society would reach a greater balance. She proclaims, “It is only through the aspiration of the whole race toward humanism that will restore both masculinity and femininity to the balance which constitutes true humanism, the great need and goal of the world to-day.” Women’s ultimate function in the civic sphere, therefore, is to balance male characteristics, thereby allowing men to develop those characteristics that have been defined as feminine. Shaw creates a strong impetus for women’s civic participation by constructing a role that only females can fill, but she does so in a manner that makes women’s involvement desirable for both men and women around the world. Women will be unthreatening to men because they fulfill their own special duties, and women will be personally fulfilled by their new roles. In constructing this balance, Shaw elevates her cause to affect the entire human race, to ensure men cannot ignore her pleas.

Conclusions

Through her discussion of women’s civic role, Shaw created a space for women to exercise their uniquely feminine characteristics to better the public sphere. She argued that the political dimensions of the civic sphere were corrupt and inefficient and that women’s civic involvement would help the public become more moral, educated, and better organized. Shaw constructed a complex argument in which women should vote on the basis of their humanity, but

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52 Ibid., 15.
53 Ibid., 10.
the impetus for expanding their civic sphere duties stems from the unique characteristics of femininity. Crucial to Shaw’s theory was the notion that women’s feminine characteristics were specifically necessary to balance male characteristics.

These conclusions reflect the multi-faceted nature of the vote as a symbol of women’s rights. On the one hand, the vote serves as a powerful and desirable tool for alleviating women’s oppression. It is a singular instrument around which suffragists can focus their discourse. On the other, the vote symbolizes an incredible swath of women’s rights issues. Shaw discusses women’s labor, domestic duties, war responsibilities, and civic responsibilities, just in the speeches of the last three chapters. Her rhetoric demonstrates the intricacy of woman suffrage arguments and thus exemplifies the difficult rhetorical situation suffragists continued to face in the twentieth century. In studying woman suffrage rhetoric we must consider the ways “the vote” was used as a symbol of women’s rights as well as the different rights it was constructed to represent. Further, we must understand ways suffragists’ arguments were structured to meet audiences with intricately different needs, so they could achieve maximum impact. Shaw, as the preeminent suffrage movement rhetor, is an excellent candidate for this type of consideration.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

The anecdote at the beginning of this thesis highlighted several central questions about Anna Howard Shaw’s historical and rhetorical significance. Shaw was a magnificent orator, an immigrant, a pioneer, a working class feminist, a questionable administrator, and a progressive thinker. Her rhetoric provides a wealth of material for studying her theories about gender as well as how her ideals were manifested in activism. The existing scholarship addressing Shaw’s life and career is too often one-dimensional, lacking the complexity of her character. This thesis has sought to address this problem with an intersectional account of Shaw’s theory of ideal womanhood; it outlines the problems Shaw identified within her society and draws connections between these problems and the multifaceted solutions Shaw forwarded.

When Shaw spoke of women, she first addressed their existing contributions to American society. From her perspective, these contributions were substantial, especially in the domestic sphere as wives and mothers. Although Shaw believed women’s domestic contributions were important, she thought they were too limited. She argued that these same skills should be allowed to expand beyond the home. Further, men should allow women to adopt these expanded roles in the arenas of the workplace and the civic sphere. The following pages summarize the three main chapters of this project; they detail my discussion of Shaw’s rhetorical construction of new and unique roles for women. In addition, I discuss how these conclusions reveal Shaw’s historical and rhetorical importance. Finally, I outline how a perspective of Shaw as an architect of the “modern” woman enhances our understanding of her rhetoric, the possible consequences of woman suffrage, and twentieth-century conceptions of gender and social change.
Summary: Shaw's Rhetoric Establishes Unique Roles For Women

In chapter two, I discussed Shaw’s characterization of the proper domestic role for women in the addresses “Women in Industries” and “The Degradation of Childhood and Womanhood.” The involvement of the United States in World War I became the central issue that led Shaw to rethink the campaign for woman suffrage and also reconsider how women’s domestic skills could be relevant to a nation in conflict. As a pacifist, she struggled with whether to support the war; furthermore, she worried that the war would draw attention away from the national suffrage movement. She chose to support the war, but used it as fuel for her discursive fire.¹ Specifically, she argued that women were uniquely positioned to address the underlying causes and problems of war. In the process of making her claims, Shaw preserved the traditional duties of females in the home, but she also figuratively expanded the “home” sphere to the national level.

Shaw identified similarities between militarist Germany and the situation experienced by women the United States. Neither space acted as a true democracy. She argued that while the United States claimed to be a democracy, no democratic nation could deny the vote to half of its adult population. Shaw then positioned women’s morality as uniquely situated to fight a spirit of militarism, both abroad and at home. She thus constructed an understanding of the nation as a home and women as its caretakers. As evidence of women’s aptitude for caretaking, Shaw used the example of women’s war service.² According to Shaw, women proved themselves worthy and able to serve the nation. Specifically, women cared for the institutions that protected the home and the family, issues with which they were intimately familiar.

In chapter three, I examined Shaw’s construction of women’s role as laborers. Systems of patriarchy negatively constrained women’s labor experiences in the early twentieth century. Because women were thought to have a higher tolerance for tedium and belonged in the home, women’s work was often unskilled and unstable. Employers needed women as a cheap labor pool, but they only tolerated individuals for short periods of time until they moved on to their next menial job or moved home to be with a family. Shaw’s rhetoric concerning the role of woman workers reframed women’s work as a valuable enterprise, rather than an inevitable burden.

The addresses “Working Women and a Living Wage” and “The Other Half of Humanity” reflect Shaw’s expansive ideas about who should be able to vote and what benefits the vote might achieve for the workplace. Shaw disliked the prevailing counterargument that women’s willingness to engage in suspect behavior required a moral transformation. She refuted this idea. She argued that women’s behavior was a result of “the present commercialized inhumanities of crushing and debasing toil.” Shaw blamed the patriarchal structure of society for restricting women’s opportunities, and then charged society with helping to solve the problems of women’s working conditions. If she could persuade her audiences that women’s behavior was determined by their circumstances and that society would benefit from changing those circumstances, then female workers would not only receive fairer treatment, but also their social standing would improve. Further, women had a duty to work. Shaw believed that labor was valuable not simply for working class women but for all women. She expounded, “No woman has a right to occupy

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space in the world who does not give valuable service for the space she occupies.” Shaw also connected women’s duty to labor for the benefit of society with the necessity of women suffrage. Through suffrage, women could enhance the conditions of their own labor. This argument had two logical consequences. First, it expanded the benefits of woman suffrage to include the positive transformation of the workplace. Second, it implied that although male employers could better the conditions of women’s employment, only women voters could ensure that the workplace became a fulfilling rather than debilitating sphere.

In chapter four, I studied how Shaw expanded women’s role in the civic sphere. Shaw argued that women’s qualities, which developed as a result of a gendered social structure, could benefit humanity. Women’s main civic responsibility to that point had been to raise children as productive citizens. Shaw established that women still could uphold this duty, but that the characteristics that made women good mothers—self-sacrifice, nurture, morality, kindness—were needed in the civic sphere. Moreover, she argued that these qualities were essential to humanity. Women would balance the unique and distinctive qualities of men in the civic sphere.

According to Shaw, the civic sphere was the domain of humanity, including both men and women. While women in the early twentieth century were already involved in civic clubs, Shaw established that these positions lacked sufficient power. In order to effect meaningful change, Shaw argued that women must have voting power and the power to hold elected office. Feminine influence in these areas would balance the current masculine influence in the civic sphere. With only a masculine civic influence, public decisions could not meaningfully take into account half of humanity’s needs. The people of the country suffered from “bad government,”

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according to Shaw, and this was because the government was run only by half of humanity.\footnote{Anna Howard Shaw, “The Bulwarks of the Commonweath.” Found in Wilmer Albert Linkugel, “The Speeches of Anna Howard Shaw: Collected and Edited with Introduction and Notes,” PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1960, 120.}

Shaw did not argue that women should replace men in the civic sphere, but rather that the United States should strive for a balance between men and women because of each group’s unique characteristics. This balance of masculine and feminine influence would become the catalyst for human progress.

### Shaw’s Rhetoric Broadens Expectations for Women

Ultimately, this project aims to provide an answer to the question of Shaw’s historical and rhetorical significance. As I established in the introduction, scholars differ on how to answer the question, “Why study Anna Howard Shaw?” After Eleanor Flexner’s unflattering characterization of Shaw’s contributions to the woman suffrage movement in *Century of Struggle*, woman suffrage scholars tended to deemphasize Shaw’s significance for the movement.\footnote{See Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 1959), page 274 for an example of this characterization. Aileen S. Kraditor offers a similar characterization on page 211 of *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).}

Recently, Trisha Franzen called for a reconsideration of Shaw’s historical contribution. She argued convincingly that Flexner’s assessment in 1959 negatively colored Shaw’s reception in the years since.\footnote{Franzen, *Anna Howard Shaw*, 9.} I have answered Franzen’s call for corrective scholarship by addressing Shaw’s positive contributions to both history and social/political theory.

Shaw’s historical impact was to broaden the scope of the woman suffrage movement, on both a physical and ideological level. Ideologically, Shaw expanded the ideas of the movement to
include women of different classes and races. She championed the poor and working-class women and argued for the necessity of the vote for this class. The vote was not just a tool to help elite women become more involved in the civic sphere, but the vote could also affect meaningful change for the working poor. Shaw, as a child of immigrants and a lifelong worker herself, likely felt a special type of identification with working class individuals. She understood that the problems facing the poor began at the societal level, and she therefore offered the vote as a solution to the wide-reaching problem of poverty. Although she did not explicitly support African American suffrage, Shaw appears to have shown sympathy to this issue as well. Shaw’s suffrage efforts help to understand the interplay among class, race, and gender in arguments for social change. Her work teaches us that these arguments are not one-dimensional and should not be analyzed as such.

In the process of broadening the ideological reach of the movement, Shaw’s rhetoric recast women’s identities. She created public, social roles that women were specifically qualified to inhabit. The occupation of these roles, further, became critical to women’s identities. Shaw took the elements of women’s traditional character and used them to create these ideal public roles. At first glance, it seemed that women’s identities did not actually change. They were still moral, nurturing beings; they were just acting as such in a public capacity rather than in private. However, Shaw did in fact spark an ideological shift in her rhetoric. She argued that women had a duty to serve their nation and work in a public capacity. This duty was not previously expected of women, and the added responsibility to serve helps Shaw to create a subject position whose work and life significantly increased in value.

Shaw was also partially responsible for the broadening of the woman suffrage movement at a material level. Under Shaw’s leadership, especially her eleven years as president of the

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10 Ibid., 81.
NAWSA, the movement grew from a largely state-level organization to one commanding national attention.\textsuperscript{11} Shaw, as leader of this movement, gained national prominence as well. She worked to move the NAWSA’s headquarters from Warren, Ohio to New York City.\textsuperscript{12} She had the insight to understand that, if the movement was going to achieve national prominence, it must be physically located in a space that demanded attention. The movement could reach wider audiences and also recruit more widely from a more prominent location. Shaw seems to have understood that the key to woman suffrage movement success was expansion to a national level. Her efforts to increase the movement’s reach reflect this goal.

In terms of rhetorical importance, Shaw’s conceptual contributions were numerous. First, in continuing with the theme of expansion, Shaw’s rhetoric worked to define a wider role for women in all aspects of social life. In considering women’s home duties, Shaw’s rhetoric expanded their arena of influence beyond the home. She argued that women’s natural organization and skillful nurturing would benefit the nation. Especially as the nation was recovering from war, Shaw reasoned that women’s characteristic morality should be used for national benefit. In terms of the workplace, Shaw spoke of women having access to more stable jobs rather than being denied these jobs on the basis of their sex. Women should be considered valuable, rather than disposable, workers. Additionally, Shaw expanded women’s civic role. Women’s civic organizations could accomplish some good as philanthropic entities, but Shaw argued that women must have the power to make laws and vote to shape policy. The widening of women’s civic role would lead to the most meaningful change in terms of the issues that affected their lives. All of this work accomplished by Shaw’s rhetoric involved widening of their current spheres of influence.

\textsuperscript{11} Nancy Woloch, on page 217 of \textit{Women and the American Experience} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), discusses Shaw’s role in widening the movement.

\textsuperscript{12} Franzen, \textit{Anna Howard Shaw}, 98.
Furthermore, Shaw’s rhetoric redefined the relationship between men and women in each of the spheres she discussed. Shaw’s rhetoric consistently portrayed this relationship as cooperative, rather than competitive. Ultimately Shaw maintained that there were fundamental differences between men and women. However, these differences should entice men and women to work together for a greater good, rather than drive them to compete against one another. The spirit of collaboration that Shaw espoused began in the traditional arena of the home. Men and women collaborated within a nuclear family. Common presumptions of her time period affirmed that men should work outside the home, earning money to support the family, while women should work within the home, caring for the family’s physical needs. Shaw worked from this “common sense” to claim that a spirit of collaboration could exist even as women moved beyond the domestic sphere. Shaw offered this spirit as a solution to the oppression women faced in public sphere. Furthermore, Shaw’s collaborative solution functioned to assuage men’s fears that women’s increased public involvement would be to men’s detriment. The redefinition of this relationship made it easier to imagine women in the expanded roles for which Shaw advocated.

In addition to defining a wider role for women in multiple areas of social life and redefining the relationship of men and women in these areas, Shaw’s rhetoric expands the connotation of suffrage. Suffrage was more than simply the physical act of voting. Voting was an activity with multiple dimensions. First, it was a gateway to resolving a significant array of the problems that women faced. Second, it provided an identity for women that was equal to that of men. Third, it supported the historical progress of the nation. All of these elements were positive reasons why Shaw believed that women should vote. However, Shaw also was careful to address the concerns of her audiences through counterargument. These counterarguments addressed the claims that women were too emotional to vote, women would become so enthralled with the act of voting that they will forgo their home duties, women were not sufficiently educated to vote, and women would vote the same way as their husbands and therefore do not need to cast a
separate ballot. Rather than simply explaining why these arguments were wrong, Shaw used these arguments as an opportunity to discuss the many issues women faced. For example, to counter the argument that women are too emotional to vote, Shaw argued that women’s unique emotional sensitivity would be a benefit to their public sphere activity rather than a hindrance. Women would more easily understand issues of morality, education, and organization, according to Shaw. She was able to discuss these issues within her woman suffrage rhetoric. Therefore, “the vote” was not only a matter of casting a ballot but also it served to accomplish women’s equality more broadly. Women and men must both vote, claimed Shaw, but their fundamentally different sets of expertise would shine through their voting choices.

Shaw Constructs the “Modern” Woman

Shaw’s greatest historical contribution was her woman suffrage rhetoric. Her prolific oratory, charm, wit, skill at refutation, and ability to sway audiences all contribute to her significance. However, Shaw’s suffrage oratory also reflects more complex and significant qualities than what she contributes to our understanding of the woman suffrage movement. First, Shaw’s rhetoric signals that the woman suffrage movement was not simply about women or simply about suffrage. Shaw constructed ideal roles for women based on how they interacted with their families as well as their surrounding contexts as active citizens. Shaw explained how women should act and the roles to which they should aspire, but she also incorporated discussions of how men should interact with women. Shaw’s rhetoric was, at the broadest level, concerned with how humans should interact with one another. She made cases for what woman suffrage could do for women, men, and children. The whole nation, in Shaw’s estimation, could benefit from woman

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suffrage. Her rhetoric signals the complexity of women’s rights issues in how they affect not simply women, but humanity generally.

Furthermore, Shaw’s woman suffrage rhetoric encompassed more than a discussion of citizenship. While she affirmed that the effort involved in voting was insignificant, the act of voting was transformative. The capacity to vote meant being involved in the noblest realm of humanity, the civic realm. It signified that women were worthy individuals, rather than simply second-rate residents of the nation. Shaw’s speeches demonstrated that women were already involved in the major issues and public concerns of their day. For example, she described the labor issues that plagued women and that concerned even many men. She suggested that women were present in the labor pool, but unable to affect it. Having the vote could improve women’s lives in an area where they already existed. Likewise when the United States entered World War I, Shaw used women’s involvement in war service as examples of their ability to serve the nation broadly. Quite obviously, Shaw understood women’s suffrage to involve a wide range of both people and different issues, and her rhetoric reflects this fact.

Shaw established suffrage as a means for achieving a more balanced society. Her rhetorically constructed “modern” woman—a caretaker, a worker, and a citizen—was also a contributing factor toward a “modern” society. This society was intricately constructed to value both difference and equality, in balance. In Shaw’s estimation, the distinct strengths and weaknesses of men and women would be managed in a way that furthered human progress. Shaw’s discussion of a “modern woman” was just a small piece of her vision of a progressive, harmonious society. Ultimately, we might best understand Shaw as an imagining a world in which women’s agency bettered the lives of both men and women equally. When we consider Shaw to have had such noble goals, it is easy to understand her lifelong dedication to suffrage as the means of achieving her progressive vision for the future.
Over the course of her oratorical career, Shaw spoke to many diverse audiences. Furthermore, we have evidence that her speeches made a strong impact on her immediate audiences as well as other esteemed individuals like Susan B. Anthony and Woodrow Wilson.\textsuperscript{14} Shaw’s oratorical skill, as established in this project, was more than just an immediate attempt to persuade audiences. It was also how she theorized about her world and, subsequently, provided an alternative vision to her audiences about a brighter, more just future. The creation of her speeches required thoughtful consideration of the \textit{status quo}, the construction of new ideas and ways of being in response and, finally, the explanation of these ideas in a way that would reach others. Shaw’s rhetoric of woman suffrage signals a powerful, well-formed theory of gender that she developed in response to observed unfair treatment of women in an inappropriately gendered construction of society. This signaling makes Shaw’s rhetoric relevant for studying ideas about gender during the turn of the twentieth century as well as how these ideas contributed to a shift toward greater gender equality. Shaw’s words serve as windows into her world, thus indicating the efforts she made to change that world. Her rhetoric and her theory of gender, therefore, are worthy of study and future development.

Bibliography


