TO “SERVE THE CAUSE OF UNIVERSAL HUMAN LIBERTY”:
TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVIST RHETORIC AND THE WORLD’S COLUMBIAN
EXPOSITION OF 1893

by

ANNA MIRIAM DUDNEY DEEB

(Under the Direction of Belinda A. Stillion Southard)

ABSTRACT

Transnational and rhetorical theory scholars are increasingly concerned with how
discourse travels across physical and cultural borders. Existing scholarship largely
examines public address from a national context, which fails to account fully for all the
potential forces that influence and shape rhetorical concepts. A transnational analytical
approach attends to local, national, and global exchanges of information, goods, and ideas
that shape and are shaped by discourse as it moves across borders. Through the lenses of
transnational rhetorical theory and public address, this dissertation seeks to answer
scholars’ call for greater attention to how rhetoric(s) track and change as they move
across borders. In response, this dissertation examines African American activist
discourse contemporaneous to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The
Exposition was a transnational and national event that reaffirmed and challenged
discourses, such as American nationalism, that served to liberate and oppress people. The
analysis engages three cases of activist rhetoric to better understand how the Exposition’s
transnational setting and related transnational advocacy networks provided resources for
rhetorical invention. The introduction provides a theoretical and contextual overview to ground the study, and then the analysis proceeds in three parts that examine Frederick Douglass’s public address at the Exposition’s Haitian Pavilion, six African American speakers in the Exposition’s Women’s Congress, and Ida B. Wells’s antilynching newspaper dispatches that she wrote shortly after the Exposition and sent to the Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean from England. The conclusion finds that rhetors engaged both transnational rhetorical strategies and transnational settings to advance their rights claims within their own nation. This dissertation contributes to transnational rhetorical scholarship and public address with findings of how rhetors accessed and engaged resources beyond borders for the national goal of increasing civil rights for African Americans.

INDEX WORDS: African American rhetoric, public address, transnational rhetoric, World’s Columbian Exposition
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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER ONE:
PUBLIC ADDRESS, TRANSNATIONAL RHETORICAL THEORY, AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY ACTIVIST RHETORIC

Introduction

On January 2, 1893, Frederick Douglass delivered a celebratory speech dedicating the Haitian Pavilion at the World’s Columbian Exposition. The Exposition aimed to showcase all nations’ progress since Christopher Columbus had reached America four hundred years prior. Over the course of six months, more than twenty-seven million exhibitors and visitors from around the world flooded Chicago, Illinois, to attend the Exposition.\(^1\) The Exposition grounds featured numerous buildings that showcased each nation’s technological and scientific advancements, as well as their defining cultural practices and traditions. To celebrate Haiti’s progress in his dedication address, Douglass proclaimed that Haitian revolutionaries had “served the cause of universal human liberty” when they overthrew their oppressors and established Haiti as a free nation.\(^2\) The revolutionaries’ 1804 revolt touched off a chain reaction that would ultimately usher in freedom for Haitians and for enslaved people who lived along the eastern seaboard. Douglass portrayed Haiti as a proud nation built by self-liberated heroes. He pointed to Haiti’s success to uphold all people of African descent, including African Americans, in a community that transcended Haiti’s national borders.

The Exposition’s massive attendance by exhibitors and visitors from around the world created a space in which attendees could simultaneously represent and transcend
their nationalities. At once, they were citizens of their home nations and citizens of the global community of Exhibition attendees. The ability for visitors, exhibitors, and speakers alike to move in and out of national belonging suggests that the Exposition facilitated the transnational movement of ideas, goods, and discourses. In this dissertation, I use the term “transnational” to describe the phenomenon that takes place when rhetors circulate and leverage nationalist peoples and ideas that are not rigidly situated within their own national and local contexts; rather, discourses, ideologies, and rhetorical concepts transcend local, national, and regional borders to create shared identities and communities. In a setting like the Exposition, wherein objects and people represented multiple nations, discourses had the potential to cross and/or supersede national boundaries, especially as rhetors addressed audiences of diverse local, national, and hemispheric belongings.

While the Exposition was a grand celebration of nations’ progress, it also provided a setting for activist rhetors to highlight ongoing barriers to progress for marginalized people in the United States and worldwide. As with all epideictic rhetoric, rhetors can use symbolic resources to praise or blame a subject. In this project, I am interested in understanding how the Exposition may have expanded the range of possible rhetorical resources for marginalized people: to constitute new communities, to express shared interests among themselves and with more powerful populations, and to appeal to diverse audiences to advance persuasive aims. This dissertation considers three sets of texts that illustrate different ways in which marginalized rhetors leveraged the Exposition’s multi-national setting to make persuasive claims for African Americans’ increased civil rights within the United States. First, in his Exposition speeches, Douglass
repositioned African Americans and Haitians away from their national communities and as members of a transnational Pan-African community to demonstrate that African Americans deserved full integration into the United States. The second set of texts consists of six speeches delivered during the Exposition’s Women’s Congress, through which six African American women made their case for belonging to a larger transnational public sphere. Finally, Ida B. Wells, an African American antilynching activist, sent regular reports of her activist work to the United States from England, tapping into an existing transnational advocacy network to mainstream antilynching across borders. These three cases reveal how marginalized rhetors crafted transnational rhetorics at the Exposition and negotiated empowering and disempowering rhetorics at play within and beyond the US nation-state. The Exposition era exemplified how racism and sexism inflected and shaped transnational and national discourses, and how simultaneously, these discourses provided rhetorical resources for activists.

Overall, this project aims to develop a deeper understanding of late-nineteenth century African American activist rhetors who agitated for their race’s greater inclusion in the United States. This dissertation seeks to unpack how rhetors appropriated the Exposition’s transnational space, wherein national attachments were both definitive and porous, to reenvision and sometimes violate traditional US concepts of community, progress, and justice. In this introductory chapter, I justify the importance of revisiting historic public address texts from a transnational rhetorical perspective. Following a contextual overview of the Exposition era that served as the exigence for African American activist discourse, I elucidate the purpose of my dissertation and the research questions that guide it. Then, I proceed with an explanation of the methods of study:
public address and transnational rhetorical analysis. Finally, I preview the three case study chapters and the conclusion chapter.

**Placing Rhetoric in Context: The World Comes to Chicago**

The following section provides a general contextual overview of the Exposition’s historical, social, and political significance to ground the dissertation’s case studies. Specifically, I describe the overall goal of the Exposition as a celebration and representation of US progress, but I also spotlight the activist efforts that challenged this goal, and by extension, challenged mainstream social and political beliefs. I examine the racial tensions and gender division, in particular, that spurred efforts on behalf of marginalized groups to demand greater rights and recognition at the Exposition, in the United States, and abroad.

Established by the US Congress, the Exposition was a celebration of many nations’, but especially the United States’s progress, over the last four centuries. Dennis B. Downey notes that the Exposition occurred “during a period of unprecedented social reorganization in American life and in the midst of enormous economic upheaval.” The Exposition showcased US American military might, scientific prowess, civil and social progress, and cultural supremacy. The Exposition was also an economic and political event intended to foster relationships between leaders of countries and to open international markets. By its close in October of 1893, more than 27.5 million people had visited the Exposition.

However, for those looking deeper than the impressive buildings and attractive displays of the “White City,” or the main Exposition grounds, the Exposition crystallized ongoing gender and racial injustices in the United States. Douglass and Wells, in
particular, highlighted and militated against these injustices on the Exposition grounds through speeches and pamphlets. Douglass, nearing the end of his life and an illustrious career, was perhaps the most well-known African American at the time. His friend and fellow activist, Wells, was a national sensation in her own right as a fiery journalist who travelled around the United States and to Great Britain to raise awareness for antilynching. Wells distributed a pamphlet on the steps of the Haitian Pavilion entitled *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition: The Afro-American's Contribution to Columbian Literature*. Featuring an introduction written by Douglass, the pamphlet protested ongoing racial violence in the United States and discrimination against African Americans at the Exposition. The Haitian Pavilion was a grandly-decorated structure that stood in the Northeast corner of the main Exposition grounds with other national and state buildings such as the French Pavilion, the German Building, the Illinois Building, and the India Building. Barbara J. Ballard argues that the Haitian Pavilion became a locus of African American protest at an event that had no dedicated gathering or representative space for members of the race. Wells confirms this in her autobiography when she states that “the Haitian Building was the chosen spot, for representative Negroes of the country who visited the fair were to be found along with the Haitians and citizens of other foreign countries.”

The location of the Haitian Pavilion just off the main Exposition grounds offered a fitting place from which the activists could call out the irony of the seemingly progressive “White City.” The “White City” moniker referred officially to the impressive row of white buildings, made to resemble marble, which lined the main stretch of the Exposition. But to many African Americans, the “White City” also stood for the heavy
representation of white interests and the absence of non-white people in this main area. African Americans were prohibited from having their own dedicated exhibition space at the Exposition to display their unique contributions to US advancement. Moreover, African Americans were barred from leadership roles such as planning the event or serving on Exposition boards, and only had access to menial employment opportunities. The Midway Plaisance area hosted primitive exhibits and was more carnivalesque in feeling and display. Many Americans of African heritage were insulted when they found that some African nations’ exhibits seemed more of an entertainment spectacle based on stereotypes than on reality. 

The Exposition’s racial division mirrored ongoing national racial oppression. The 1890s marked a “nadir” for African Americans as Jim Crow laws reigned and Post-Reconstruction tensions intensified racialized violence. In a February 1893 speech delivered in the same year as the Exposition, entitled “Lynch Law in All Its Phases,” Wells claimed that “the lawlessness [in the southern United States] is like unto that which prevailed under slavery. The very same forces are at work now as then.” Lynchings reached their highest numbers in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In large southern cities like Wells’s own Memphis, African Americans could not fully participate in their communities as business owners or employees without facing violent threats from lynch mobs, which aimed to eliminate competition for business and jobs. Legal decisions such as the Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, granted African American men the right to vote and declared that “the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” Unfortunately, these legal gains were not realized in
reality. Jones argues that, “By the end of the nineteenth century the comparative fluidity of race relations in the Reconstruction era dissipated into increasingly rigid discrimination—legally, physically, and culturally.” In 1883, the Supreme Court ruled to overturn the Civil Rights Act of 1875, granting states more power to instantiate laws that limited the freedom of African Americans. Local governments passed legislation designed to disenfranchise African Americans by requiring literacy tests and poll taxes. “Jim Crow” laws further divided citizens along racial lines as people were assigned to separate spaces in public, the effect of which was to relegate African Americans to the worst conditions in rail car accommodations and other services. Thus, while African Americans were ostensibly equal under the law, they were disciplined through social separation and an insidious threat of extra-legal activity by white mobs. Douglass and Wells responded to these conditions in speeches and pamphlets that urged the United States and other nations—Haiti and England, primarily—to protest American injustice. One of the six African American speakers—Frances E. W. Harper—also spoke out against lynching directly in her May 20, 1893 address, while her fellow speakers spoke more generally about African American oppression.

In contrast to African Americans, white middle- and upper-class women had some control over their representation at the Exposition. The occasion provided a rare opportunity for nationally-recognized women’s leadership through the Board of Lady Managers. The Board had substantial funding and represented women’s interests in the planning and execution of the event. A total of 117 women served as Lady Managers. These women, who were all white, were nominated because they “had made some mark on society” and were members of women’s clubs and philanthropic organizations,
according to Jeanne Madeline Weimann. One of the Board’s major duties was to erect a Woman’s Building between the White City and the Midway Plaisance. Women leaders at the Exposition also hosted the World’s Congress of Representative Women, or Women’s Congress, from May 15 to 21 to highlight the progress of women. Jane S. Sutton claims that the Congress “stag[ed] American women as leaders in science, education, and the arts” whose listed achievements were “primarily understood as a record of progress.” In the Progressive Era, social science represented the preferred mode of reporting progress, so Board President Bertha M. Honoré Palmer encouraged speakers to offer an accounting of women’s progress in their speeches. The Board’s activities coincided with ongoing women’s rights movements in the United States. Well-known suffragists such as Susan B. Anthony took to the Congress’s stage.

Despite agitating for inclusion, African American women were completely absent from the Board and were only marginally represented in the Woman’s Building and Women’s Congress speeches. Shortly after the Board formed in 1890, an African American woman’s group in Chicago proposed a resolution to have at least one woman of their race included on the Board as a representative. The Board repeatedly stymied their efforts, claiming budget constraints and indecision about who to appoint, holding debates about whether there needed to be a separate space for women of color, and expressing fear of African American protest at the Building exhibits. The few examples of non-white women’s representation in the Building included a mural depicting “primitive arts” and a bust of Harriet Beecher Stowe with a case containing copies of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, the popular book that depicted the trials of slavery. Overall, opinions were mixed regarding the inclusion of African American women in Board
activities, with some Board members making outright racist claims to others making weak appeals for African American women’s inclusion.\textsuperscript{35} Wells dedicated several pages of \textit{The Reason Why} pamphlet to an account of the Board’s racial discrimination, namely that the Board had refused to include African American representation in the Woman’s Building or to appoint African American women to serve on the Board.\textsuperscript{36} Therefore, while members of the Board of Lady Managers possessed unprecedented decision-making power, African American women faced racial discrimination from members of their own gender. Their refusal to grant representation to African American women on the Board is indicative of the broader women’s movement at the time. Competing philosophies and priorities excluded most women of color from major organizations and leadership.\textsuperscript{37} Likewise, the Board’s discriminatory practices mirrored those of the Exposition’s planners.\textsuperscript{38}

The Congress of Representative Women, however, featured a handful of African American women speakers, including Fannie Barrier Williams, Anna Julia Cooper, Fannie Jackson Coppin, Sarah J. Early, Hallie Quinn Brown, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. These six speakers were the only African American women who delivered speeches along with hundreds of speakers in the Women’s Congress.\textsuperscript{39} Laura L. Behling argues that these few speakers were objectified as “museum pieces” or tokens who assimilated into white culture by emphasizing their shared gender and womanliness rather than differentiating themselves as African American women.\textsuperscript{40} However, the speakers did advance arguments that challenged white supremacy, lynching, and racial discrimination as barriers to US progress. Ultimately, African American women had a
platform from which to speak at the Exposition, but the oppressive racial climate of the time severely constrained their participation.

The Exposition provided a unique rhetorical situation that provided multiple groups with an arena to agitate for their rights. Due to the international nature of the event, the Exposition offered a discursive space for wide-reaching critiques on the one hand, and on the other hand, it provided ammunition for marginalized people to engage transnational strategies to promote justice and equality. For example, Douglass invoked Haiti’s revolution to critique the United States, while the Women’s Congress speakers undermined US progress through examples from their local experiences with discrimination as well as examples of other nations’ brutality that was similar to US barbatity. And Wells amassed British advocates whose words she recirculated back to US audiences to pressure southerners with the economic and political pitfalls that would come from failure to stop lynching. In short, the Exposition provided a platform on which marginalized groups could publicly construct a transnational community that recognized and yet elided national borders; could challenge US progress that limited African American women’s participation in national and transnational public spheres; and could construct a transnational form of justice that critiqued lynching as vigilante justice rooted in racial discrimination. These rhetors argued that by failing to attend to the inequality and oppression against marginalized groups, the United States’ purported commitments to progress were hypocritical and false. The activists leveraged the potential to create transnational identification at the Exposition to exert pressure on the US public. Their purpose was to assimilate African Americans into the nation and to secure the full citizenship rights and privileges that African Americans deserved.
Purpose and Research Questions

This dissertation’s aim is to deepen our understanding of how activists can leverage transnational spaces and discourses to agitate for increased rights and recognition in the United States. How did activists craft and engage the transnational setting of the Exposition to serve this end? While these rhetors dealt with questions of national values and citizenship, they reframed these concepts in a transnational context. They were uniquely enabled by the international nature of the event in which they produced discourse. To clarify, the term “international” denotes rhetorical and material transactions made from nation to nation. That is, “international” describes the exchanges that take place between at least two nations in which the “nation” is rigidly viewed as an isomorphic, geographically-defined community. The term “transnational” provides a more nuanced understanding of how rhetorical and material transactions take place globally because it attends to multiple geographic communities—local, national, regional, hemispheric—as well as reimagined communities of people unbound by geographic boundaries. Discourses and ideologies are shaped through the exchange of ideas, people, and goods among national, local and regional locations, which animate and influence these exchanges. Global movements shape local practices, and at the same time, local subjects and political, economic, and cultural practices can often influence global processes.41 Transnational settings, networks, and rhetoric(s) circulate backwards and forwards across borders, and in the process, may shape and change rhetorical concepts. Through my analysis, I ask how rhetors exploited the rigidity and fluidity of national identities toward rhetorical ends and social change. My analysis seeks to answer the following questions in particular:
How did the Exposition enable rhetors to craft transnational identities and networks to further their activist causes on a national scale?

How did activists craft a transnational agency through cross-border and cross-national collectivizing and community-building?

What new insights can scholars glean from these case studies about transnational rhetoric and public address?

Transnational Theory, Public Texts

This project analyzes rhetorical artifacts from the Exposition era with insight from existing transnational rhetorical analyses and their theoretical tenets. Scholars across the humanities are focusing their attention on how discourse is ever-changing and shaped by its movement across physical and imagined boundaries in an increasingly interconnected world. Feminist, postcolonial, and rhetorical scholars, among others, engage transnational analysis to identify how discursive practices and modes of representation are situated in “global and local relations, as well as state-to-state and supranational transactions,” according to Rebecca Dingo.\(^4^2\) Scholars have applied transnational analyses to examine rhetorical representations of political leadership,\(^4^3\) international policy making and implementation,\(^4^4\) publics/public spaces and social justice cases,\(^4^5\) and economics,\(^4^6\) among others. Dingo claims that transnational analysis emerged in earnest in the early 2000s as scholars began to theorize how globalization shapes and is shaped by “citizenship, place, and texts.”\(^4^7\) She explains that the term *transnational* “generally refers to how globalization has influenced the movement of people and the production of texts, culture, and knowledge across borders so that the strict distinctions among nations and national practices have become blurred.”\(^4^8\) Raka Shome and Radha S. Hegde
characterize “transnational motion” as “flows of trade, communication, ideas, technologies, finance, social movements, cross border movements, and more.” In transnational analysis, scholars must account for discourses that cross not only national borders, but also local and regional borders. Discourse is taken up by different actors—individual, organizational, or state actors—that recirculate, shape, and influence rhetorics as they travel. Spaces like the Exposition engender discourses that flow transnationally as people from multiple regions and nations gather to exchange social and political ideas. Those who participate in such discursive exchanges may invoke their local experiences or tap into national themes to shape their discourse. Wendy S. Hesford, a scholar of transnational feminist rhetorical studies, claims that scholars must attend to how past discourse shaped and was shaped by transnational exchanges. She claims that “the global pivot calls for new questions about and new perspectives on the relation between past and present prototypes of globalization . . . and reconsideration of earlier transnational thinkers and international rhetorical figures.” This project seeks to answer the call for revisiting historic transnational discourse by drawing further attention to African American activists’ Exposition discourse.

To situate the analysis in a transnational context, I first turn to scholars who have already theorized existing transnational ties between the rhetors and groups I examine. Arguably, the Exposition itself was a transnational event, and yet there is an absence of transnational rhetorical analyses of the event to date. However, in Chapter Two, I elaborate on how scholars of African studies, Diasporic studies, and Pan-Africanism have theorized a large, transnational community of people of African descent along the Atlantic seaboard that existed before and after the Exposition, and that endures up to the
This extensive transnational community has served as a resource for African cultural exchange, shared traditions, and points of connection for displaced Africans and people of African descent. Scholars claim that Douglass identified with this Pan-African community along the Atlantic while he also maintained strong allegiance to the United States. Moreover, scholars detail Douglass’s relationship with Haiti, which is important to understand related to the Exposition. Historically, Haiti represented a symbol of hope for enslaved Africans before the Civil War. In Douglass’s Exposition speeches, Haiti was a beacon of pride and hope, and the Haitian Pavilion served as a gathering space for African American activists. Building upon these analyses of Douglass’s transnational ties, this dissertation further attends to how he utilized and extended an existing transnational Pan-American community in his public address to agitate for racial equality in the United States.

Numerous rhetoric and public address scholars have also examined US women’s agitation for greater political rights; however, there is a dearth of rhetorical scholarship that examines women’s rhetoric from the nineteenth century, and particularly African American women’s public address and discourse, from a transnational perspective. Scholars highlight the unique rhetorical strategies of African American women, noting their different experiences of marginalization and oppression in negotiating US citizenship as both women and persons of color. These studies of women’s rhetoric have largely focused on national conceptions of citizenship and women’s political identity around the time of the Exposition, and few have touched on extranational resources and connections of women’s rights activists. More commonly, scholars
provide important historical context for how women fought for greater access to legal and citizenship rights, such as suffrage, within the United States.

I argue that we need more rhetorical analyses that examine how these rhetors and their discourses operated transnationally. This focus deepens our understanding of how rhetors advanced transnational rhetorical strategies to agitate for their increased rights and to appeal to a range of audiences, some of whom were hostile to the activists. How did the rhetors craft transnational affiliations and identities to achieve their persuasive ends? This dissertation builds upon existing scholarship to gain insight into how rhetoricians linked to and took up transnational ideas and engaged in such settings to inform their national activist discourses. Overall, I hope this project sparks greater attention to transnational discourse in public address scholarship and in the field of rhetoric more broadly. I aim to demonstrate how, moving forward, rhetorical scholars should attend to how a transnational rhetorical analysis can lend a deeper understanding to texts and contexts both past and present.

**Reading Strategy**

A public address methodology is most fitting for my study because it helps us understand how rhetors’ discourse, or language, functioned symbolically to transnationalize national American ideologies; this methodology also helps us interpret how activist rhetoric formed transnational communities and/or launched arguments across transnational publics and networks. My research questions center on how discourse enabled and constrained rhetors within the setting of the Exposition. As critics, we attempt to understand the constraints, opportunities, and expectations of a speaking situation in order to gauge the meaning and significance of an utterance. According to
David Zarefsky, a public address perspective provides a “richly textured understanding” of a particular piece of discourse, but it may also bring about a better understanding of the broader issues surrounding the text.\textsuperscript{60} A public address perspective encourages us to turn to the discourse to unpack the societal norms, constraints, and beliefs that animate a community.

For example, in \textit{You, The People}, Vanessa B. Beasley seeks to better understand American national identity by examining the symbolic function of presidential rhetoric over the course of the nation’s history.\textsuperscript{61} She finds that presidential rhetoric creates meaning for the American people and crafts a vision of national community. By studying a series of speech acts for formative ideas and recurring, enduring themes, we may more deeply understand how norms for US citizenship, identity, and belonging have shaped or been shaped by discourse over the course of time. Because the goal of a public address method is to interpret discourse and better understand cultural forces of a time and community, this method is fitting to interpret the symbolic function of discourse surrounding the Exposition.

Generally, rhetoric and public address scholarship seeks to explain public discourse’s role in shaping communities and cultures. Scholars often examine the “oratory” of well-known, contemporary figures such as US presidents to understand current guidelines for eloquence, style, and adherence to or departure from a genre of speaking.\textsuperscript{62} Put simply, scholars are concerned with what “constitutes a ‘great speech,’” and this conception can change over time, according to Shawn J. Parry-Giles and J. Michael Hogan.\textsuperscript{63} Public address scholars also focus on how certain speakers and texts depart from the traditional, or even ancient, rhetorical tradition, or how public address has
unfolded and evolved over time\textsuperscript{64} (such as with Beasley’s analysis). Finally, public address scholars often take a critical approach to texts or they may critique the field of public address itself. Part of this work includes identifying speakers and texts from marginalized groups that may have been previously overlooked. In response, some scholars are also calling for an increased focus on the public address of lesser-known and -studied groups both within and outside of the United States,\textsuperscript{65} and for revisiting historic texts more critically, and/or revisiting texts from less traditional perspectives. Such projects could spotlight underexamined rhetorical strategies and contextual factors.\textsuperscript{66} This dissertation aims to answer these calls in part through a renewed look at historic texts and through an examination of rhetoric through national and transnational lenses. In addition to broadening the scope of public address work, these research strategies can highlight new meanings and strategies in historic texts that circulated both within and beyond US borders.

Because of this aim and my research questions, my study requires further methodological input. Though the Exposition took place within the borders of the United States, the event and its discourse require rich contextualization beyond a US context to account for national and transnational symbols and meanings. This project examines a range of texts that are not situated in a particular geographic or discursive context, but rather texts that address communities and people unbound by national borders. My analysis asks questions such as: How did rhetors invoke and/or craft a transnational community to challenge US nationalism and citizenship, and to challenge their own inequality and exclusion from public life? Are there patterns or recurring themes in the discourse that we can better understand through a transnational analysis?
To answer these questions, specifically, I establish the contextual rhetorical background of the texts to understand what ideas circulated at the time of the Exposition that would have helped the rhetors appeal to their audiences. I turn to the discourse to identify prominent themes of the time, and then conduct a contextual analysis to have a deeper understanding of the discursive text as it circulated during the time period. As Jennifer Mercieca states, “the rhetorical discourse must be—in fact, can only be—understood by placing it within the complex web of dominant ideas and events in its immediate historical context.” Therefore, the process involves tacking back and forth from the original text to the secondary material about the texts, rhetors, and the Exposition itself to paint a fuller picture of the context.

A transnational rhetorical analysis requires identifying global linkages that rhetors engaged to persuade their audiences. After laying out the social, political, and cultural beliefs and practices of the time, I turn to an investigation of the transnational rhetorics and ideas that shaped and were shaped by the activists through their texts. More specifically, I follow in the lead of Shome and Hegde and identify transnational “flows of trade, communication, ideas, technologies, finance, social movements, cross border movements, and more” that emerge in the discourse. From there, I identify how rhetors leveraged these transnational themes and ideas to make persuasive arguments. Taking a cue from Wendy S. Hesford and Eileen E. Schell, I consider how “rhetorical concepts are shaped by cultural, social, and economic interconnectivities and interrelations and cross-border and cross-cultural mobilizations of power, language, resources, and people.” In this process, I examine how rhetors tap into networks of people and ideas that are larger than their own local context, and also how their locally-situated experiences inform their
national and transnational discourse. I also look for moments when rhetors engage seemingly non-transnational ideas, such as US nationalism, and reapply them, rework them, re-envision them, or repurpose them in a transnational context to serve their goals.

**Preview of Chapters**

This dissertation coheres around three concepts that rhetors took up during the Exposition era: Frederick Douglass’s addresses reenvisioned *community* to challenge US nationalism; the six African American women’s speeches at the Women’s Congress redefined US *progress* to agitate for their greater national inclusion; and Ida B. Wells’s dispatches recontextualized *justice* as antilynching to reverse the belief that lynching was an acceptable form of US justice. Each chapter includes a context narrative that grounds each case in its immediate context. Then, I operationalize the specific reading strategies and theoretical concepts used to interpret each case. Next, a transnational rhetorical analysis illuminates how rhetors engaged transnational rhetorical strategies, settings, and networks to advocate for equal rights in the United States. Finally, each chapter explores the historical and rhetorical implications of each analysis.

Chapter Two examines two of Douglass’s Exposition speeches that have only received limited scholarly attention. I engage an analysis of Douglass’s “Dedication Ceremonies” and “Lecture on Haiti” speeches to understand how he appealed to common nationalist themes used in US public address to construct a transnational Pan-African community. Douglass disseminated a scathing critique of African Americans’ treatment in the United States and argued for their greater inclusion in his addresses. Specifically, I argue that Douglass’s speeches invoked and shaped a transnational Pan-African community as a source of identification and collective action for African Americans to
fight for civil rights. This transnational community was based in racial heritage rather than national heritage, and therefore exceeded the bounds of the US national community. And yet, Douglass appropriated US nationalist discourses to argue that Haitians, who were linked in a transnational community with African Americans, were superior defenders of freedom. Since African Americans were inextricably linked with freedom-loving Haitians, African Americans deserved full citizenship rights within the United States. After situating Douglass’s addresses in a transnational context, this chapter analyzes Douglass’s three-pronged transnational rhetorical strategy: He appropriated American exceptionalist discourses and applied them to Haitians and African Americans as part of a larger transnational network; he engaged American ideologies of civilization and Manifest Destiny to claim that racial inclusivity was a necessary pre-condition for a truly progressive nation in a transnational world; and he argued that, since African Americans were part of a transnational community along with nation-builders like Haitians, they deserved full civil rights and assimilation into the United States. The chapter concludes with observations and implications of how a transnational rhetorical analysis reveals the cross-cultural economic, political, and social dimensions that shaped Douglass’s speeches. Douglass’s addresses constituted people of African descent in a transnational community of people of African heritage. Then, he leveraged this transnational Pan-African community to support African Americans in their national struggle for equal rights. Douglass argued that Haitians had fought not only for their own freedom, but also for people of African descent around the world. He sought to uplift Haiti’s history, civility, and economic fortitude as a source of inspiration for this community. Overall, Douglass crafted and advanced a transnational community that
transcended national boundaries and belonging. With Douglass’s speeches as just one example, we can see how people have historically forged identities from multiple cultures in tandem with and in opposition to nationalism(s).

Chapter Three examines African American women’s discourse that circulated in the challenging discursive space of the Women’s Congress. Six African American activists addressed audiences at the Exposition’s World’s Congress of Women, a week-long event during which women from around the world delivered speeches related to women’s progress. Through the lenses of public sphere theory and transnational rhetorical theory, this chapter analyzes the six speeches against the backdrop of the Women’s Congress and the greater Exposition to better understand how the speakers advanced their arguments for African American women’s inclusion in exclusionary public spheres. Broadly, the Women’s Congress represented a transnational discursive space in which women of many nationalities exchanged ideas about women’s progress. Their discussions formed a feminist counterpublic sphere, as well, because the organizers and presenters aimed to provide a women’s-only space at the Exposition wherein women could account for their contributions to national progress. In general, participants in the Women’s Congress sought greater recognition in the main Exposition, which represented the dominant US public sphere and highlighted primarily men’s contributions to progress. Within the Women’s Congress, however, the six African American speakers had an even greater burden to argue for their legitimacy as they faced an audience of mostly white women, some of whom were hostile to their inclusion in the Congress. This chapter argues that, within these layered spaces, the six African American speakers crafted arguments that would be intelligible in multiple public sphere discussions. They first
constituted a feminist African American counterpublic in which African American women united through a rhetoric of sisterhood and crafted and leveraged arguments based in their unique experiences as African American women. Next, the speakers appealed to the shared value of civility to identify with white participants in the transnational feminist counterpublic sphere of the Women’s Congress. Finally, the speakers demonstrated their value to the nation-state to make intelligible their arguments for equality, citizenship participation, and deliberation within the US public sphere. This chapter concludes that the speakers could tailor their discourse to move within and without multiple public spheres in order to establish African American women’s status as valuable contributors to national progress.

Chapter Four examines the rhetoric of antilynching activist Ida B. Wells for how it mainstreamed antilynching across national borders. This analysis considers eight dispatches that Wells sent to the Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean to report on her 1894 antilynching tour in Great Britain. On the tour, she educated British audiences about unlawful lynching in the US South through press engagements, lectures, and meetings with reform groups, congregations, and members of parliament. The chapter begins with a contextual overview of lynching in the United States and transatlantic reform networks of the era. I argue that Wells circulated her discourse through existing transnational reform networks to mainstream antilynching. First, she justified herself as a legitimate activist by recirculating the words of her supporters and by refuting or reappropriating the words of her critics. Next, Wells demystified lynching as an acceptable form of US justice when she dispelled widely-circulated myths about lynching’s necessity and recirculated accounts of lynchers’ barbarity. Lastly, Wells recirculated British critiques of
lynching in an attempt to pressure US southern elites to end lynching locally. I conclude that Wells’s arguments were not strong enough to gain traction with her target audience. However, her example demonstrates how rhetors can engage transnational advocacy networks in order to advance activist arguments across borders and through multiple channels. As she travelled to and from the United States and Great Britain, Wells and her network of supporters circulated antilynching arguments back and forth through newspaper articles, public lectures, interviews, and meetings with reform groups, socialites, and politicians. Through her own discourse and by galvanizing others, Wells successfully mainstreamed lynching across borders and contributed to a sea change in public opinion across the Atlantic Ocean about lynching’s acceptability. Increasingly, Britons and Americans alike considered lynching an unnatural, immoral act, which began to uproot lynching as an acceptable form of justice in the US South. Wells’s case illuminates how rhetors can engage with and circulate activist messages through transnational advocacy networks to exert pressure over leaders in their home country.

The conclusion chapter expands upon and weaves together the broader implications of the three case studies. I conclude with reflections on what the dissertation’s findings mean for future transnational rhetorical analysis, social movement studies, and historical-critical analyses. The overarching goal of this dissertation is to deepen transnational and rhetorical scholars’ understanding of the rhetorical resources made available in spaces like the Exposition, which offer transnational themes, strategies, and settings through which activists can agitate. In other words, the analysis engages theoretical and critical strategies gleaned from public address theory and transnational rhetorical theory to attend to contextual factors and discursive strategies that may have
been overlooked through more traditional critical approaches. Ultimately, I hope this project broadens the scope of known rhetorical strategies for activism in the late-nineteenth century in order to expand public address scholarship, but also to encourage future research on historic activist discourse using transnational rhetorical analysis.

17 U.S. Constitution, Amendment 15, section 1.
23 The only comparable event was the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876, which hosted a Woman’s Pavilion. This was the first building of its kind at a national exposition to be planned and overseen by women, and it showcased women’s activities and progress. See Weimann, *The Fair Women*, 1.
24 Ibid., 42.
25 Ibid., 43.
43 See Richards, *Transnational Feminist Rhetorics and Gendered Leadership in Global Politics*. 

26


Ibid.


Public sphere scholars have proposed “transnational public spheres” where political issues are discussed between actors who are not necessarily from the same nation-state, or public sphere. See, for example, Nancy Fraser, “Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World,” in *Transnationalizing the Public Sphere*, ed. Kate Nash (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2014), 8-42.


58 In *Transnational Feminist Rhetorics and Gendered Leadership in Global Politics*, Richards claims that rhetorical studies often focuses on “nationalistic research methods” and similarly argues for more transnational rhetorical studies (xxii).


63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 2-3.
66 David Zarefsky discusses the current primary focus on contemporary issues in public address, and calls for a return to evaluating historic texts, as well, to appreciate their value from a public address perspective in “Public Address Scholarship in the New Century,” in The Handbook of Rhetoric and Public Address, 81.
71 Bay, To Tell the Truth Freely, 6.
CHAPTER TWO:
CRAFTING AN AFRICAN AMERICAN (TRANS)NATIONAL COMMUNITY:
FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND HAITI

Introduction

Close to noon on January 2, 1893, Frederick Douglass prepared to address a small, mixed-race crowd at the fairgrounds of the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Exposition officials and attendees, as well as African American civic leaders, had gathered to hear Douglas speak at the dedication ceremonies of the Columbian Exposition’s Haitian Pavilion.¹ Months later, the Exposition opened and drew millions of attendees from around the world between May and October of 1893.² Established by Congress, the Exposition was a celebration of progress made by the United States and many other nations since Christopher Columbus arrived 400 years prior. It featured exhibits that showcased the technological and intellectual advances of the nations selected to participate. The Exposition was also an economic and political event intended to foster relationships between nations and to open international markets.³ As former US Minister Resident and Consul General to Haiti, Douglass was in a unique position to represent both the United States and Haiti at the event. The Exposition planners asked him to serve as commissioner of the Haitian Pavilion for the duration of the Exposition.⁴ In this role, Douglass was responsible for delivering a “Dedication Ceremonies” speech at the Pavilion’s opening to welcome attendees, to celebrate Haiti’s progress, and to praise the Exposition.⁵
The Exposition also crystallized ongoing racial injustices in the United States. For example, African Americans were prohibited from having their own dedicated exhibition space to display their unique contributions to US progress and were barred from leadership roles in planning the event. Many Americans of African heritage were also insulted when they found that some African nations’ exhibits seemed more of an entertainment spectacle based on stereotypes than on reality. More broadly, the 1890s marked a “nadir” for African Americans as Jim Crow laws increasingly controlled public spaces and as post-Reconstruction tensions intensified racialized violence. To protest these conditions, Douglass wrote the introduction for a pamphlet spearheaded by antilynching activist, Ida B. Wells, entitled, *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition.* At the same time, Douglass oversaw the Haitian Pavilion and helped audiences make sense of the proud Black republic that had secured its own freedom through a slave rebellion. During the last month of the Exposition, Wells distributed *The Reason Why* pamphlet on the steps of the Pavilion, where activists and Exposition attendees gathered. From the protesters’ perspective, the Exposition represented and contributed to the denial of full citizenship to African Americans.

Douglass delivered a second address in the evening entitled “Lecture on Haiti,” wherein he disseminated a scathing critique of how the United States oppressed people of African descent, both African Americans and Haitians. He delivered “Lecture on Haiti” in Quinn Chapel, a popular A.M.E. Church near the Exposition grounds. According to the introduction of the pamphlet *Lecture on Haiti,* “fifteen hundred of the best citizens of Chicago assembled” on the evening of January 2, 1893. In contrast to his “Dedication
Ceremonies” address, Douglass’s immediate audience for this speech consisted mainly of African Americans.¹² The “Lecture on Haiti” address was more explicitly political than the dedication speech presented earlier that day, particularly regarding the national and international consequences of racial discrimination in the United States. According to Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon, Douglass “saw the Haitian Revolution and contemporaneous violence against African Americans in the South as linked, illustrations of the ongoing oppression of people of African descent as well as their ability to defeat it.”¹³ In “Lecture on Haiti,” Douglass charged that racial discrimination was the root cause of poor relations between Haiti and the United States. He claimed that “[A] deeper reason for coolness between the countries is this: Haiti is black, and we have not yet forgiven Haiti for being black [applause] or forgiven the Almighty for making her black.”¹⁴ He criticized the U.S. government because it refused to formally recognize Haiti as a diplomatic and economic partner.¹⁵ In addition, Douglass documented the various negative opinions Americans held of Haitians and how American officials had even conspired to foment revolution within Haiti.¹⁶ His accusation of US racism applied to both the nation’s treatment toward Haiti and toward its own citizens of African descent.

Despite differences in audience and theme, in both addresses, Douglass praised Haiti, highlighted the importance of the 1804 Haitian Revolution, and launched a forceful critique of racism in the United States. His words would be taken up and distributed to secondary audiences across the United States. Rhetorician Glen McClish notes that both of Douglass’s speeches reached beyond the Columbian Exposition stage as African American and white presses around the country recounted the events of January 2, with varying degrees of completeness and accuracy.¹⁷ In the following months, Douglass’s
supporters also printed and disseminated *Lecture on Haiti*, a pamphlet that recounted the two addresses and featured commentary from David Swing, a white abolitionist and preacher.18

Douglass’s public addresses also referenced and built upon an existing community of people of African heritage around the world. Historians and sociologists have considered how Douglass invoked and appealed to a Pan-African community in his public addresses and writings. Russ Castronovo, Paul Gilroy, and Ivy Wilson argue that Douglass identified with the Pan-African community along the Atlantic while he also maintained a strong allegiance to the United States.19 Broadly, Pan-Africanism refers to a community of people of African descent around the world who were geographically separated, or whose ancestors were separated, through the African Diaspora. Through this cross-border, cross-national community, people relate through a common history of slavery and oppression in the Americas (which also, it can be argued, serves to diminish the differences between various groups that made up the African Diaspora).20 Within the Haitian Pavilion space, Douglass sought to uplift Haiti’s history, civility, and economic fortitude as a primary source of inspiration for a transnational Pan-African community that included Haitians and African Americans. According to Barbara J. Ballard, the Haitian Pavilion served as a community space for African Americans, who “stood as a people without a nation at a gathering of nations.”21 This chapter attends to how Douglass invoked and advanced an existing Pan-African community to uplift all people of African descent, including African Americans, and to exert pressure on the United States to increase civil rights for his race.
I argue that Douglass’s speeches constituted African Americans and Haitians in a transnational Pan-African community as a source of identification and collective action for fully-enfranchised citizenship. This community was grounded in a shared African heritage rather than national affiliation. To constitute this community, Douglass appropriated US nationalist discourses to celebrate Haiti’s successful revolution and tapped into shared Pan-African roots to join together Haitians and African Americans. Haitians were superior defenders of freedom, and since African Americans were interlinked with Haiti, they too were capable of fighting for freedom. As such, Douglass argued that African Americans deserved full citizenship rights in the United States. Specifically, Douglass appropriated American exceptionalist discourses to uphold Haiti and to confront the United States with the limits and fiction of its own exceptionalism. Second, he engaged ideologies of civilization and Manifest Destiny to persuade Americans to recognize Haiti’s worth as a diplomatic and financial partner. A successful and lucrative partnership between the two nations could only be secured if Americans accepted Haiti’s African heritage and respected Haitians. Finally, Douglass constituted Haitians and African American in a transnational Pan-African community through which he linked Haitians’ greatness with African Americans’ potential to support national values. Through these appeals, Douglass addressed at least two audiences: he charged privileged (typically white) Americans with the responsibility to enfranchise African Americans, and he collectivized people of African descent into a transnational community to better cope with the discrimination they faced in their own country.

Through a transnational rhetorical perspective, this chapter elucidates how Douglass engaged transnational rhetorical appeals to advocate for African Americans’
full enfranchisement. First, I ground my analysis with a contextual overview of Douglass’s speeches. Then, I analyze Douglass’s three-pronged rhetorical strategy through which he appropriated American exceptionalist discourses, cited racial inclusivity as a necessary pre-condition for American advancement, and crafted a transnational Pan-African community to argue for African American inclusion in the United States. I conclude with observations and implications of how transnational rhetorical analysis attends to the cross-cultural discourses and global linkages that Douglass engaged in his speeches.

**Negotiating Nationalism through a Transnational Pan-African Community**

A transnational analysis of Douglass’s speeches helps clarify how people across national borders grappled with nation-building, nationalism, exclusion, and inclusion at the time of the Columbian Exposition. The Exposition promoted the exchange of commerce, intellectual thought, and culture between nations. Speaking at an event that facilitated international relations allowed Douglass to link Haitian and American cultures as part and parcel to the Exposition’s goals. Within this context, Douglass invoked and collectivized a transnational Pan-African community.

Scholars across the humanities are focused on how discourse is ever-changing and shaped by its movement across physical and imagined boundaries in an increasingly interconnected world. Rebecca Dingo claims that transnational analysis emerged in the early 2000s as scholars began to theorize how globalization shapes and is shaped by “citizenship, place, and texts.” She explains that the term *transnational* “generally refers to how globalization has influenced the movement of people and the production of texts, culture, and knowledge across borders so that the strict distinctions among nations...
and national practices have become blurred.”

Raka Shome and Radha S. Hegde specify that “transnational motion” describes “flows of trade, communication, ideas, technologies, finance, social movements, cross border movements, and more.”

A transnational approach to rhetoric exposes how “rhetorical concepts are shaped by cultural, social, and economic interconnectivities and interrelations and cross-border and cross-cultural mobilizations of power, language, resources, and people.”

In short, scholars must account for global flows and linkages that potentially influence rhetorical texts and contexts.

In order to contextualize Douglass’s discourse specifically, it also is important to understand the concept of Pan-Africanism, or the enduring transnational relationship between people of the African Diaspora. St. Clair Drake claims,

What makes [an] activity Pan-African is the conceptualization on the part of the participants in these local struggles of their being part of a worldwide activity involving black people everywhere, with various segments having obligations and responsibilities to each other.

The Pan-African community is inherently transnational because in order for the Pan-African community to exist, African ideas, cultural traditions, and people must circulate across and irrespective of national borders. Stephen Howe adds that people of African descent are connected through “shared philosophies, attitudes to life, or modes of expression and [behavior],” despite the physical distance between them.

I use the term “transnational Pan-African community” for two reasons. First, “transnational” attends to the fact that members of this community draw from local and national experiences to form a shared community, and second, I incorporate “Pan-African” to draw attention to
the fact that members of this community share an African heritage, rooted in numerous African countries, and they exchange discourse across African and non-African nations.

Modern conceptions of Pan-Africanism were not fully fleshed out in Douglass’s time and continue to evolve today. Beginning in the fifteenth century, African, African American, and West Indian people were dispersed around the world through the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Howe asserts that African American intellectuals began to formulate “a specific African cultural ethos and destiny [and] a form of cultural nationalism” in the first half of the nineteenth century. Prior to that, in the late eighteenth century, Haiti became a Pan-African symbol of hope for US slaves when Haitians secured their freedom just 25 years after the US Revolutionary War. Following the abolition of slavery, Pan-Africanism thrived through black colleges and universities such as the Tuskegee Institute. People frequently exchanged ideas through gatherings at African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Churches, and through pamphlets and newspapers distributed by African Americans. Fittingly, Douglass delivered the “Lecture on Haiti” speech in one of these A.M.E. churches in Chicago. Through this speech, Douglass called for African Americans to fight for their right to full citizenship privileges as members of this Pan-African community.

Pan-Africanism also helped African Americans negotiate the inclusionary and exclusionary forces of US nationalism. While nation-states feature physical, geographical borders, nationalism forms cultural and political borders. Benedict Anderson claims that though members of a nation will never personally know every other member of that nation, they are bonded to one another as each person “lives the image of their [national] communion.” National group identification, according to Daniel Druckman, “fulfills
economic, sociocultural, and political needs, giving individuals a sense of security, a feeling of belonging, and prestige." Members of a nation feel connected through shared values and goals that define them as a collective people.

While nationalism builds and strengthens the nation, it simultaneously divides people as members of a nation might form their collective identity against a rejected outsider, or “other,” who is excluded from the nation. National discourses and nation-state apparatuses enforce physical and political barriers. Generations of immigrants, former slaves, and other marginalized people have struggled for acceptance in relation to dominant understandings of US nationalism. Paul Gilroy argues that “[c]onventional ideas of modern citizenship have sometimes been stretched so that they might accommodate black hopes. At other times they have been compressed to the point of implosion by the dead weight of black suffering.” In other words, nationalism and citizenship have at times included and excluded people of African descent within the nation.

Douglass’s transnational rhetoric, based in Pan-Africanism, negotiated the inclusion and exclusion of African Americans in relation to US nationalism. For much of the nineteenth century, organizations such as the American Colonization Society advocated for the relocation and emigration of free African Americans to other countries. However, Douglass vehemently opposed relocation. According to Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo, Douglass’s “position on emigration was profoundly tied to his commitment to African American rights to American soil and American citizenship.” Instead, Douglass sought to integrate African Americans into US culture such that their differences would be accepted. According to Angela Ray, in lyceum speeches between the 1850s and 1870s,
[Douglass] enacted and argued for social change that did not merely adapt African Americans to the norms of a fixed white American culture but rather challenged cultural fixedness itself, promoting an ‘American’ culture encompassing differences, in which biological variation did not determine cultural hierarchies.  

In other words, Douglass imagined an American community that would fuse elements of white and African American cultures as people learned to coexist. In the same way that Haitians deserved freedom, Douglass believed strongly that African Americans deserved full political and social freedom and should not relocate to another country to achieve that freedom. In a speech delivered in May of 1886 entitled, “The Future of the Colored Race,” Douglass averred,

My strongest conviction as to the future of the negro therefore is, that he will not be expatriated nor annihilated, nor will he forever remain a separate and distinct race from the people around him, but that he will be absorbed, assimilated, and will only appear finally, as the Phoenicians now appear on the shores of the Shannon, in the features of a blended race.

In this passage, Douglass referred to the ancient Phoenicians of the Mediterranean coast, who had integrated into the largely Anglo-Saxon population situated near what Douglass is presumably referring to as the Shannon River in Ireland. With this example, Douglass advocated for African Americans to stake their claim on American soil because this had successfully been accomplished in the past. He critiqued relocation movements that suggested African Americans emigrate to the African continent or to the Caribbean to achieve freedom and equality. In a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe on March 8, 1853,
Douglass insisted, “We have grown up with this republic, and I see nothing in her character, or even in the character of the American people as yet, which compels the belief that we must leave the United States.”Douglass insisted that people of African heritage were vital members of the nation-state who should hold their ground within it.

A transnational rhetorical analysis brings attention to how Douglass discursively constituted subjects in a community that transcended their nation-state’s borders and dominant ideas of nationalism. Douglass opened up the possibility for African Americans to identify with a community that appropriated existing American ideologies but was not based in national citizenship. Rather, the community was based primarily upon shared African pride. The following analysis demonstrates how Douglass engaged nationalist and transnational discourses to urge African Americans to understand and defend their right to full citizenship. He also invoked this collective identity to persuade more privileged Americans of his race’s legitimacy for fully-realized citizenship.

**Engaging a Transnational Pan-African Community for African American Assimilation**

Douglass understood that he belonged to a transnational Pan-African community, as did all African Americans. He tapped into this vibrant community to prove his race’s legitimacy and to carve political space for African Americans in the United States. To do so, he needed to reach multiple audiences to argue his case, and he did so through a number of rhetorical appeals. First, Douglass spoke to both privileged and non-privileged North Americans in his addresses when he appropriated American exceptionalist discourses to make a case for Haitian exceptionalism. Douglass compared Haiti, a nation comprised of former African slaves, to the United States, a nation that discriminated
against former slaves, to urge his listeners to recognize the United States’s failure to live up to exceptionalist ideals. Second, Douglass appealed more specifically to privileged Americans when he capitalized on the ideologies of US civilization and Manifest Destiny to argue that Americans risked their worldwide reputation and missed a key financial opportunity when they discriminated against Haiti. Third, Douglass constituted African Americans and Haitians as part of a transnational Pan-African community, based in Haiti’s proud example. People of African descent had experienced greater hardship and had overcome more adversity than any other group of people in the United States. Like Haitians had done, African Americans would agitate for freedom in their own nation.

Celebrating Haitian Exceptionalism

Ideologies of American exceptionalism have sculpted nationalist ideals from colonial times. Specifically, exceptionalism refers to the ideology that the American people were chosen by God to fulfill an errand of bringing freedom to others and thereby achieving salvation. In his addresses, Douglass forced his fully-enfranchised audience members to confront their own failure to fulfill this obligation. Specifically, Douglass argued that these Americans had failed by continuously denying freedom to African Americans. Simultaneously, Douglass invited audience members of African descent to identify with a Haitian form of exceptionalism superior to the American version. The following offers a brief overview of American exceptionalism as an ideology and a rhetorical construct. Then, the analysis demonstrates how Douglass appropriated exceptionalism to characterize Haitians as a chosen people who fulfilled the demands of American exceptionalism in ways superior to the United States.
For centuries, rhetors have grounded arguments in American exceptionalism to motivate listeners to action and to solidify national identity. American exceptionalism is rooted in Puritan John Winthrop’s speech, “A Model of Christian Charity,” delivered in 1630. In the address, Winthrop claimed that the pilgrims of the Massachusetts Bay Company were citizens of a “new Israel” or “a shining city upon a hill.” These Christians had escaped oppressors in Europe and settled in a new land that promised religious freedom. Colony leaders like Winthrop governed colonists’ behavior by establishing strict laws and social customs. In public addresses, leaders employed the jeremiad, a redemption-seeking speech pattern named after the prophet Jeremiah. The jeremiad called on people to follow the rules of a covenant with God and warned them of the consequences of misconduct. They had a God-given errand to create a model Christian community and achieve salvation through religious devotion. Importantly, themes of American exceptionalism referred specifically to the duties reserved for white, male, Christian Americans who were uniquely capable of political influence and of fulfilling the nation’s destiny.

Rhetors have repurposed these foundational ideologies in activist rhetoric. African American activists have a long tradition of adopting the “Black jeremiad” in abolitionist discourse. In this conceptualization of the jeremiad, leaders characterize African Americans as chosen people who must be liberated from bondage, which places the onus on white Americans to free them from the sin of slavery. According to Wilson Moses, the Black jeremiad represented "the constant warnings issued by blacks to whites, concerning the judgement that was to come from the sin of slavery." The Black jeremiad endured after slavery as Douglass and other rhetors used this rhetorical form to remind white
Americans of their exceptional duty to treat African Americans justly. Douglass used the Black jeremiadic structure to remind his listeners that white, Christian Americans were duty-bound to ensure others’ freedom, which included the freedom of oppressed African Americans.

In both “Lecture on Haiti” and “Dedication Ceremonies,” Douglass deployed discourses of American exceptionalism to rhetorically construct Haiti as a great nation grounded in a superior form of nationalism to the United States. Boldly, he claimed that the United States should follow Haiti’s example to better itself as a country. He opened “Lecture on Haiti” with a preview of the topics he would address, mainly Haiti’s proud revolutionary past, her promising future, and her status as “the only self-made Black Republic in the world.” Drawing upon the ideology of American exceptionalism, Douglass argued that Haiti’s revolution was an even greater feat than the American Revolution. As such, Haitians should be celebrated for their superior status as a chosen people with an errand to secure liberty and carry out a precious inheritance from their founders that they were duty-bound to protect.

First, Douglass touted Haiti’s exceptionalism by comparing its uprising for independence to the American Revolution. In his afternoon “Dedication Ceremonies” speech to a mixed-race crowd, he asserted that Haiti’s effort to liberate themselves from their oppressors was more honorable than the American revolutionaries’ effort because Haitians had faced greater obstacles. In the eighteenth century, members of the French colony Saint Domingue, located on the island of Hispaniola, subjected Africans to brutal enslavement. A select group of *affranchis*, or freed slaves, were enfranchised by the French assembly in 1791. However, French colonists refused to recognize their legal
rights, which sparked an uprising by both freed and enslaved Africans. The rebels formed an army that eventually forced the surrender of French soldiers dispatched by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1803, ushering in the January 1, 1804 declaration of Haitian independence. Revolutionary hero Jean-Jacques Dessalines served a short time as Governor until 1806. By 1820, the country had instated a democratic, presidential system. France officially recognized Haiti as an independent nation in 1825, followed by Britain in 1833. The United States followed much later in 1862.51

In his Exposition addresses, Douglass characterized Haiti as an exceptional nation and argued that the world should revere the Haitian Revolution more so than the American Revolution. Douglass’s rationale for why Haiti’s revolutionaries faced greater obstacles is worth quoting at length:

[The American] Revolution had a thousand years of civilization behind it. The men who led it were descended from state[s]men and heroes . . . They belonged to the ruling race of this world and the sympathy of the world was with them. But far different was it with the men of Haiti. The world was all against them. They were slaves accustomed to stand and tremble in the presence of haughty masters. Their education was obedience to the will of others, and their religion was patience and resignation to the rule of pride and cruelty. As a race they stood before the world as the most abject, helpless and degraded of mankind.52

Douglass emphasized how Haitians had to overcome greater obstacles to secure their freedom when he drew comparisons between the United States and a tiny country led by people of African descent. The Haitian uprising presented a “herculean task” considering
that Haitians had no support for their battle for freedom, unlike American revolutionaries.\textsuperscript{53} Haitians fought for their country as current and former slaves while the American colonists had a better-equipped military and political support from some European nations. Douglass asserted further that the “Negro manhood, Negro bravery, Negro military genius and skill”\textsuperscript{54} exhibited by Haitian revolutionary leaders rivaled the heroics of US revolutionary leaders. Haitian revolutionaries performed an unparalleled task in the service of freedom when they singlehandedly fought for and established the first liberated slave nation in the world.

Appropriating another major component of American exceptionalism, Douglass proclaimed Haiti’s status as a nation of people who were selected by God to fulfill a mission or an errand. In this case, Haiti was tasked with the divine mission of freeing people from bondage and securing liberty for countries along the Atlantic Ocean. In his “Dedication Ceremonies” address, Douglass invoked John Winthrop’s metaphor that Haiti was “not a candle put under a bushel, but a city set upon a hill.”\textsuperscript{55} Douglass emphasized how Haiti “had its special mission in the world” that “taught the danger of slavery and the value of liberty. In this respect she has been the greatest of all our modern teachers.”\textsuperscript{56} Just as Puritans alighted to the shores of America to resist oppression and establish a new nation, Haitians secured their own freedom by escaping their oppressors. Moreover, the Haitian Revolution accomplished more for the cause of liberty than the American Revolution because Haiti’s victory assured freedom from slavery not only for people in Haiti, but also for people of African descent around the world. Douglass averred:
[Haiti] has grandly served the cause of universal human liberty. We should not forget that the freedom you and I enjoy to-day; that the freedom that eight hundred thousand colored people enjoy in the British West Indies; the freedom that has come to the colored race the world over, is largely due to the brave stand taken by the black sons, of Haiti ninety years ago.57

To Douglass, Haiti’s victory initiated a domino effect that led to the collapse of slave systems across the Atlantic. The credit was not to Britain, to the West Indies, nor to the United States for abolishing slavery, but rather to the fledgling nation that had the courage and wherewithal to fight for liberty. Douglass ended the “Lecture on Haiti” speech with decisive words regarding Haiti’s position on the world stage: “I will rather believe that whatever may happen of peace or war Haiti will remain in the firmament of nations.”58 In other words, Haiti had established itself as an independent nation and as a premiere model of liberty. Douglass suggested that, in fact, Haitians were a true chosen people whose country symbolized a shining city upon a hill. Through further comparison to the United States, Douglass demonstrated that Haitians were not only braver than the Americans revolutionaries, but also that Haitians were uniquely qualified to secure freedom for those in bondage more so than other great nations.

Douglass advanced a third exceptionalist argument when he claimed that through their great struggle, Haitians earned a “precious inheritance” that must be protected. Traditional conceptions of American exceptionalism hold that the original founders of the United States left a precious inheritance for future generations to carry forward. The values put forth in the Declaration of Independence represented guidelines for fulfilling that legacy.59 Traditionally, “precious inheritance” referred to the foundational morals
and values that (white) Americans were duty-bound to carry on from their forefathers. Douglass reappropriated this concept to describe the Haitian people’s cherished values when he claimed that they also had a precious inheritance from their own founders: the freedom fighters who had liberated themselves and established Haiti. Douglass asserted in “Dedication Ceremonies” that

[Haitians] not only gained their liberty and independence, but they have never surrendered what they gained to any power on earth. [Applause.] This precious inheritance they hold to-day, and I venture to say here in the ear of all the world that they never will surrender that inheritance. [Prolonged Applause.]

Just like Americans, Haitians treasured the valiant revolutionary efforts that had secured their freedom and their founding national values. Douglass’s precious inheritance argument would have likely appealed to his more privileged listeners because it tapped into the sense of duty inculcated in them from the time of their forefathers.

Douglass was quick to remind his audience that African Americans were denied fundamental American rights such as liberty and the pursuit of happiness. He applied the Black jeremiadic form to warn these privileged listeners that it was irreligious to oppress African Americans and Haitians. Moreover, Douglass argued, Americans of African descent and Haitians represented the true chosen people who had overcome great struggle to secure their freedom. Douglass offered evidence that Haiti was dedicated to preserving the same rights treasured by Americans. In so doing, he confronted the most privileged and powerful people in the United States. Far from advancing freedom, these Americans had failed to uphold their duty when they discriminated against and thereby limited the freedom of their fellow Americans. In order to reverse this reality, fully-enfranchised
Americans would have to treat African Americans as equals. Only then would they fulfill the destiny set before them by their forefathers.

Concurrently, Douglass presented African Americans with proof that their race could form a community bound by a commitment to freedom that was superior to American nationalism. Through analogical reasoning, Douglass invited his audience to consider that if people of African descent in Haiti upheld the same values as Americans, then people of African descent in the United States could uphold those values, as well. Put otherwise, the Haitian example of a struggle for freedom could be taken up by African Americans to boost their eligibility for citizenship in their own country. Through the Haitian example, Douglass discursively linked Haitians and people of African descent in the United States. Haiti’s renaissance as a democratic, free nation suggested that African Americans would also live up to a valuable precious inheritance if afforded the same opportunity. Thus, as Douglass called out the prejudice enacted by fully-enfranchised Americans, he also enabled people of African descent to take pride in the notion that they were linked with Haitians through a shared racial heritage, and therefore, were related to superior protectors of freedom.

By advancing three pillars of American exceptionalism, Douglass reversed the traditional application of American exceptionalism to fully-enfranchised Americans and instead used them to characterize people of African descent. He posited that Haitian Revolution fighters were honorable and should be considered highly capable of defending the freedom of their people, just as US revolutionaries were honored. Moreover, Haitians were selected to fulfill an errand from God and had a precious inheritance to protect. Douglass appropriated American exceptionalism and applied it to a
nation that was founded by former slaves. He simultaneously uplifted his African American audience and reminded his more privileged supporters that they were failing to uphold precious American values. He appropriated American nationalist ideologies to demonstrate that Haitians, a people of African descent, could protect values that Americans also hold dear. In this way, Douglass invited African Americans to identify their role in fulfilling American exceptionalism. With Haitian’s brave freedom fighters in mind, perhaps African Americans could begin to militate against the narrow perceptions and exclusion of their race.

*Driving Ideologies of Civilization and Manifest Destiny*

In addition to touting Haiti’s exceptionalism, Douglass urged the United States to forgo prejudice against Haiti and strengthen diplomatic ties with the nation. Douglass capitalized on cultural currents that circulated in the late-nineteenth century, including the discourse of civilization and the ideology of Manifest Destiny, or the drive to continually expand US territory. Douglass’s arguments tapped into a collective national American identity and were particularly salient against the backdrop of the Exposition, which touted US progress and superiority. Specifically, Douglass argued that the United States was uncivilized for dismissing Haiti as a viable nation for trade and territorial expansion. Furthermore, Douglass framed Haiti as a civilized nation that stood in stark contrast to the incivility of the United States. In so doing, he reversed the “white man’s burden” to civilize non-whites; instead it was Haitians’ burden to civilize privileged Americans. Douglass reasoned that the United States would strengthen its global economic and political prowess if it abandoned its racial prejudice.
The United States was inextricably and transnationally linked to other nations through commerce, diplomacy, social movements, and the circulation of new knowledge and technologies. Throughout his Exposition speeches, Douglass leveraged this fact to argue that the United States was under the scrutiny of other nations of the world. When other nations compared the United States to Haiti, they would find Haiti to be the superior model of civilization. Moreover, the United States missed a key investment opportunity to continue expanding US interests when they shunned Haiti. An analysis of Douglass’s persuasive use of civilization and Manifest Destiny requires a brief contextual overview of these ideologies.

A discourse of civilization determined social mores and acceptable behavior along lines of class, gender, and race. According to historian Gail Bederman, enfranchised white men represented the ultimate form of civility while dark-skinned men were often portrayed as savage and inferior in the cultural milieu. This notion of racial superiority stemmed in part from the popular belief in the nineteenth century that white men had a mission to civilize savage men of other races in foreign countries. Rudyard Kipling coined the phrase in his 1899 poem, “The White Man’s Burden,” which justified imperialism as US white men’s duty to “civilize” savage people of other nations. Just before Kipling’s poem was published, the Exposition offered a synecdoche of US racial hierarchy based upon racial groups’ perceived level of civilization. African Americans were excluded from equal representation and participation based on that notion that were less civilized. They were rendered almost invisible when they were denied the opportunity to have a dedicated African American building. African countries’ exhibits were relegated to the Midway Plaisance part of the Exposition, which was set apart from
the grander and aptly named “White City.” In response to his race’s exclusion, Douglass unmasked the lie that the Exposition was a bastion of civilization. He aimed to spotlight the United States’ oppression of Haitian and African American exclusion at the Exposition to change his race’s poor treatment within the United States.

In addition to a discourse of civilization, Douglass appropriated the ideology of Manifest Destiny to convince his audience that Haiti was worth financial investment. Manifest Destiny refers to the ideology that in order for Americans to fulfill their duty to spread freedom, they had a right and a calling to continuously expand their nation’s geographic territory. Americans first secured new territory in the United States through westward expansion and then beyond US borders through wars such as the US-Mexico War of the mid-nineteenth century. Often, Manifest Destiny beliefs undergirded efforts to “civilize” indigenous peoples of lands that Americans settled. Importantly, the Exposition served as the site for a presentation delivered by Frederick Jackson Turner on July 12, 1893. Presented just five months after Douglass’s Exposition addresses, Turner’s thesis is widely accepted as a definitive treatise on the role of the frontier in shaping US national character. Manifest Destiny had been a well-developed concept in the American psyche before Turner’s famous presentation, but Turner put this phenomenon into words. With the turn of the century looming, Turner described the effects facing a largely-conquered frontier, signaling the end of westward expansion that had characterized American identity since the founding of the country. The nation was changing from a people who conquered largely unsettled, rural land toward a people engaged in industrialization and urban development. Turner claimed that the
disappearance of a “frontier line” marked the “closing of a great historic movement” and the end of the “colonization of the Great West.”

Turner’s thesis explained what drove territorial expansion outside of the United States. A pervasive understanding of American identity had been forged in what Ronald H. Carpenter terms the “persuasive myth” of the brave, enterprising frontiersman who Americans aspired to emulate. However, at the time of the Exposition, the new reality of a dwindling frontier coupled with industrialization was unsettling because it departed from this familiar myth. Imperialism emerged in this era, generating a rhetorical crisis of how to justify movement into new territories outside of the United States. Speaking only months before Turner, Douglass’s addresses corroborated the ideology of Manifest Destiny as a key component of American identity. He recognized that post-frontier Manifest Destiny would translate to expansion beyond US borders. He proposed that the desire to expand beyond the country’s borders would be satisfied, in part, by building a strong economic and political relationship with Haiti.

First, Douglass argued that the United States was putting itself at political risk through its uncivil treatment of Haiti. The United States was not only accountable for itself, he argued, but it was also subject to judgment by a network of nations with which it associates. He shamed the United States for shunning Haiti, while all other nations accepted Haiti as a viable nation-state. Previously, Douglass had used comparative strategies in anti-slavery discourses to pressure the United States to abolish slavery. For example, Douglass compared the United States to Britain after the British passed the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. He emphasized how the United States continued the barbaric practice of slavery while other nations had abandoned it. In his “Lecture on
Haiti” address, Douglass followed a similar strategy of comparison when he detailed how the United States maintained a poor relationship with Haiti while other countries embraced the island nation:

[O]ur boasted civilization is far behind all other nations. [Applause.] In every other country on the globe a citizen of Haiti is sure of civil treatment. [Applause.] In every other nation his manhood is recognized and respected. [Applause.] . . . Vastly different is the case with him when he ventures within the border of the United States.77

What is more, Douglass cautioned, “we continued to refuse to acknowledge the fact [of Haiti’s independence] and treated her as outside the sisterhood of nations.”78 With these words, Douglass underscored the United States’s transnational responsibilities in a world wherein countries had regular diplomatic and cultural exchanges. Other nations monitored the United States since it was a self-declared leader of civilization and an arbiter of freedom. Douglass warned that the actions of Americans had consequences beyond US borders. In rejecting a diplomatic relationship with Haiti, the US risked developing a reputation for incivility, which could tarnish their credibility on the world stage.

Douglass argued further that Haiti deserved the United States’s recognition as a capable and powerful nation. He compared Haiti’s government and leadership to those of the United States. To Douglass, Haitians were more civil than Americans who claimed to be models of civilization. Moreover, Haiti’s democratic government was almost identical to the US government, and therefore, was just as legitimate. Douglass offered as proof that “[Haiti] has her judiciary, her executive and legislative departments. She has her
house of representatives and her senate. All the functions of government have been, and are now being, regularly performed within her domain.”

Douglass also compared the president of Haiti to the heroic figure of President Abraham Lincoln: “Like Abraham Lincoln, President Hyppolite was duly elected President of Haiti and took the oath of office prescribed by his country. . . . If one should be commended for his patriotism, so should the other.” It was a bold claim to compare the president of Haiti to Abraham Lincoln, who was widely considered a hero in the northern United States for his role in abolishing slavery and ushering in freedom for African- and American-born slaves. Douglass’s long list of similarities to US government and leadership situated Haiti as a legitimate democracy.

Next, Douglass leveled a second argument for the United States to foster a better relationship with Haiti that tapped into Manifest Destiny logics of expansion. Douglass stressed the possible economic and political gains if the United States traded with Haiti. In so doing, he suggested that the frontier crisis would be solved by the United States’ increased commercial and political relationships with other nations and territories. The latter half of the nineteenth century marked a surge in industrial and economic expansion in the United States, beginning with the period of Reconstruction following the Civil War. By the 1870s, however, US economic and political elites felt uncertain about the ability of the US market to sustain the amount of growth brought on by increased industrialization. Foreign trade and production offered relief from that anxiety because it represented new opportunities for expansion. Contemporaneous accounts confirm this trend. In a 1904 book entitled, *The Expansion of the American People: Social and Territorial*, Edwin Erle Sparks claimed that the post-Reconstruction industrial boom in
the American South “quieted the demands of capital and allayed for the time the territorial expansion feeling. But colonial sentiment was simply awaiting precipitation.”

By the late 1860s, the United States sought commercial engagement with Cuba, other West Indian islands, and Hawaii.

Frederick Merk argues that the 1880s and 1890s marked a resurgence in the desire for expansion as “the [American] economy reached maturity.” After reaching this apogee, however, the economy dipped into a recession that culminated in the panic of 1893. In response, politicians, primarily from the Republican Party, touted foreign expansionism as a surefire boost for the economy. According to William Appleman Williams, during this period people “began to agitate for more vigorous action by the government to expand the marketplace to preserve America’s uniqueness. They wanted more expansion abroad, more empire, to preserve individualist freedom at home.”

Economic expansion abroad also fulfilled the US mission to civilize non-Americans. Anders Stephanson avers that “commerce was the precise measure of civilization,” meaning that to invest in new lands financially was to also civilize the people within them. Simultaneously, many pro-expansion political figures, including Theodore Roosevelt, sought stronger diplomatic connections with foreign lands to bolster the nation’s political, economic, and military strength. Notably, these activities aligned with the era in which Douglass delivered his Exposition addresses. Drawing upon his recent diplomatic experiences, Douglass predicted the national move toward economic expansionism. He understood that investment in Haiti offered a solution to American anxieties caused by the dipping economy and the lack of new territory for expansion.
Thus, he touted the economic windfall that could result from American elite’s financial engagement with Haiti.\textsuperscript{89}

As part of his strategy to uplift Haiti, Douglass needed to prove that investing in Haiti was the next logical step in the national mythos of Manifest Destiny. To this end, Douglass characterized Haiti as a verdant land of milk and honey poised for US investment. He argued further that Haiti’s presence at the Exposition offered proof that Haiti was a financially stable nation worthy of US attention: “She might easily become, in proportion to her territory and population, the richest country in the world. [Applause].”\textsuperscript{90} The United States neglected important economic opportunities by discriminating against Haiti, which had proved its legitimacy to the world. He implored his audience to consider the lucrative benefits of investment with Haiti with a list of what the nation already offers:

While she is one of our very best customers, selling her coffee and her other valuable products to Europe for gold, and sending us her gold to buy our flour, our fish, our oil, our beef and our pork; while she is thus enriching our merchants and our farmers and our country generally, she is the one country to which we turn the cold shoulder.\textsuperscript{91}

Douglass touted Haiti’s capitalistic potential by listing the goods and services of the country throughout his speeches. These included coffee, cotton, and wood exports.\textsuperscript{92} Moreover, the country offered a convenient location for trade and represented an opportunity to increase US wealth:

[Haiti’s] large and increasing commerce with us, should alone make us deeply interested in her welfare, her history, her progress and her possible destiny.
Haiti is a rich country. She has many things which we need and we have many things which she needs.\textsuperscript{93} Douglass painted an enticing picture of Haiti as an easily attainable boost to the US economy. Moreover, he emphasized how the nations needed one another to achieve maximum financial potential.

After dangling this fruit, however, Douglass insisted that a successful relationship between the nations was predicated upon abandoning racial prejudice against people of African descent in Haiti. As Haitian Commissioner, Douglass had overseen failed diplomatic negotiations between the United States and Haiti to establish an American military base at a strategic point in Haiti, on the Mole St. Nicolas peninsula.\textsuperscript{94} Douglass asserted that “the nation that can get [the peninsula] and hold it will be master of the land and sea in its neighborhood.”\textsuperscript{95} Yet, the United States failed to acquire this desirable area of Haiti during diplomatic negotiations. Douglass cited racial discrimination as a root cause of the conflict.\textsuperscript{96} In “Lecture on Haiti,” Douglass claimed that “Haiti is black, and we [as a nation] have not yet forgiven her for being black [applause],”\textsuperscript{97} to suggest that US diplomats failed to accept Haiti based on its African heritage. Douglass added,

No man can point to any act of [Americans] to win the respect and friendship of this black republic . . . No people would be likely soon to forget such treatment and fail to resent it in one form or another.\textsuperscript{98} Douglass argued that to establish commercial relations with Haiti and obtain territories like Mole St. Nicolas, the United States would have to treat the nation more civilly.

Cross-national lines of trade and diplomacy between the United States and Haiti
promised to reap lucrative benefits if the United States only accepted racial differences and embraced Haiti.

By framing the US-Haitian diplomatic relationship through the lenses of civilization and Manifest Destiny, Douglass established the global consequences that resulted from the nation’s failure to respect people of African descent. First, he pointed to privileged Americans’ incivility toward Haitians, which could tarnish the US reputation on a global scale. He also compelled US elites to increase diplomacy with Haiti for financial gain and to solve the frontier crisis. To embrace and to invest in Haiti was a logical next step in American expansion, consistent with Manifest Destiny ideology. Moreover, Douglass warned, elite Americans would be judged by the entire world for their discrimination against people of African descent, which would harm their diplomatic efforts abroad. But changing discriminatory behavior would continue the march toward Manifest Destiny and also foster greater US prosperity on a global stage. The United States would have to accept Haiti’s African heritage in order to protect their transnational relationships with all nations and to reap full rewards of a financial relationship with Haiti.

*Asserting African Americans’ Place in the Nation-State*

Douglass advanced the argument that Haitians were highly capable of building a strong nation and that they were worthy financial and diplomatic partners. Next, Douglass linked Haitians and African Americans in a transnational Pan-African community based in their shared racial heritage for dual purposes: to exert pressure on more privileged US citizens to assimilate African Americans into the nation, and to empower African Americans to agitate for greater inclusion. First, Douglass constituted
Haitians and African Americans in a proud transnational Pan-African community based in heritage rather than national affiliation. Second, Douglass reasoned that Haiti’s example proved that all people of African descent were capable national citizens, and therefore, African Americans deserved full citizenship rights in the United States. Finally, he argued that it was African Americans’ destiny to follow in Haiti’s wake to secure true freedom in the United States.

Douglass joined Haitians and African Americans in a transnational Pan-African community when he upheld Haiti’s impressive example as a synecdoche for the proud character of all people of African descent. In “Lecture on Haiti,” Douglass claimed that Haitian revolutionary fighters “were linked and interlinked with their race, and [in] striking for their freedom, they struck for the freedom of every black man in the world. [Prolonged applause.]”99 In this passage, Douglass highlighted how Haiti’s revolution had effects well beyond the borders of Haiti such that it secured freedom for all people of African descent. Douglass suggested that transnational Pan-African belonging resulted not from one’s membership or location in a particular nation-state. Instead, he constructed a community of people “linked and interlinked” through their shared racial heritage. As such, Douglass’s rhetoric imagined a transnational Pan-African community100 that transcended national boundaries and belonging to include people of African descent. In the “Dedication Ceremonies” speech, Douglass reinforced how it was Haiti’s mission “to give to the world a new and true revelation of the black man's character. This mission she has performed and performed it well. [Applause.]”101 Haiti’s revolution uplifted people of African descent the world over. African Americans, linked
with Haitians in a transnational Pan-African community, possessed the same character as Haiti’s brave freedom fighters.

Douglass’s transnational Pan-African community also served his larger nationalist program for African Americans’ assimilation and integration into US society. In “Lecture on Haiti,” Douglass suggested that, just as Haitians were “brave men, men who loved liberty more than life,”102 African Americans who assimilated fully into the United States would be a boon to the values of freedom and liberty that Americans held so dear. Douglass concluded that the United States should begin assimilating African Americans as full citizens. Rather than give in to relocation movements to achieve freedom, Douglass argued for his race’s right to assimilate within the United States. Douglass continued,

It is about as idle for the black man to think of getting rid of the white man, as it is for the white man to think of getting rid of the black. They are just the two races which cannot be excluded from any part of the globe, nor can they exclude each other; so we might as well decide to live together here as to go elsewhere[].103

Douglass suggested that the “two races” would always occupy the same geographic locations, and therefore the most sensible course forward was for both races “to decide to live together.” Douglass implied that fully-enfranchised Americans should welcome African Americans as fellow citizens. For Douglass, it was a forgone conclusion that African Americans were worthy of citizenship and could support the nation. Douglass maintained that there was a heavy responsibility on more privileged Americans to accommodate African Americans.
And yet, Douglass also shaped opportunities for his African American audience to take a more active role in securing their equality, especially because their relationship with Haitians offered resilience and inspiration. He claimed that the purpose of his “Lecture on Haiti” speech was to reflect on Haiti’s “example as a free and independent Republic, upon what may be the destiny of the African race in our own country and elsewhere.”

Douglass implied that while Haitians were free within their own nation, African Americans were not. However, Douglass crafted a vision of African Americans’ destiny through Haiti’s example. In his speech at the Haitian Pavilion, Douglass declared that Haiti “has never been ashamed of her cause or of her color,” and implied that African Americans should feel pride, as well. Moreover, Haitians “gained their freedom and independence against odds as formidable as ever confronted a righteous cause or its advocates.” Douglass upheld Haitians’ example to suggest that, just as Haitians had thrown off their oppressors, so would African Americans. Therefore, Douglass provided his African American audience with an example of how other people of African descent had agitated for increased rights. Now, African Americans could feel empowered by the weight of the transnational Pan-African community behind them.

In short, members of Douglass’s transnational Pan-African community could find solace in their shared experiences with racial discrimination and invoke Haiti’s example as evidence that they could fully integrate into the US national community. African Americans who had little-to-no representation at the Exposition could potentially feel pride in identifying as members of a community that transcended US nationalism. Through this connection with Haiti’s freedom fighters, Douglass suggested that people of African descent deserved full citizenship, and that more privileged Americans should
welcome them. Now bonded with Haitians in a transnational Pan-African community, African Americans had a stronger foothold from which to grasp onto the rights and privileges that they deserved as members of their nation.

**Conclusion: Lessons from Douglass’s Transnational Community**

This chapter considered how Douglass leveraged US nationalistic themes to link Haitians, who modeled a superior form of nationalism, with African Americans in a transnational Pan-African community. Douglass repurposed the jeremiadic form into the Black jeremiad, declaring that people of African descent were a chosen people just as the American pilgrims had been. Douglass described Haiti’s struggle in US nationalistic terms to uphold Haiti’s nationalism as superior to US nationalism. In comparison to American Revolutionaries, Haitians had overcome greater odds. For this reason, they were a chosen people who struck for freedom and protected a precious inheritance: the values of freedom and liberty that characterized their nation. Second, Douglass tapped into the US desire to advance political and economic progress to argue that the United States must cease discrimination against Haitians. Only then would Americans achieve true civility and be viewed favorably by other nations, which would allow them to continue the march toward Manifest Destiny. Finally, Douglass constituted African Americans as interlinked with Haitians in a transnational Pan-African community. He reasoned that people of African descent had proven their eligibility for citizenship through Haiti’s example, and therefore, should be assimilated into the United States. Douglass invited his audiences to come to different conclusions depending on their standpoints: Privileged Americans should support African American cultural assimilation, while African Americans should continue to assert their place in the nation,
since they deserved to be counted as citizens. Through these strategies, Douglass urged privileged audience members to support African Americans’ full enfranchisement. He also propped up Haiti as a shining example of the capabilities of the African race. Because they were related to Haiti, African Americans should have the opportunity to be fully-participating, vital members of their own nation.

These speeches offered some of Douglass’s final words about African American rights in the United States. He died in 1895, just two years after speaking at the Exposition. As with any contextual rhetorical analysis, we cannot be certain about the direct impact of these speeches on the treatment of African Americans in the United States. It is known that the speeches immediately circulated through national African American and white newspapers and through the Lecture on Haiti pamphlet. Also, it is possible to trace Douglass’s rhetorical strategies through to twentieth century civil rights activists. In a few short years, for example, W. E. B. Du Bois would incorporate American exceptionalism and jeremiadic rhetoric in his call for increased African American civil rights. According to Michael A. Gomez, Du Bois was also “a leading architect” of the African Diaspora of the twentieth century and discussed Pan-Africanism in his writings. Du Bois followed Douglass’s lead when he engaged exceptionalist rhetoric to describe members of his race and conceived of a transnational Pan-African community of African Americans.

This case study has also demonstrated how the transnational analysis of a speech text helps scholars attend to how multiple nations and people shape and engage nationalist discourses. Douglass accused fully-enfranchised Americans of failing African Americans through appeals based in American exceptionalism. Douglass also touted the
importance of the United States’ acceptance of Haitians, or else the nation risked losing
economic and political superiority. Finally, he forged a transnational Pan-African
community to boost African Americans’ value to the nation-state and to potentially offer
them encouragement to agitate for greater rights in the United States.

However, Douglass’s conceptualization of the transnational citizen of African
descent also placed limits on who could participate. Because women were not recognized
as fully-enfranchised citizens at the time, and throughout his speeches, Douglass’s citizen
was presumed to be male. Indeed, except for rare exceptions, most leaders of civil rights
movements were male into the twentieth century because of the perceived impropriety of
female public speakers at the time. Douglass was also a well-educated gentleman with a
polished oratorical style. His refined manner made him more appealing to mixed-race
audiences, and especially white audiences, throughout his career. At the time of the
Exposition, Douglass also held celebrity status as the most famous African American
activist of his time, which undoubtedly heightened interest in his speeches. Notably,
Douglass’s counterpart at the Exposition, Ida B. Wells, provided an important contrast as
a female African American leader who called out men and women, white and African
American, for their complicity in the violence against African Americans. 109 Also, other
African American speakers would advance a different argument for increased racial
equality through the Exposition’s Women’s Congress. Both Wells and the Congress
speakers would continue to agitate for African American civil rights into the twentieth
century. Wells, for example, collaborated with W. E. B. Du Bois and the newly-formed
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. 110
In closing, this chapter has picked up where social and political theorists have left off to perform a transnational rhetorical analysis of Douglass’s Exposition speeches. Much of rhetorical criticism focuses on the national elements that define US citizens and identities. This context is vitally important, but we must look beyond national dynamics to larger, cross-cultural exchanges that shape discourse, identity, and nationalism. Looking beyond the nation expands conceptualizations of identity in a specific moment and over time. In order to approach such texts with an eye toward transnationalism, scholars of rhetoric and public address should identify global linkages that past rhetors might have harnessed to persuade their audiences. We must attend to these interconnectivities to fully understand a rhetor’s motivations and strategies. With Frederick Douglass as an illustrative example, we know that nineteenth-century rhetors agitated for increased rights through a transnational Pan-African community, in tandem with and in opposition to US nationalism.

1 Christopher Robert Reed, “All the World is Here!”: The Black Presence at White City (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 176.
2 Robert Muccigrosso claims that attendance figures “exceeded 27 million” for the duration of the fair. See Celebrating the New World: Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893 (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 80.


10 I located both speech texts online through the Library of Congress’s Daniel A. P. Murray Pamphlet Collection. They are located together in a file entitled *Lecture on Haiti. The Haitian Pavilion Dedication Ceremonies Delivered at the World's Fair, in Jackson Park, Chicago, Jan. 2d, 1893. By the Honorable Frederick Douglass*. The archive features the text of this document in digital form, which was generated from the original pamphlet entitled *Lecture on Haiti* located in the Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress. The pamphlet indicates where the audience presumably applauded during Douglass’s speeches. I have retained those notes in this essay. Full citation: Frederick Douglass, *Lecture on Haiti. The Haitian Pavilion Dedication Ceremonies Delivered at the World’s Fair, in Jackson Park, Chicago, Jan. 2d, 1893. By the Honorable Frederick Douglass* (Chicago: The Violet Agents Supply Co., 1893), accessed from Library of Congress’s Daniel A. P. Murray Pamphlet Collection, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/lcrbmrp.t2109.


12 McClish, “Frederick Douglass and the Consequences of Rhetoric,” 39.

13 *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution*, eds. Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon, 10.


18 Ibid., 42-60.

19 Ibid., 61-65.


21 Ballard, “A People without a Nation,” 27

22 For an example of a rhetorical transnational analysis, see Rebecca Dingo, *Networking Arguments: Rhetoric, Transnational Feminism, and Public Policy Writing* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2012).


24 Ibid.


32 Ibid., 354.


43 Deborah L. Madsen, *American Exceptionalism* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 14. See also the work of Sacvan Bercovitch and Perry Miller, who are
widely cited for their authoritative accounts of puritanism, American exceptionalism, and the American jeremiad.

51 Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon provide an excellent account of the events of the Haitian Revolution in *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution*, 10-11.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 38.
55 Ibid., 49.
56 Ibid., 35.
57 Ibid., 34.
58 Ibid., 44.
60 See Daniel Walker Howe’s *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 243-4. Howe claims that John Quincy Adams was the first speaker to use the term “precious inheritance” in his Inaugural Address on March 4, 1825.
63 Ibid., 22.
66 Ballard, “A People without a Nation,” 27.
69 Ibid., 3-5.
70 Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 93.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 39-40.
80 Ibid., 21.
85 Ibid., 231-232.


Ibid., 9.

Ibid., 13.

Ibid., 8.


Ibid., 9-10. Historians agree for the most part that the conflict was more complicated than race prejudice, so it is interesting that Douglass made this claim in his speech (See Himelhoch, “Frederick Douglass and Haiti's Mole St. Nicolas,” 180). Douglass had been criticized while in the post, which some attributed to race prejudice or the idea that a “white man” would be better suited for negotiations with Haiti, but Douglass had also made some diplomatic errors. The US government limited Douglass’s involvement in Haiti after a series of negotiations failed to have positive results, and Douglass eventually resigned from his post (Himelhoch, 177).


Ibid., 10.

Ibid., 34.

Benedict Anderson first introduced the notion that communities are “imagined” or constituted through people’s shared identity, in *Imagined Communities*.


Ibid., 52.

Ibid., 27.

Ibid., 7.

Ibid., 47.

Ibid., 52.


Wells frequently claimed that failure to respond to and protest violence was akin to performing that violence. For example, see *The Reason Why* pamphlet and one of Wells’s most famous speeches: Ida B. Wells, “‘Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in all its Phases,’ 1892, with Mary Church Terrell's Introduction, 1893,” in *Man Cannot Speak for Her: Key Texts of the Early Feminists*, ed. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, Vol. 2 (New York, NY: Praeger, 1989), 385-419.

CHAPTER THREE:
LAUNCHING INTO THE PUBLIC SPHERE: NATIONALIZING AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN AT THE TRANSNATIONAL WOMEN’S CONGRESS

Introduction

On May 19, 1893, Hallie Quinn Brown delivered an address that advocated for African American women’s increased civil rights to an audience of mostly white women. Brown was one of only six African American women speakers who were invited to present alongside hundreds of other women from around the world at the Women’s Congress of the World’s Columbian Exposition. Brown ended her speech with a line that called for women to unite in the United States and around the world:

God speed the day when the white American woman, strengthened by her wealth, her social position, and her years of superior training, may clasp hands with the less fortunate black woman of America, and both unite in declaring that “God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.”

Brown’s declaration spoke to a theme that animated the speeches of all African American Congress speakers: People around the world deserved equal rights, including African American women. The Women’s Congress was one of the most popular speaking events of the Exposition. It welcomed more than 150,000 attendees over one week. African Americans had been excluded from representation throughout most of the Columbian Exposition, and many members of the Exposition’s Board of Lady Managers had resisted
allowing any African American women to address the Congress. As such, the six speakers had a difficult rhetorical task of convincing their audience members, many of whom were against their inclusion in the Congress, that they deserved equal inclusion in the Women’s Congress, and by extension, the Exposition.

Scholars draw attention to the fact that while the Exposition seemed to expand opportunities for women in civic engagement and leadership, it did not do so equally for all women. African American women in particular were doubly marginalized for their gender and their race, and this reality carried over to the Exposition setting. African American women were denied the opportunity to serve on the Board of Lady Managers or enjoy more than minimum representation in the Woman’s Building. Because of these limitations, a small cadre of African American women articulated their arguments for African American civil rights through participation in the Congress. Fannie Barrier Williams, Anna Julia Cooper, Fannie Jackson Coppin, Sarah J. Early, Hallie Quinn Brown, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper joined hundreds of women who addressed Congress audiences. Though attendees hailed from many nations, the audiences were made up of primarily white women who were national and international leaders.

According to Shirley Wilson Logan, the African American women speakers faced a difficult rhetorical task because they had the dual responsibility of representing a “disenfranchised, brutalized, oppressed race” who had to articulate how their civil rights were denied them, but simultaneously “had to present themselves as respectable, articulate women who contradicted all the stereotypes upon which this treatment was founded.”
This chapter aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how African American women attempted to overcome these rhetorical restraints as they advocated for increased rights. Scholars have analyzed these speeches from historical and rhetorical perspectives, but an analysis of the speeches through the lenses of public sphere, feminist, and transnational theories may offer new understandings of how the African American women speakers negotiated equal rights through the Women’s Congress. Catherine A. Squires calls for a deeper understanding of the relationship between publics and dominant society and “modes of communicative and cultural expression” within public spheres. In response, this chapter argues that the speakers formed a feminist African American counterpublic through their Exposition speeches in order to rhetorically insert themselves into a transnational feminist counterpublic sphere of the Women’s Congress, and eventually into the Exposition’s broader public sphere. Specifically, they appealed to the Exposition’s rhetoric of progress to argue for increased civil rights in three ways: First, through a rhetoric of sisterhood, the speakers constituted African American women in a feminist African American counterpublic that served as a discursive space to elucidate African American women’s interests and advance them outward. Next, through appeals to civility, the speakers characterized African American women as legitimate participants in the Congress, and then linked their equal inclusion to civility. Finally, the speakers launched African American women’s rights into the Exposition’s public sphere when they pressured the nation to accommodate African American women as the way to realize true national progress.

To advance these claims, this chapter first contextualizes the Women’s Congress speeches within the broader Exposition. Then, using public sphere, feminist, and
transnational rhetorical theories, I analyze the six speakers’ discourse to explain their rhetorical strategies for launching their equal rights arguments into the Exposition’s public sphere. I determine that the speakers legitimized African Americans’ contributions and weaved women of their race into a US nationalist narrative of progress. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of this study for rhetorical scholarship. This chapter finds that African American womanhood was intelligible in the US public sphere as long as it aligned with nation-state interests. Even so, the speakers advanced a political identity for African American women in the US public sphere.

**The Women’s Congress: Collectivizing through a Transnational Feminist Counterpublic Sphere**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Columbian Exposition facilitated the transnational movement of people, innovative ideas, and rhetorical strategies. Exhibits touted countries’ scientific and civic progress. The Congress also served as a space for transnational discursive exchange and deliberation, both at and beyond the event. The Congress’s stated mission and proceedings reveal how Congress leaders embraced the Exposition’s transnational movement and rhetoric. A year after the Congress ended, the Woman’s Branch of the Congress Auxiliary commissioned the publication of *The World’s Congress of Representative Women: A Historical Résumé for Popular Circulation.*\(^\text{12}\) The two-volume anthology contained an introduction that articulated the Congress’s mission and included a schedule of proceedings. It also reproduced the text of a majority of the addresses delivered at the event. The Congress volume claimed that the Congress had “the purpose of presenting to the people of the world the wonderful progress of women in all civilized lands in the great departments of intellectual
activity.”13 It was meant to encompass “all the varied interests in which the women of the world are concerned.”14 It also served as a stand-in for the annual meetings of several national and international women’s organizations, including the National and International Councils of Women and the Federation of Women’s Clubs.15 In a circular released to announce the intentions of the Women’s Congress, Congress President Bertha Palmer had announced that “all distinguished women […] will meet on absolutely equal terms for the advancement of the common interests of women everywhere.”16 She continued, “Wisdom will be drawn from women of all nations; all bring their votive offerings to build and make beautiful the great temple of truth.”17

The Congress planners intended for the event to spark a global conversation about women’s public work and to account for women’s role in human progress. During the Congress week, representatives from almost all continents delivered addresses18 meant to answer the question, “What is [women’s] part in the development of the whole [human race] and in the work of the world?”19 In her opening address on May 15, Palmer exclaimed, “The influence of good emanating from these halls can not be overestimated, for the words here spoken will be widely read and felt.”20 Delegates from nations who attended the Congress, especially “accredited representatives of the different European governments,” would generate “reports which they will make on their return [that] will be published and widely read.”21 According to the volume editor and Congress Chairman, May Wright Sewall, the large crowds at the Congress proved that people were interested in women’s concerns and wanted to engage in discussions about women. She noted that the “desire in woman to tell her own story, to paint her own portrait, to read her own future” was matched by the “eagerness of the world at large to listen to the story, to look
at the picture and the vision.” The volume introduction invited readers to pursue the printed speeches, since “the word […] is the best symbol of the spirit” of the Congress. The Congress planners meant for ideas expressed at the event to resonate with their immediate audiences, and then to circulate back to attendees’ home nations.

The Women’s Congress events bear the hallmarks of what scholars would consider a transnational public sphere. Jürgen Habermas originally introduced public sphere theory to describe citizens’ political discourse, which aimed to develop public opinion and deliberate in order to advance citizens’ mutual interests. Scholars have expanded upon Habermas’s original theory because, they argue, it fails to attend to the reality that there are people who may have barriers to full participation in the public sphere or who may organize outside of the dominant public sphere. Furthermore, public spheres are not limited to discursive exchange among people within nation-state boundaries but can also be global, such as when people of multiple nations form political communities. Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink define the transnational public sphere as “a space in which both residents of distinct places (states or localities) and members of transnational entities (organizations or firms) elaborate discourses and practices whose consumption moves beyond national boundaries.” Bart Cammaerts and Leo Van Audenhove add that transnational public spheres describe when “civil society actors” organize on “a transnational level, engaging with issues that transcend the boundaries of the nation state.” However, they caution that these transnational spheres are not “unified,” but rather scholars must attend to the local and national identities, interests, and ideological views of parties involved. Nancy Fraser notes further that transnational public spheres are “communicative arenas in which the interlocutors are not
fellow members of a political community” but still engage in political discussion for some kind of social or cultural change. Transnational public spheres, then, are formed as people exchange discourse and ideas that are not firmly situated in and can move outside of their present nation-state or geographic locations.

Fraser also argues that a transnational public sphere complicates the traditional public sphere, which located “a model of deliberative democracy for a territorially bounded polity.” She poses the question, what are the conditions and constraints of a public whose members are dispersed within and outside of the nation-state, and where the public is always changing and shifting? In light of transnational public sphere theory, she proposes that “inclusive public opinion” results “not in shared citizenship, but [people’s] co-imbrication in a common set of structures and/or institutions that affect their lives.” In other words, people’s membership in a transnational public is not derived from their citizenship status, but rather from participation in a collective discursive community that engages issues that matter to members of the community.

Some scholars have pushed back against or have extended Fraser’s assertions, offering that publics are still linked to nation-states in substantial ways. They argue that subjects are still beholden to the laws and regulations of their geographic and national locations.

Scholars have begun to elucidate modern ways in which transnational discursive spaces provide the grounds for political agitation that does not center on the nation-state. They are still examining the political efficacy of transnational public spheres to see if they offer greater liberating potential as they move across and within borders. In particular, feminist public sphere scholars propose a transnational feminist public sphere. Lisa McLaughlin argues that transnational feminist public spheres advance transnational
feminist goals through which “shared counterhegemonic political consciousness crystallizes into collective political practice at the global level.”37 She continues that, ideally, a transnational feminist public sphere would serve an important role of attending to “the impact of globalization processes on the public sphere.” A transnational feminist public sphere today consists of “transnational feminist networks that have been constituted in order to consolidate struggles against gender equality and justice.”38 Members engaged in these discussions work toward “creating solidarity, exchanging experiences, and sharing strategies” and work to include all women as knowledge producers at all levels of globalization processes.39

While feminist and other transnational public spheres may offer potential for political agitation, scholars also caution that such spheres are still fraught with issues of access and equality that plague traditional public sphere discussions. Both knowledge production and access to transnational public spheres vary by participants’ location and economic status.40 Craig J. Calhoun claims that transnational elites, including businesses and organizations, still have more control than individual actors in the transnational public sphere.41 Taking a cue from Keck and Sikkink, who study the precursors to modern transnational social movements, historic versions of the transnational public sphere might offer more knowledge about the political efficacy of transnational public spheres. There is more to uncover about how people historically collectivized to generate knowledge and protest barriers to their national rights. The Women’s Congress discussions, for instance, were still governed by what Fraser identifies as the “protocols of style and decorum” that “functioned informally to marginalize women and members of the plebeian classes and prevent them from participating as peers.”42
In addition to transnational public spheres, scholars have also started accounting for many nuanced types of publics that emerge in response to social and political inequality. Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer, for example, refer to a “multiplicity” or a multitude of publics.\footnote{43} Scholars posit that there are multiple spheres in which people can participate and circulate arguments. Calhoun claims that “A public sphere comprises an indefinite number of more or less overlapping publics, some ephemeral, some enduring, and some shaped by struggle against the dominant organization of others.”\footnote{44} To account for a multitude of publics, scholars have proposed counterpublic spheres to describe spaces for counter hegemonic discourse,\footnote{45} including feminist public spheres\footnote{46} and black public spheres.\footnote{47} These spaces and discourses are informed by points of difference from members in the dominant and exclusionary public sphere, including race, gender, and economic class.\footnote{48} Fraser states that counterpublics “on the one hand, […] function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.”\footnote{49} According to Mary P. Ryan, members of a counterpublic exchange ideas from a “place of political marginality and social injustice” and form “their own particular stakes in the public interest” as they seek to enter the public sphere.\footnote{50} Counterpublics are formed with the intent to eventually move its members’ concerns into the broader public sphere. James Bohman claims that counterpublics “must be embedded in a larger institutional and political context, if they are to be transformed into public spheres in which citizens can make claims and expect a response.”\footnote{51} This chapter attends to how this multitude of spheres could offer marginalized rhetors more opportunities to make and respond to arguments for their inclusion.
Particularly salient to this analysis is a feminist counterpublic sphere. Rita Felski explains how a feminist counterpublic sphere “offers a critique of cultural values from the standpoint of women as a marginalized group within society” wherein “the experience of discrimination, oppression, and cultural dislocation proves the impetus for the development of a self-consciously oppositional identity.”52 Felski argues further that a feminist counterpublic sphere “seeks to convince society as a whole of the validity of feminist claims, challenging existing structures of authority through political activity and theoretical critique.”53 Drawing upon Felski, Bonnie J. Dow and Mari Boor Tonn argue that a feminist counterpublic discourse helps scholars conceive of many feminist rhetorical resources besides a feminine style of speaking. For example, through an analysis of Governor Ann Richards’ rhetoric, Dow and Tonn note that rhetors can persuade audiences in traditional political contexts but still advance a critical rhetoric, or rhetoric that offers “positive alternatives to the discourses of power,” for feminist aims.54 Thus, participants of a feminist counterpublic sphere have a range of rhetorical options to advance their arguments: their discourse may operate through traditional political frames but still advance feminist aims, while others’ arguments may draw upon feminine style and femininity for similar liberating purposes.55

I propose that the discursive exchange and collective knowledge production of all women speakers at the Women’s Congress created a transnational feminist counterpublic sphere. The Congress women advanced clear feminist aims when they demanded that women be recognized for their contributions to progress alongside men at the Exposition. The introduction to the Congress volume offers clues to how women asserted themselves as agents who believed “that women are dissatisfied with any conception of themselves,
with any position which implies their natural, necessary, and therefore perpetual subordination to men.” The volume expressed that woman “has acquired a new conception of herself, as also an independent individual and a conscious daughter of God, which is not harmonious with the former prevailing conception of her as man’s addendum, his helpmeet, his subordinate.” In an introductory speech on May 15, Congress Vice President Ellen M. Henrotin asserted that the Congress was “destined to bring about a peaceful revolution in the social, legal, and moral status of women.” In other words, Congress women united around the feminist goal of elevating themselves from a subordinate position to men as part of their vision of progress. The Congress discussions would provide a communicative space to articulate strategies for advancing women’s equality.

The Congress’s speakers and attendees constituted a collective that exchanged discourse about women’s issues that crossed national borders, such as women’s suffrage. The Congress volume lists women from sixteen countries on the Advisory Council and 126 representatives of women’s organizations from these nations. Over one week, more than 300 women “of a score of nationalities” contributed addresses or discussions on the status of women. Based upon their experiences in their home nations, women were urged to “present their position and work in every field of labor which they have entered [so that] women might read their own interpretations of their natures, their own version of their rights, responsibilities, duties, and destiny.” In the closing address of the Congress, May Wright Sewall announced plans to create an International Parliament of Women, composed of women from countries’ national organizations. This organization would form “a republic of ideas,” as it was detached from any one “republic,” or nation,
wherein “questions of womankind shall be discussed, but where all the great questions that concern humanity shall be discussed from woman’s point of view.” She expressed her hope that the Parliament would eventually turn into an “International Parliament for Men and Women.” She traced the goal of women’s progress from the Congress, to women’s international organizing, to an eventual mixed-gender organization, which would denote that men and women were finally equals. In the meantime, the Congress provided grounds for a transnational feminist counterpublic sphere through which women could shape arguments for equality and through which, ideally, African American women could assert their particular case for national inclusion.

A Site of Public Negotiation: African Americans in the Women’s Congress

The public nature of the Exposition placed women in a bind; they were expected to maintain their femininity, but also to participate in the Exposition’s narrative of national progress, which was rooted in the masculine concepts of civilization and science. Planning committees debated whether to incorporate women’s displays of progress into major exhibits or whether to separate them. Ultimately, the Exposition planners provided women with their own representative arm in the Exposition’s Board of Lady Managers. The Board headed efforts to construct a Woman’s Building with “the official purpose of showcasing the advancements and achievements of women from the United States and countries around the world,” according to art historian, Wanda Corn. The Board consisted of at least 115 women, with two from every state and territory and the District of Columbia. Members of the Board were all white women and a majority were middle-to-upper class with the means to cover the cost of their travel to Chicago. Many were clubwomen, business owners, and philanthropists. Though homogenous in
their racial and economic backgrounds, the women butted heads over the emerging issue of “new women,” who demanded greater public engagement including enfranchisement, versus “true womanhood,” which favored domestic pursuits as women’s most important role.  

More radical women on the board, mostly suffragists, had advocated for women’s full integration into all exhibition spaces. Meanwhile, Board President Bertha Honoré Palmer was considered a safe choice to head the Board because she subscribed to “true womanhood”: she supported education and women’s advancement but was undecided on woman suffrage.

Another key contribution by women at the Exposition was to host the World’s Congress of Representative Women, or the Women’s Congress, from May 15-21, 1893. During the Congress, hundreds of speakers discussed women’s contributions to their nations’ progress in a public forum. Organized and administered by the Woman’s Branch of the World’s Congress Auxiliary, the Women’s Congress was one of the largest and most popular Congresses at the Exposition. Up to eighteen sessions ran at once, with 330 scheduled speakers for a total of seventy-six sessions. The sessions were held off-site at the Art Palace, seven miles north of the Exposition grounds. This larger building, which would become the Art Institute of Chicago after the Exposition, could accommodate bigger crowds than the Woman’s Building. Crowd sizes varied from session to session, but when well-known speakers like Susan B. Anthony or Elizabeth Cady Stanton were scheduled to appear, the crowds overflowed. Congress speeches were meant to showcase women as leaders in “science, education, and the arts” and to demonstrate “civic unity” as a marker of progress. Another marker of progress was women’s civility and refinement. As a result, President Bertha Palmer encouraged
Women’s Congress speakers to avoid social and political criticism in the service of promoting American women’s advancement.77

The Congress audience members were primarily white, well-educated, and middle-to-upper class women of many nationalities.78 A few prominent African Americans were in the crowd, as well, including Frederick Douglass, who was the only man allowed to address the Congress after the opening address.79 Douglass followed Williams, Cooper, and Coppin’s addresses on May 18 with brief remarks of his own. His words complimented the “refined, educated colored ladies addressing—and addressing successfully—one of the most intelligent white audiences that I ever looked upon.” Douglass claimed that his “mind is too much illuminated with hope and with expectation for the race in seeing this sign.”80

Douglass was optimistic considering that, in general, African American women had few opportunities for representation at the Exposition. Some scholars claim that the handful of African American women who were included were tokenized.81 Beginning in 1890, African American women had fought for a seat on the Board of Lady Managers and for more exhibits representing them in the Woman’s Building or elsewhere, but their appeals went mostly unanswered.82 Some of the women who would eventually speak in the Congress had advocated for more African American women’s representation.83 Hallie Quinn Brown had submitted an appeal that urged the Board to create a paid advisory position for African American exhibits. She was offered a low-paying secretarial position and was insulted by the salary offer. It paid less than her current position as a university administrator and, she reasoned, the position was not enough to fully represent her race at the Exposition anyway, so she turned it down.84 Brown expressed her frustration in a
letter to the Board in which she implored, “Are nine million of American Citizens to be humiliated in the eyes of the world by the absence of even one black face in the administrative corpus of the Fair?” After the Board refused to amend the salary offer or create more positions for women of her race, Brown and a group of Washington, D.C. women formed the Colored Woman’s League. In an attempt to mitigate protest, the Board of Lady Managers appointed Fannie Barrier Williams to a clerical job and, later, a non-salaried appointment to oversee the creation of exhibits. Apart from Williams’s clerical job and the six speakers who spoke during the official Congress, it appears there were no other African American women who had a public role in the Woman’s Building or Board of Lady Managers.

While scholars agree that the six African American women faced a challenging rhetorical situation as Congress speakers, they disagree on whether the speakers presented a persuasive message of greater equality in their addresses. Gail Bederman claims that “the exposition’s logic of constructing manly white civilization in opposition to unmanly swarthy barbarism made it impossible for the white organizers to accept the existence of fully civilized men and women who were not of European ancestry.” In an analysis of Williams’s, Cooper’s, and Coppin’s speeches at the Congress, Laura L. Behling argues that African American women “occupied a zone of objecthood simply because there was no place else for them to exist.” They were themselves “exhibits” or curiosities among the displays and showcases in the Woman’s Building. Andrew F. Wood adds that spaces like the Woman’s Building “provide the space for oppositional narratives to exist while simultaneously reducing the power of those narratives to function.” The narratives potentially lacked power because “the Woman’s Building—
and the debates within—represented a site of safe spectacle” in which the African American women speakers were not expected to offer “a genuine threat to the status quo.” In the end, Wood concludes, the event served as “a site to showcase a feminized minority’s power over a racialized minority.” In other words, the Congress was likely a space in which white women still exerted power over African American women by controlling their speech content and behavior. These analyses suggest severely constrained, almost passive roles for African American women in the Woman’s Building and at the Congress.

However, scholars of Black feminism propose that rhetoric, discourse, and storytelling have offered liberating potential for African American women, and some scholars contend that this was the case for the African American Congress speakers. Christopher Robert Reed characterizes the speakers as active participants who “accorded themselves as molders of a new African American identity with a destiny they planned to help shape.” Logan finds that Frances Harper advanced “a rhetoric for establishing common ground to serve as a starting point for productive civic engagement.” Even if African American women were viewed as objects, they advanced a complex series of arguments that justified their inclusion at the Exposition and in US public life. This chapter seeks to further account for how African American women negotiated for equality and advanced their vision of progress by reading their public addresses through public sphere theories.

This analysis examines six speeches delivered by the African American Congress speakers—Williams, Cooper, Coppin, Early, Brown, and Harper. These women shared many similarities in their backgrounds and in their speech topics. They were part of an
emerging “New Negro” class who were a generation removed from slavery and were very successful academically and professionally. According to Behling, the women aimed to “exhibit their qualities, experiences, and philosophies regarding Black uplift” in their speeches. Black uplift refers to an African American social movement dedicated to self-improvement and helping others, especially in the post-bellum South. Subscribers to uplift ideology believed that the key to a successful life was increased education, financial growth, and better living conditions. Though the Congress offered the speakers a platform from which to advocate for increased civil rights, the speakers had to adhere to situational expectations and constraints in that setting. Even so, they addressed difficult subjects that were immediately relevant to African American women’s uplift, including the scourge of lynching, barriers to education, and economic inequality.

The first speaker, Fannie Barrier Williams, delivered a major address, presented as part of a session entitled, “The Solidarity of Human Interests,” during which women from Western Europe, North America, and South America also spoke. Specifically, Williams delivered “The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation” on Thursday, May 18, in the Hall of Washington during an evening session. Williams was well-educated and from a middle-class family, and was one of only a few African American members of the Chicago Woman’s Club. Anna Julia Cooper, a former slave and an outspoken teacher, author, and suffragist, followed Williams’s address with a shorter discussion. Cooper taught at M Street School in Washington, D.C., where she would eventually become principal in 1902. She had authored A Voice from the South by a Black Woman from the South, published in 1892, which has since been recognized as the first book to
provide a feminist analysis of African American women’s condition. Fannie Jackson Coppin also responded to Williams’s address with her own remarks following Cooper. Coppin had been a slave until age thirteen and graduated from Oberlin College in 1865, and was then affiliated with the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia.

The speeches continued the next day, Friday, May 19, with another evening session. Fannie Barrier Williams appears to have presided over a session during which Sarah J. Early delivered an address entitled “The Organized Efforts of the Colored Women of the South to Improve their Condition.” Early obtained a master’s degree in mathematics from Wilberforce University and was a member of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. As a teacher, she was highly concerned with African American women’s access to higher education. Hallie Quinn Brown, also from Wilberforce, presented a discussion after Early. Also an educator, Brown was former Dean of Female Students at Tuskegee.

The last African American speaker, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, addressed the Congress on Saturday, May 20 in the Hall of Columbus in a Session entitled “Civil and Political Status of Women.” She was scheduled on the “penultimate day of the Congress,” according to Logan, during which the organizers had hoped to attract a large general audience. Harper, who lived in Baltimore, was the oldest of the six speakers and was a noted lecturer, prolific writer, and former abolitionist whose name would have registered with many people in her audience. She was on the board of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and a founding member of the American Woman Suffrage Association. As a dedicated proponent of racial uplift, Harper was concerned with conditions in Reconstruction South, especially lynching and mob violence. In her
speech, “Woman’s Political Future,” Harper “challenged women in her audience to exert their influence upon the political life of the nation,” according to Logan. Indeed, all six speakers advanced a collective vision of African American women’s progress in a complex rhetorical situation.

**Advancing African American Women’s Civil Rights as Progress**

In the Congress addresses, African American speakers touched upon universally appealing topics, including uplift, civility, and nationalism. They leveraged these topics to gain legitimacy in the Congress and then in the larger Exposition to advance their arguments in the US public sphere. They agitated for greater inclusion through engagement in multiple public spheres. First, they constituted a feminist African American counterpublic through a rhetoric of sisterhood, a sisterhood defined by its members’ character and intellect. Next, they unified African American women with all women in the Congress through appeals to the shared value of civility. Finally, they accounted for their contributions to progress and appealed to patriotism to illustrate the irony of a progressive nation that denied its citizens full civil rights. In so doing, they hoped to launch their persuasive goals into the US public sphere along with the Congress’s transnational feminist counterpublic sphere.

*Forming an African American Feminist Counterpublic: “A Grand Sisterhood”*

Scholars have proposed black public spheres as another kind of counterpublic to explain how people of African descent deliberate and exchange ideas for critical and liberating ends. Put otherwise, the black public sphere is “a transnational space whose violent birth and diasporic conditions of life provide a counternarrative to the exclusionary national narratives of Europe, the United States, and the Caribbean, and
Africa,” according to The Black Public Sphere Collective, a group of interdisciplinary public sphere scholars. Squires adds that black publics circulate “common discourses and negotiations of what it means to be Black” with “particularly defined Black interests.” In particular, Mabel O. Wilson claims that gatherings of people of African descent in world’s fairs were “extensions” of the black counterpublic sphere since they served “as places where different agendas for social advancement, cultural identity and national belonging could be presented, seen, and debated publicly.” Teresa Zackodnik adds that African American activists of the nineteenth century “were not only working with ‘local’ rhetorics and politics at home but also taking black feminism public in an international frame that highlighted interlocking oppressions and their particular effect on women.” Examples of this kind of international gathering could include discursive arenas such as the Congress on Africa at the 1893 Exposition, which was a smaller Congress that focused on the interests of people of African descent and featured participants from the United States, Africa, and the Caribbean.

However, the six Congress speakers delivered addresses in a setting that was not reserved for primarily African American discursive exchange; they spoke in a highly public venue in which some members of their audience were hostile to their inclusion, and the speakers were restricted by the kinds of topics and concerns they could voice. In response, the six Congress speakers agitated for greater civil rights through collective public discourse. Their discourse constituted a feminist African American counterpublic sphere within the larger transnational feminist counterpublic sphere of the Congress. To join African American women in a feminist counterpublic, the speakers employed rhetorical strategies to constitute African American women as their own group.
of rational public actors who deserved public recognition and rights. To this end, the speakers engaged a rhetoric of sisterhood to unify African American women around the country through appeals to their successful struggle for their own uplift. Belinda A. Stillion Southard examines strategies for how suffragists in the early twentieth century unified women around the country for their cause. Specifically, the white suffragists would engage “a rhetoric of national sisterhood” to unite enfranchised western women with women who did not yet have the vote, in order to draw them to action and generate “a sense of loyalty and reciprocity.”

She argues that the rhetors’ strategy of “uniting US women’s voices constituted a national community of white women citizens whose demands militantly expanded women’s political identities in the political sphere.” In a similar fashion, the six speakers discursively formed and invited participation in a feminist African American counterpublic through a rhetoric of sisterhood that unified African American women, specifically through their strong moral character and drive for intellect.

First, the speakers united African American women from across the United States when they constituted them as part of a national sisterhood of women whose strong moral character enabled them to successfully emerge from slavery and thrive as free women. The speakers emphasized the special qualities that only African American women in this sisterhood of fighters possessed. In the first speech on May 18, Fannie Barrier Williams united women under the banner of strong character, evidenced by their immediate urge to uplift themselves after slavery:

[I]t must ever be counted as one of the most wonderful things in human history how promptly and eagerly these suddenly liberated women tried to lay
hold upon all that there is in human excellence. The longing to be something better than they were when freedom found them has been the most notable characteristic in the development of these women.\textsuperscript{129}

Williams described African American women at the moment of abolition as strivers and self-starters who longed to better themselves. Though she referenced southern former slaves, she spoke to a majority of African American women who had some experience with slavery, as either freed before or during Abolition, or descended from those who had been enslaved. Whether liberated themselves, or members of the same race and gender who had been oppressed through slavery, all African American women could heed Williams’s call for “human excellence.”

In a short response to Williams, Cooper also celebrated southern women as representatives of all African American women in a national sisterhood. She explained further how African American women’s special character helped them move through their struggle. “I speak for the colored women of the South,” she claimed, as she told a narrative of African Americans as toilers and builders of their own destiny. She continued,

[It is in the South] that the millions of blacks in this country have watered the soil with blood and tears, and it is there too that the colored woman of America has made her characteristic history, and there her destiny is evolving.\textsuperscript{130}

Cooper suggested that all African American women’s stories were linked to the South, regardless of where they were born. They were connected to the brave women of the sisterhood who had lifted themselves up from slavery.
In her speech the next day, Sarah J. Early agreed with Williams and Cooper that African American women played an active role in their own advancement because of their strong character. She declared that “To improve their social condition was the first impulse of [African American women’s] nature” immediately after slavery ended.\(^\text{131}\) Notably, they founded mutual aid societies, which “were the beginning of their strength, the groundwork of their future advancement and permanent elevation.”\(^\text{132}\) On May 19, Brown concurred with the previous speakers when she stated that women’s emergence from slavery “into light and liberty is one of the marvels of the age.”\(^\text{133}\) Brown continued to uphold African American women’s character, claiming that “through unremitting exertions she has climbed to elevated planes, accepting all which dignifies and refines, and flourishing under it.”\(^\text{134}\) Brown’s words suggested that no other class or race of people could have advanced themselves the way African American women had done after slavery. Williams agreed when she claimed that others have “so long underestimated the character strength of our women.”\(^\text{135}\) Instead, African American women “whose hearts have been wrung by all kinds of sorrows, are abundantly manifesting those gracious qualities of heart that characterize women of the best type.”\(^\text{136}\) Due to their strong character, African American women had come upward from struggle in a relatively short time. The speakers united African American women in a sisterhood that represented some of the best women in the nation working toward their own uplift. The speakers grounded the sisterhood of African American women in their collective striving for uplift, represented in how women of their race had the character to overcome almost insurmountable challenges after bondage.
The speakers also united all African American women in a sisterhood of women who had successfully educated themselves for uplift. Freed African American women, for example, had a strong desire for intellectual opportunities from the moment of their freedom, and that momentum had not slowed in the thirty years since Emancipation. Early credited her fellow women’s “intellectual powers” for a multitude of successes:

It has assisted in raising them from a condition of helplessness and destitution to a state of self-dependence and prosperity; and now they stand a grand sisterhood, nearly one million strong, bound together by the strongest ties of which the human mind can conceive, being loyal to their race, loyal to the government, and loyal to their God.137

Early celebrated how a thirst for knowledge united African American women across the country in a “grand sisterhood.” With their special “intellectual powers,” she argued, African American women were working to uplift not only themselves, but their race, their nation, and even their God. Immediately following Early, Brown reinforced African American women’s shared intellectual prowess in a poetic passage that claimed that “[w]ith freedom's first sweet draught came the thirst for knowledge. . . . Never in the history of the world was there manifested on the part of any people such an earnest desire to obtain an education.”138 Williams, too, unified African American women in their strong desire to obtain an education. She reported that women “have adapted themselves to the work of mentally lifting a whole race of people so eagerly and readily that they afford an apt illustration of the power of self-help.”139 The six speakers crafted a sisterhood of women united in a special drive for intellect that animated their collective struggle for uplift.
Depicting African American women as intellectuals may have seemed to exclude those women who did not have access to educational opportunities, such as lower-class women who had to work to survive. However, Stillion Southard claims that a rhetoric of sisterhood actually “allowed women to identify with each other across state lines and transcend differences in political power.”

At least one speaker, Brown, was careful to value African American women trained in trades and labor, as well. She claimed that “The girls of the South are realizing that with a common education and a trade they are superior to the girl who completes the academic course and neglects the training of her hand.” As evidence, she invited the audience to examine the dress she was wearing, which female students at Tuskegee had made for her “who six months ago could handle only the hoe and the plow.” Now, after the girls had undergone some training, “The whistle of the engine, the ring of the hammer, the buzz of the saw, [and] the spinning of the wheel serve as music and inspiration.”

In other words, any African American woman could find a place in the sisterhood as long as she had ambition. If she did not thrive through traditional schooling, she could contribute through trade skills and manual labor. Though not explicitly stated in her Congress speech, Coppin also believed that finding roles for African Americans in industrial trade would aid unemployment and encourage uplift. Early also included African American women of all levels of education and vocation:

The most unlettered, the most remote and obscure, as well the most refined and erudite seem to have felt the touch of an unseen power, and to have heard a mysterious voice calling them to ascend higher in the scale of being.
Regardless of their education level and employment, African American women could consider themselves part of the sisterhood, as long as they had ambition to better themselves and to contribute to society.

African American women, then, were united in a sisterhood dedicated to self-uplift. They resisted their oppression through their continuous drive for their own uplift, and as such, may have felt empowered to engage in counterpublic agitation. Stillion Southard argues that identifying shared experiences through a sisterhood helped women “reenvision their ability to participate in and transform the American political process.”

Because the six speakers had joined together in a “grand sisterhood,” they could craft arguments and critique Congresswomen from their exclusive feminist African American counterpublic. Thus, in addition to celebrating African American women’s impressive emergence from slavery, the speakers also incorporated arguments that challenged their audience to think about African American women’s accomplishments. Williams described how uncomfortable more powerful members society had become with African American women’s intellectual advancement:

The dread inspired by the growing intelligence of colored women has interested us almost to the point of amusement. It has given to colored women a new sense of importance to witness how easily their emancipation and steady advancement is disturbing all classes of American people.

This bold statement had many complex meanings. First, Williams refuted a common stereotype that African American women were incapable of intellect and civility. They had been portrayed in US culture as less womanly and impure compared to white women. Williams and her fellow speakers refuted the myth that women in the
sisterhood were less intelligent and refined through their deep desire to learn. Second, Williams suggested that American elites’ discomfort with African American women’s uplift served as proof that African American women were truly intellectuals. If African American women had not advanced from a position of subordination, the more powerful would have no reason to feel threatened. Finally, Williams claimed that women in the sisterhood responded to these reactions with amusement, perhaps to show how little they were affected by criticism. Williams drew attention to the fact that African American women had a collective understanding that they had been discounted, but they would continue to prove skeptics wrong. Another part of their shared experience in an African American sisterhood was grounded in outsiders’ skepticism and resistance to their uplift efforts.

Through forming this sisterhood, the speakers may have felt empowered to resist hegemonic interpretations of African American women. However, in joining African American women in a sisterhood based in self-uplift, the speakers presented a homogenous, glowing image of African American women’s success that focused less on the ongoing struggles of their lower-class, uneducated sisters. Women who were part of the sisterhood were gainfully employed or striving to be, and they devoted themselves to uplifting their families and others. As such, the speakers drew attention away from African American women who were still too oppressed to seek an education or find employment due to barriers such as violent racial discrimination and sexual subordination. The speakers’ rhetorical strategy can be explained in part by the complex rhetorical situation the speakers faced. Addressing an audience of well-to-do, privileged clubwomen, the six speakers matched the expectations of the venue and
included women who fit acceptable understandings of womanhood. The speakers united women in a “grand sisterhood” that subsumed class and regional differences under the similarities of race and gender. In other words, the speakers intentionally focused less on the institutional and social barriers facing some African American women in order to portray the best side of African American women. The speakers made a strategic decision in light of the rhetorical constraints of the situation and constructed a sisterhood of African American women wholly capable of progressing themselves through their own uplift, in order to help the speakers insinuate themselves into the transnational feminist counterpublic sphere of the Congress.

*Unifying and Progressing All Women through the Shared Value of Civility*

In addition to unifying African American women, the six women aligned their ideas with the transnational feminist discourses of the Congress. As such, they constructed rhetorical appeals to the shared value of civility. For women in the Progressive Era, civility was assessed according to their perceived level of “womanliness.” According to Bederman, this translated to the degree to which women were “delicate, spiritual, [and] dedicated to home.” These values linked to Christian millennialism, or a constant striving to better civilization by contributing to human progress. An increasing turn toward social science and Darwinian survivalism also fueled a drive for bettering humanity and perfecting civilization. The Progressive Era’s focus on social science also provided women with increased opportunity for civic engagement. They applied social science principles to propose public change—such as economic and social policy initiatives—and to account for progress made through their public organization efforts. Benevolent organizations allowed women one of their only
acceptable civic roles, as activities in these organizations aligned with women’s role of nurturing and helping others. According to Stillion Southard, women’s political activity included their role as “advocates of health, education, and child-labor policies—issues thought to be more ‘domestic’” and thus aligned with their womanliness.\textsuperscript{153} Through organizing, women could exercise their academic (especially scientific) learning and professional and organizational skills to better society while their public efforts were considered moral and righteous.\textsuperscript{154}

Indeed, the themes of perfecting civilization and helping others through organization undergirded the goals of the Congress, whose motto was “Not for Herself, but for Humanity.”\textsuperscript{155} However, such activities were often seen as the purview of white women who, along with white men, supposedly represented the most civilized version of humanity according to social Darwinism.\textsuperscript{156} Though more privileged Americans invoked civility to marginalize others, Bederman claims that multiple groups in the United States engaged discourses of civility to “legitimize certain claims to power” in the nineteenth century, and that African American women in particular used civility to argue for their equality.\textsuperscript{157} Recognizing that many people in the Congress audience were club women and philanthropists, the six speakers asserted their civility and their aptitude for promoting progress by first, aligning accounts of their tireless work in aid organizations with progress. Next, they argued that it would be uncivil to deny African American women the same rights enjoyed by other women. Then, the speakers proposed a way forward that would unify all women in their goal of achieving human progress.

First, to demonstrate their civility, the speakers aligned their goals of uplift with the Congress’s overarching goals for uplifting humanity. African American’s
womanhood had been attacked and questioned in the United States. To overcome this challenge, the speakers spotlighted their tireless work in aid organizations. Logan claims that in the May 18 address, Williams “developed the theme of common womanhood shared by all women in the audience. Given the difficult circumstances under which she spoke, Williams wisely addressed similarities rather than differences first.” According to Williams, the daughters of former slaves “have so elevated the moral tone of their social life that new and purer standards of personal worth have been created, and new ideals of womanhood, instinct with grace and delicacy, are everywhere recognized and emulated.” Williams presented her fellow women’s accomplishments as proof of African American’s civility. Early also dedicated ample time in her speech to describing African American women’s organizational work in ceremonial style, or in beautiful prose appropriate to the Congress event, claiming that “[i]n organization is found all the elements of success in any enterprise, and by this method alone are developed the force and ability that have reared the grand structure of human society.” She continued, “organizations had bound the women together in a common interest so strong that no earthly force can sever it. Organization has taught them the art of self-government, and has prepared the way for future and grander organizations.” Early’s dramatic rhetoric, such as “grand structure,” and a common interest that “no earthly force can sever,” elevated the purpose of African American women’s organizing work. Brown bolstered Early’s claims about African American women’s civility when she explained how self-organization had lifted women after slavery: “The girls of the South are realizing that they must refute the dark prophecies concerning the race by lives of integrity and chastity,” and to do so, they created numerous societies, such as the Young Woman's
Christian Associations and Woman's Christian Temperance Unions, “for the amelioration of the condition of the poor and helpless about them.”\textsuperscript{162} Thus, it was through organizing that African American women could work to cast off vestiges of slavery and devote themselves fully to uplifting humanity and thereby, demonstrate their civility. The speakers identified with their audience when they accounted for their extensive, selfless organization work, which framed African American women through the Progressive Era’s standards of civility. It would be difficult for audience members to disagree that African American women, through their organization, had contributed to human progress.

Finding commonality through a rhetoric of civility also provided the speakers an opportunity to call their audience’s civility into question. Since African American women were able and willing partners in achieving human progress, the speakers implied that to turn them away would undermine the Congress’s and Exposition’s goal. The speakers directed their criticism to attendees, especially white American women, who failed to include them in the march toward progress. The speakers could not directly call out the Congress women who had attempted to exclude them, so they tapped into the shared value of civility to exert pressure onto them. On May 18, Williams spoke directly to club and society women. She said,

Women who are tender enough in heart to be active in humane societies, to be foremost in all charitable activities, who are loving enough to unite Christian womanhood everywhere against the sin of intemperance, ought to be instantly concerned in the plea of colored women for justice and humane treatment.\textsuperscript{163}
She did not directly attack the more privileged women in her audience, but rather spoke more generally to women in aid societies, which would include many of the Congress attendees. Williams challenged her audience further with a pointed question that asked the audience to ponder their own incivility: “Certainly you can not be indifferent to the growing needs and importance of women who are demonstrating their intelligence and capacity for the highest privileges of freedom[?]”¹⁶⁴ Williams’s rhetorical question invited the audience to come to the conclusion that they were uncivil to ignore to African American women’s plight, and therefore, had violated their duty to help others. To strengthen her argument, Williams elaborated on the double standard that African American women faced in particular: “As American women generally are fighting against the nineteenth century narrowness that still keeps women out of the higher institutions of learning, so our women are eagerly demanding the best of education open to their race.”¹⁶⁵ And yet, she continued, “[O]ur women have the same spirit and mettle that characterize the best of American women. Everywhere they are following in the tracks of those women who are swiftest in the race for higher knowledge.”¹⁶⁶ Thus, while more privileged women sought recognition in the broader public spheres of their home nations, African American women were still struggling to have the same opportunities as more privileged women in the United States. They had not equally benefitted from the move toward progress. Without directly naming them, Williams implicated women in the audience who had failed to support African American women’s inclusion in the Exposition, such as the Board of Lady Managers.

The speakers offered their Congress audience a solution to restore their civility through a rhetoric of unity. Each speaker ended her speech with a call to action for
women to unite in the shared goal of progress. In the first speech on May 18, Williams stated the African American speakers’ purpose clearly, which was that they were there to assert their place in the Congress: “We come before this assemblage of women feeling confident that our progress has been along high levels and rooted deeply in the essentials of intelligent humanity.”167 She used the pronoun “We” to seemingly speak for all African American women, and continued, “We believe that the world always needs the influence of every good and capable woman, and this rule recognizes no exceptions based on complexion.”168 African American women only needed the opportunity to “be welcomed as co-workers” alongside other women, and all could rest assured that “[t]he highest ascendency of woman's development has been reached when they have become mentally strong enough to find bonds of association interwoven with sympathy, loyalty, and mutual trustfulness. Today union is the watchword of woman's onward march.”169 Williams described a vision of women of all backgrounds marching in lockstep for the common goal characterized by a “greater respect for one another” and “bonds of association interwoven” with shared values. Moreover, women’s greatest work was realized when women worked together, so it was a logical and necessary step to unite with all women across race lines to guarantee the “moral elevation of all the people.”170 Cooper reiterated Williams’ rhetoric of unity when she closed her speech with an inclusive description of who should work to secure equality for all women:

[It is] not till the universal title of humanity to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is conceded to be inalienable to all; not till then is woman's lesson taught and woman's cause won--not the white woman's, nor the black woman's, nor the red woman's, but the cause of every man and of every woman who has
writhed silently under a mighty wrong. Woman’s wrongs are thus indissolubly linked with all undefended woe, and the acquirement of her “rights” will mean the final triumph of all right over might, the supremacy of the moral forces of reason, and justice, and love in the government of the nations of earth.171 Cooper’s prose served dual purposes. First, the poetic language and allusion to the “moral forces of reason” and “love” demonstrated her high civility. Both beautiful prose and appeals to morality and love denoted femininity and womanhood. Second, Cooper smoothed over differences among her audience members, including race and nationality, suggesting that all women were united around the same cause for their rights, regardless of their skin color. Most importantly, all women were “indissolubly linked” in the fact that they had been wronged because they were women. Cooper suggested that race was merely a distraction; to win “women’s ‘rights’” was the ultimate goal. She was also sensitive to the fact that “women’s rights” had many different meanings to the members of her audience. She avoided a specific definition of what these rights were and instead left the meaning open-ended to allow her diverse audience members to fill in what women’s rights meant to them and recognize their own interests in her rhetoric.

In her May 20th speech, Harper seemed to bookend the previous calls for women’s worldwide unity as a necessary step to achieve civility and human uplift. Harper concluded her address with a dramatic passage that crescendoed to a powerful finish:

Let the hearts of the women of the world respond to the song of the herald angels of peace on earth and good will to men. Let them throb as one heart unified by the grand and holy purpose of uplifting the human race, and humanity will
breathe freer, and the world grow brighter. With such a purpose Eden would
spring up in our path, and Paradise be around our way.172

Harper emphasized unity above all else when she characterized women’s collective goal
of “uplifting the human race” as a holy endeavor. She alluded to Eden and Paradise to
signify that such unity was holy, which further appealed to women’s civility since it
denoted devoutness and service. Harper suggested that a failure to join the cause for
human progress by excluding any women was unholy and was therefore uncivil.

In these appeals to civility, the speakers highlighted their own efforts to promote
progress through organizing in order to align with the broader Congress goal. They called
for the Congress women to erase race differences in the service of achieving civility.
They constructed a logical argument that implicated all women in the Congress,
regardless of their racial and national affiliation, if they prevented African American
women from full participation in the broader fight for rights. The African American
speakers also made their womanhood intelligible to women of multiple nations and
states, but especially the white American women in the audience. The speakers impressed
upon their audience that they were oppressed alongside their sisters in the Congress,
sometimes even by those women in the Congress, but they had to tread carefully so as not
to alienate them. The African American speakers provide another example of how
marginalized groups have tapped into the shared value of civility to advance
counterhegemonic arguments. With their civility and place in the Congress established,
the speakers would advance another strategy that appealed to progress to break into the
public sphere of the Exposition.
Launching All Women into the Public Sphere

The Columbian Exposition presented “a vision of common humanity” for “an emerging global society,” according to Richard Hughes Seager. But as the nation rushed to demonstrate its progress, it excluded marginalized Americans. Despite their status as US citizens, many women still fought for legal rights such as enfranchisement. African American women’s political activity was suppressed even more. Their exclusion from leadership positions on the Board of Lady managers and in the Woman’s Building made clear that they had to work harder than their white counterparts for legitimacy in the Women’s Congress, and more broadly, in the US public sphere. The six speakers asserted their place in the Congress’s transnational feminist counterpublic sphere to ultimately launch their feminist African American counterpublic ideas into the public sphere. They argued that African American issues were part and parcel to all women’s issues. African American women would join with all women in an attempt to advance women’s inclusion in the greater US public sphere, but especially to have African American women’s contributions recognized nationally. The six speakers argued for their race’s claim to full citizenship rights by demonstrating their important role in advancing American progress, specifically through a rhetoric of objectivity, which quantified their extensive participation in benevolent organizations, and through patriotic oration, or appeals to patriotism. Then, they would exert pressure on their audience with the irony of their exclusion in a progressive nation.

First, the speakers used the Congress platform to quantify their race and gender’s tremendous contributions to progress through a rhetoric of objectivity. One of the stated goals of the Exposition was to gather hard data related to all nations’ advancements in
400 years, but especially US progress, since it hosted the grand event. Board President Bertha Palmer, for example, collected statistics on the number of US women who were currently employed, as well as their salaries, so that women’s work would be valued at the Exposition.\textsuperscript{176} In general, women of the era were keen to provide reports of their progress, because they were questioned for their ability to keep pace with men in the industrial work force. Such reports were desirable in an era that valued efficiency, productivity, and careful accounting of public work.\textsuperscript{177} Data and statistics were key reporting tools of the era, during which people posited that phenomena were known through what was observable. Frank J. Stec claims that numbers serve to “rationalize public speech,”\textsuperscript{178} which explains why women of this time strategically portrayed their contributions through numeric accounting. Members of a masculine public sphere valued hard data rather than narrative accounts, which characterized a more feminine rhetorical style. Women of this era proved their efficiency through systematic management, such as timekeeping and scientific analysis.\textsuperscript{179}

To launch their concerns into the public sphere, the six speakers provided an objective, thorough account of African American women’s contribution of progress. The speakers’ strategy mirrored a rhetoric of objectivity that another African American activist had employed in the Progressive Era. Ida B. Wells, whose efforts are discussed at length in Chapter Four, engaged a rhetoric of objectivity to construct an irrefutable picture of violent lynchings in the South in order to foreclose any doubt that lynching was a serious issue.\textsuperscript{180} According to Logan, rhetors who engage a rhetoric of objectivity present themselves as “information gatherers” and “objective informants” who present facts to achieve “action-oriented responses.”\textsuperscript{181} Stec corroborates Logan’s objectivity
claim when he posits that there is a “rhetoricity of numbers” which “limit[s] the means of critique.” He suggests that it is more difficult for audiences to refute hard facts and numbers. Reporting and cataloguing factual information for an audience has the tendency to make it real and commonplace. Through a rhetoric of objectivity, the speakers provided a meticulous, exhaustive accounting of their many contributions to national life including education, religion, social services, and economics. They presented these facts as something to be studied and considered. With so many plainly-stated numbers, audiences would be left with no doubt that African American women were important contributors to the nation. And given the era’s attention to social science and accounting for progress, the speakers’ rhetoric of objectivity would track with an audience that valued data about progress.

The speakers argued two positions through a rhetoric of objectivity: they accounted for African American women’s contributions through plainly-stated facts and they communicated their eagerness to continue this forward progress. The six speakers’ strategy of enumeration was evident in passages that painstakingly detailed numbers related to all avenues of progress: education, finance, the church, the arts, and benevolent organizations. Cooper was the first to give extensive accounts of exactly how many African American pupils were enrolled in school: “Today there are twenty-five thousand five hundred and thirty colored schools in the United States with one million three hundred and fifty-three thousand three hundred and fifty-two pupils of both sexes.” Cooper accounted for every single pupil who would obtain an education and ultimately contribute positively to civic life. Early also provided another impressive figure related to African Americans’ involvement in education: “Five hundred thousand girls and young
women are now crowding our schools and colleges.” Brown, who spoke immediately after Early, followed the same tactic and provided exact figures for the number of pupils who enrolled in school following the Civil War. Cooper also celebrated the increased education of African American women at universities, medical and law schools, and other postgraduate programs that have been “bombarded by colored women, and every year some sister of the darker race claims their professional award of ‘well done.’” Brown noted African American women’s contribution to education, art, music, and literature, including widely-recognized novels produced by Congress speakers: Frances Harper’s “Iola Leroy” and Anna Cooper’s “A Voice from the South.” Thus, the speakers presented an objective account of how more than one million African Americans were bettering themselves in order to enter public life and contribute to progress. They were active in every area of education and the arts, which demonstrated that they were already part of the forward march of progress.

The speakers also enumerated African American women’s contributions through organization, which also reinforced their civility. It was a foregone conclusion that African American women could contribute to progress because they were already doing so through benevolent organizations, aid societies, and church work. Early offered extensive statistics related to African American women’s aid organizations for social uplift, religion, and temperance, which had built orphanages, cemeteries and churches, and raised financial support for the needy. As members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, women had collected thousands of dollars in donations to churches and had conducted missionary trips throughout the southern hemisphere, such that “[t]he aggregate of all the money raised annually by the colored churches amount[ed] to over
half a million dollars, and by far the greater share is raised by women,” according to Early. Moreover, African Americans now owned millions of dollars in real estate and investments in banks. Cooper specified how “[t]his is not quite the thirtieth year since their emancipation, and the colored people hold in landed property for churches and schools twenty-five million dollars.” At the close of a lengthy recitation of statistics and facts related to African American women’s progress, Cooper averred, “This is just a glimpse of what we are doing.” Each of these accounts of progress seemed to build upon one another, creating a mental image of piles and piles of accomplishments. The exhaustive list foreclosed any argument that African American women had not contributed greatly to US progress. Their audiences need not even consider whether African American women would contribute to progress, because they already had. And they enacted the very educated, civilized women they wanted the rest of the world to see.

In addition to a strategy of enumeration, the speakers proved African American women’s contributions to nation building through patriotic oration. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell identifies how female speakers have used patriotic oration to transcend barriers to their participation in public address and to make their appeals more palatable for audiences who may be hostile to a woman speaking publicly. Patriotic oration describes speech that appeals to heroism, humanity, and love of country. As an epideictic form of speech, patriotic oration features rhetoric that praises soldiers for the sacrifice of valiant war service. In high style, speakers detail dramatic events, such as the terrors and triumphs of war. They will also use terms that evoke patriotism, such as “freedom,” “liberty,” and “independence.”
Rhetorical scholars note other instances of African American speakers who engaged appeals to patriotism strategically to fight for their own inclusion. For example, in abolitionist and civil rights discourse, African Americans have invoked the nation’s values in front of white audiences for subversive purposes. Perhaps the best-known example is Frederick Douglass’s speech, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” Douglass pointed to the irony of a day celebrating independence when slaves were not free. He engaged in irony to speak directly to his audience about this disconnect between purported values and actual barriers to freedom. According to Robert Terrill, Douglass was able to provide “his (white) audience both narcotic and goad, bidding them to observe passively their own inconsistencies and then actively to redress them.” In other words, Douglass created an exigence out of this ironic construction that aimed to “goad” his audience into action. In the same way, the six speakers would point to a disconnect between American values and the oppressive reality for African American citizens through patriotic oration. The speakers invoked their own patriotic experiences and nation-building efforts to weave African American women into the US nationalist fabric. Then, they presented the irony of their exclusion in a nation that purported to value liberty and freedom to then argue that they, too, deserved equal rights as American citizens. The speakers drew on patriotic oration to construct African American women as mythic American heroines who protected treasured national values such as freedom and who were nation-builders alongside more privileged Americans.

Service in war had always been one of the most selfless ways to demonstrate patriotism and to contribute to the nation. Historically, women could not fight openly in war and so they found other ways to demonstrate patriotism and serve their country. In
the nineteenth century, ideal womanhood was linked to republican motherhood, which required that mothers serve the nation by bearing and raising good soldiers and supporting the nation through their domestic duties, which would promote civic virtue, in turn. Over time, women justified their increased public service in wartime as serving the broader goal of promoting civic virtue. Stillion Southard claims, “Women’s domestic war service could easily be justified as extensions of women’s domesticity.” Their wartime “efforts were extensions of women’s increased participation in the political, social, and reform movements of the Progressive Era.” And, with their increasing public role in wartime, women had “the grounds to demand equal citizenship rights” because they had served the nation. Thus, women’s rights activists such as suffragists argued that they deserved full enfranchisement given their selfless service to the nation.

The African American speakers legitimized their public sphere participation when they presented their contributions to civic virtue through patriotic oration. They demonstrated how African American women promoted American values such as freedom through overcoming slavery and helping others in the nation’s most trying times. Brown constructed an image of a heroic African American female slave in a dramatic passage which described soon-to-be freed slave women’s first taste of freedom:

When the first low mutterings from Fort Sumter were heard, hope sprang up within the negro woman’s breast [...] and [when] chains of wrists and ankles were broken she stepped forth, her body scarred and striped by the lash, her intellect dwarfed and sunken into piteous ignorance, without money, clothes, or home--but a free woman.
In a style of patriotic oration, Brown invoked the long, torturous efforts of the Civil War with the decisive Fort Sumter battle and described a woman breaking free of her chains to experience her right to life and liberty, at last. Through this vignette, Brown interpreted the slave experience to match with a widely-shared belief of what it meant to be an American: a fighter for liberty and freedom. Cooper continued to advance African American women’s heroism and patriotism in grand style: “Yet all through the darkest period of the colored women’s oppression in this country her yet unwritten history is full of heroic struggle, a struggle against fearful and overwhelming odds.”

Even in the most trying times, and when suffering their own ills, African American women “heroically” struggled to help themselves and fellow Americans. Early described how African American women in wartime “showed the deepest sympathy for suffering humanity and the highest valor and loyalty” when she “breath[ed] the last prayer with him who had laid down his life for his country.”

In such trying moments, African American women “did not hesitate” and instead “they organized [into] many active and industrious corps accomplishing much noble work.” Their organizing included such civic and civil tasks as “assisting the needy, decorating graves, presenting flags to schools, and in many ways instilling patriotism.”

In other words, Early emphasized the patriotic role that African American women played through wartime organizing, demonstrating self-sacrifice and eagerness to help, and promoting patriotism. Williams clinched the idea that African American women were true American patriots. She said,

We come before this assemblage of women feeling confident that our progress has been along high levels and rooted deeply in the essentials of
intelligent humanity. We are so essentially American in speech, in instincts, in sentiments and destiny that the things that interest you equally interest us.\textsuperscript{208} Williams also engaged patriotic oration to show it was African American women’s “destiny” to be “essentially American,” since they were already patriotic actors in the foundational moments of nation building. She suggested that their patriotism was a foregone conclusion, since all that the African American women wanted was freedom and to ensure others’ freedom, just as any American should. The speakers also reasoned from their local experiences of breaking free from slavery and organizing to promote patriotism to establish how African American women were American patriots.

As a final strategy for accessing the broader public sphere of the Exposition, the six speakers linked their full access to civil rights to the national goal of progress. In order for their arguments to gain traction in the public sphere, the African American women had to portray their arguments for equality in a way that aligned with the goals of both their Women’s Congress and Exposition audiences. Elevating all humanity was a purported aim of both. Through their civility in organizing and appeals to patriotism, the speakers had already proven, as Cooper declared, that African American women were “toilers for the universal triumph of justice and human rights.”\textsuperscript{209} As such, African American women should be embraced for their contribution to humanity’s progress, and therefore, the nation’s progress. The speakers argued that to deny African American women full national rights was to stem progress. To argue for greater inclusion, the speakers equated their own experiences with discrimination to a violation of national progress. They pointed to the irony of a free nation that oppressed its citizens to undermine US progress at an event meant to celebrate it, and thus increased pressure on
all Americans in their audience. They marshaled examples from around the world to point to the United States’s failure to promote progress, and as a solution, painted a picture of African American women’s inclusion as the way to progress. Ultimately, they launched their arguments into the Exposition’s public sphere when they argued that their exclusion precluded the nation’s progress.

To highlight their oppression on a national scale, the speakers turned to comparisons with other nations to reveal the irony of US barriers to progress. As Douglass and other African American activists had argued in abolitionist and civil rights rhetoric, the speakers pointed to the irony of the United States touting progress whilst oppressing members of its citizenry. The six speakers would also push their audiences to action through an appeal to irony. Specifically, they invoked examples of other oppressive nations to illustrate women’s experiences, but especially African American women, in the “free” United States. In her May 20 address, Harper pressured the US citizenry to secure equality for all women as a precondition to fully-realized progress:

I know that no nation can gain its full measure of enlightenment and happiness if one-half of it is free and the other half fettered. China compressed the feet of her women and thereby retarded the steps of her men. Her comparison to another nation, China, suggested that the same oppressive conditions existed within the United States. But, US women were held back by a different form of bondage through barriers to national participation. Then, reasoning from her experience as an African American woman, Harper pointed to the irony of espousing US progress when the nation’s own citizens still suffered brutalities such as lynching, which terrorized African Americans in particular. Harper alluded to the biblical story of the Apostle Paul,
who was protected and given due process in the brutal and unforgiving Roman Empire. She implored her audience with irony: “Surely the life of the humblest American citizen should be as well protected in America as that of a Roman citizen was in heathen Rome[?] A wrong done to the weak should be an insult to the strong.” Harper asked her audience to consider the irony that a citizen in an oppressive regime received fairer treatment than a US citizen. This notion was almost ridiculous to consider, given that the nation should have advanced beyond the cruel justice system of ancient Rome long ago. And yet, inalienable American values of liberty and freedom failed to hold up when examined more closely. And then, with a specific reference to her Congress audience, Harper pointed out the irony of women who organized campaigns to condemn other nations’ violence, but did not prevent the same horrors at home:

How can any woman send petitions to Russia against the horrors of Siberian prisons if, ages after the Inquisition has ceased to devise its tortures, she has not done all she could by influence, tongue, and pen to keep men from making bonfires of the bodies of real or supposed criminals?

In this statement, Harper momentarily departed from the “safe” topics in the Congress setting and referenced the common practice of burning bodies during a lynching. She took this risk to highlight the irony that civil women would protest brutality abroad when unthinkable horrors continued unabated against US citizens. “The Inquisition” evokes a more brutal, barbaric time that had long passed, and yet, the Inquisition continued on US soil. Through these examples from outside US borders, Harper undermined the US proclamation of progress and challenged the nation’s superiority in the march toward progress. Moreover, she used her platform to oppose lynching, an issue that especially
affected African Americans. Regressive justice in any part of the nation, and a failure to condemn that injustice on the part of Congress attendees, undermined US progress on a national scale.

As a solution to these national ills, the speakers yoked US progress to African American women’s increased rights. To do so, the speakers compared the act of granting African American women civil rights with protecting fundamental American rights. On May 18, Williams averred,

The contentions of colored women are in kind like those of other American women for greater freedom of development. Liberty to be all that we can be, without artificial hindrances, is a thing no less precious to us than to women generally.215

With these words, Williams invoked “liberty” to unify African American women’s concerns with all women’s concerns, as all women could agree that liberty was a foundational US value worth spreading. Cooper agreed that African American women simply wanted a role in advancing US progress when she claimed that “We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favoritisms, whether of sex, race, country, or condition.”216 Cooper and her fellow speakers asked not for special consideration, but simply the same opportunities as any other fully-enfranchised citizen. Williams launched the speakers’ claims even further when she linked African American women’s experience with prejudice to a violation of fundamental American rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence:
If the love of humanity more than the love of races and sex shall pulsate throughout all the grand results that shall issue to the world from this parliament of women, women of African descent in the United States will for the first time begin to feel the sweet release from the blighting thrall of prejudice. The colored women, as well as all women, will realize that the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is a maxim that will become more blessed in its significance when the hand of woman shall take from its sepulture in books and make it the gospel of every-day life and the unerring guide in the relations of all men, women, and children.217

In this passage, Williams specifically referenced how the Congress should serve as a launchpad from which African American women’s concerns “shall issue to the world.” She linked the guarantee of “inalienable” national rights with a universal “love of humanity” to guide “all men, women, and children.” She suggested, along with her fellow speakers, that equality for African American women was a prerequisite for fully realizing human progress, and their inclusion in the nation-state was the true marker of that progress. The speakers exerted pressure by linking their own rights to national rights.

In sum, the speakers provided a clear path for their audience to fulfill the Exposition’s goal of progress. Through a rhetoric of objectivity, the speakers reported extensively on the activities of African American women as contributors to progress, urging their audiences to consider the already observable contributions as proof that they were valuable national actors. They exhaustively detailed their many contributions to building and strengthening the nation to the point that their audience could not deny their contributions to progress. They also engaged in patriotic oration to portray African
American women as heroic national contributors. Due to their contributions, the speakers reasoned, they should enjoy equal access to rights and privileges guaranteed to all US citizens. They engaged irony to highlight the hypocrisy of their ongoing discrimination and barriers to guaranteed rights in an era that trumpeted US progress. They invoked past examples from other nations to argue that their own nation was far behind others in the march toward progress. Then, they marshaled examples from their own experience to explain how an issue such as an African American woman’s lack of rights, or a horrific lynching in the US South, undermined US progress on a national scale. In the process, they made women of their race valuable and intelligible to audiences outside the Congress’s discussions and launched their concerns into the greater national conversation about US progress. Then, the speakers proposed a solution: The nation could fulfill its promise of progress if it afforded greater rights and privileges to African American women, along with all women.

Conclusion

The Congress speakers tapped into the Exposition’s discourse of progress to argue for African American women’s greater inclusion at the close of the nineteenth century. I proposed the term “feminist African American counterpublic” to describe how these marginalized rhetors first unified women of their race through a rhetoric of sisterhood. Their counterpublic offered a discursive space from which to articulate their perspectives and launch their civil rights arguments outward to other discursive spheres. Next, I demonstrated how the speakers aligned their interests with the Congress’s transnational feminist counterpublic sphere through appeals to the shared value of civility. The speakers defended their status as civil women and civic actors who organized and
educated themselves for the goal of self-uplift. Finally, the speakers launched their concerns into the broader US public sphere when they incorporated a rhetoric of objectivity to erase any doubt that women of their race had not contributed to national progress. They accounted for African American women’s organizational efforts through meticulous data that would have resonated with Progressive Era audiences, who valued social scientific accounting as evidence of progress. Second, the speakers engaged in patriotic oration to construct an image of African American women as national heroes and selfless nation builders. Through these arguments, the speakers legitimized their participation in US civic life, which provided the grounds for them to agitate for increased political rights and recognition. The speakers advanced a strategy of irony to undermine US progress. To deny African American women—legal American citizens—their guaranteed civil rights directly contradicted US progress. Their audience would have to answer for African American women’s exclusion in order to preserve the Exposition’s image of US progress.

This analysis affirms and extends scholarly assertions about how counterpublics provide spaces to launch arguments into the public sphere. Marginalized speakers can operate within and outside of multiple spheres to accomplish their aims. With this finding, this analysis partially answers scholars’ call to investigate the liberating potential and challenges of working within multiple spheres. The speakers engaged numerous rhetorical strategies in their discourse to appeal to multiple counterpublics. First, to construct their own feminist African American counterpublic sphere, then to align with the transnational feminist counterpublic of the Congress, and ultimately to launch their arguments into the public sphere of the Exposition, and by extension, the United States.
This case demonstrates how marginalized rhetors of a counterpublic can insert themselves into larger counterpublics and dominant public spheres to advance their political and social justice aims. By drawing attention to multiple public spheres that interacted with one another at the end of the nineteenth century, this analysis has several implications for public sphere theory, feminist theory, and transnational rhetorical scholarship.

Scholars often conceive of the transnational public sphere, and transnationalism in general, as a more modern phenomenon with the increase of globalization and technology. However, this analysis has shown that transnational public spheres operated well before that in spaces such as the Columbian Exposition. Moreover, this analysis affirms McLaughlin’s claim that transnational public sphere discourses can serve counterpublic and feminist aims. The six speakers’ case reveals how marginalized rhetors engaged transnational appeals to advance their political aims in multiple and exclusionary public spheres. The rhetors first developed arguments within their counterpublic from African American women’s experiences. Then, they legitimized themselves and made their arguments intelligible in spheres other than their own. Finally, they made transnational appeals to launch their concerns outward. Importantly, the six speakers provided evidence from their own lives—their civility, their nation-building efforts, and their experience with discrimination—to argue for greater inclusion in broader spheres. Then, the speakers’ appeals to other nations’ brutality exerted pressure on the United States. Their efforts demonstrate that marginalized rhetors can present evidence from their local experiences to assert their counterpublic aims in a more powerful transnational feminist counterpublic sphere or the dominant public sphere. It appears that rhetors can
also invoke cross-border comparisons as appeals to launch their concerns into the
dominant public sphere. Future scholarship should continue to explore the strategic
potential of presenting local as well as international evidence as a rhetorical strategy to
advance rights claims into transnational counterpublics and public spheres.

This case study also contributes to feminist theory because it provides a deeper
insight into how African American women in particular navigated the tension between
agitation for greater rights and respectability in public address. While the speakers
advanced a vision for African American women’s rights, they also appealed to existing
value structures determined by the nation-state to make themselves intelligible to broader
audiences, which limited their ability to account for all African American women’s
experiences. Some scholars point to the fact that the speakers were only acceptable in
public when they were “commodified” in the quantifiable, masculine public sphere.220
Indeed, this analysis reaffirms Jennifer Wingard’s claim that the nation-state regulates
how “opportunity is available only to those who fall into appropriate and accepted
citizenship categories” which is “regulated through capital.”221 Thus, the US nation-state
promises “equality and freedom while it simultaneously condemns those who do not fit
into particular categories valued by the neoliberal state.”222 Undoubtedly, the speakers
had to align with Exposition’s conception of progress and prove how they have
contributed to nation-state interests, in order to be counted. Felski cautions that “[i]t has
become apparent that female community cannot simply transcend existing power
structures but is deeply implicated within them.”223 Indeed, though united in a feminist
African American counterpublic, the speakers were bound by the constraints of their
immediate rhetorical situation, and more broadly, they had to appeal to nation-state
interests to have a voice in the broader public sphere. At the same time, it is possible that the speakers understood that appealing to nation-state interests offered liberating potential. If we recall Dow and Tonn’s reading of counterpublics, the speakers’ appeals make more sense if we consider that the speakers made an active choice to engage dominant interests for feminist ends. The speakers appealed to the nation-state to infiltrate a public sphere that would otherwise invalidate their arguments if they failed to align with the interests of their audience.

From a rhetorical perspective, I argue that the Exposition speakers exercised what agency they had in a limiting rhetorical situation, but ultimately, they could not overcome the social and cultural constraints of an era in which they were considered inferior because of their race and gender. In an effort to overcome these challenges, the speakers strategically portrayed African American womanhood in a way that aligned with dominant understandings of civility to stake a claim in the Congress, and more broadly, they appealed to nation-state interests to gain a foothold in the Exposition. Thus, this analysis aligns more with Giddings’ assertion that “[m]uch of what has been interpreted as mere imitation of White values among middle-class Black women was a race-conscious mission.”224 While the speakers’ discourse could be interpreted as aligning with dominant understandings of American progress, the women’s discourse subversively and publicly demanded recognition for African American women as contributors to this progress. The speakers aimed to preserve their own ideas of African American women’s uplift but spoke to the transnational feminist counterpublic sphere of the Congress, working with them and against them to break into the majority public sphere. At
minimum, African American women counted themselves among important contributors to US progress.

Lastly, it is possible that the feminist African American counterpublic served as a pre-genesis stage to African American’s burgeoning political agitation into the next century. Lisa M. Gring-Pemble notes that social movements sometimes require a “pre-genesis stage in which individuals and groups accomplish the conditions necessary to move into the public sphere.” Scholarly agreement that Harper, Williams, and their fellow speakers contributed to the tradition of rhetorically powerful, intellectual, and publicly active African American women. Their Congress addresses preceded other African American women’s counterpublic discussions and public address platforms. Following African American exclusion at the Columbian Exposition, for example, a first ever Congress of Colored Women was held at the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition in 1895. Fannie Barrier Williams was invited to speak at the event. The six speakers’ efforts to unite women in an African American sisterhood also corresponded with the African American clubwomen movement, in which African American women would advance issues of greatest importance to them, including uplift and equal rights. Within twenty years, the National Association of Colored Women would have 50,000 women in 28 federations and over 1,000 clubs. These clubs likely served as additional counterpublic spaces for African American women to exchange discourse and to agitate for increased rights and recognition in the broader public sphere.

The six Women’s Congress speakers offer an example of how African American women appealed to their audiences in a challenging political space and repurposed the Exposition’s rhetoric of progress to assert their place in the nation. This analysis counters
the notion that the African American women served as disempowered tokens of their race in this space; rather, they shaped a larger conversation of African American women’s identity that would continue to develop after the Exposition. The speakers actively collectivized through a counterpublic when they folded themselves into the transnational feminist counterpublic sphere of the Congress and staked a claim in the broader public sphere. Within a short time, many of the speakers would join other women of their race to advance political discourse through the African American women’s club movement and public address. But at the Columbian Exposition—an event that contributed to developing a global women’s consciousness—the speakers played a vital role in constructing African American women as valuable members of their nation.


5 The speeches examined include Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation—An Address by Fannie Barrier Williams of Illinois” (May 18, 1894), 696-711; Anna Julia


Wanda A. Hendricks, Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 82.


This analysis recognizes that these speakers do not represent all of African American women’s thought at this time and aims not to essentialize African American women’s experiences and strategies, but rather to offer a snapshot of a handful of influential speakers and rhetorical strategies they advanced to learn more about how African American women advocated for empowerment in the public sphere. I subscribe to Lisa M. Gring-Pemble’s claim that “To view the emergence of women into the public domain as a result of efforts of a few courageous ‘great women’ or as a result of social, religious, political, and economic conditions is to highlight an artificial dichotomy between the public and private and to ignore the intermediary and highly significant processes of transformation.” See Lisa M. Gring-Pemble, “Writing Themselves into Consciousness: Creating a Rhetorical Bridge Between the Public and Private Spheres,” Quarterly Journal of Speech 84 (1998): 44. Thus, this project seeks to account for a step in the transformation of African American women in public life, rather than a panacea to ills they faced.


This is an abbreviated version of the title in the interest of space. The full title is as follows: The World’s Congress of Representative Women: A Historical Résumé for Popular Circulation of the World’s Congress of Representative Women, Convened in Chicago on May 15, and Adjourned on May 22, 1893, Under the Auspices of the Woman's Branch of the World's Congress Auxiliary, ed. May Wright Sewall (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1894).

Young, “Announcement,” The World’s Congress of Representative Women, v

Ibid., vi.

126

Ibid.


May Wright Sewall claims in her address at the Women’s Congress opening, “Almost all the countries of Europe, India, China and Japan, Turkey, Syria, and other oriental states, divers [sic] border states of African, Iceland, Australia, and our next neighbors, Mexico, Canada, Central and South America, are in this Congress, united to all the states within our own borders.” See “May Wright Sewall, President of the National Council of Women of the United States and Chairman of the Committee of Organization for the World’s Congress of Representative Women, World’s Congress of Representative Women, Chapter I.—The Introduction.,” in *The World’s Congress of Representative Women: A Historical Résumé for Popular Circulation of the World’s Congress of Representative Women, Convened in Chicago on May 15, and Adjourned on May 22, 1893. Under the Auspices of the Woman’s Branch of the World’s Congress Auxiliary*, ed. May Wright Sewall (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1894), 14.


Palmer and Henrotin, “Preface,” xxi.


Asen and Brouwer offer a detailed accounting of the evolution of public sphere theory from before to after Habermas in *Counterpublics and the State*, eds. Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 3-6; See also Nancy Fraser, “Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World,” in Nancy Fraser, et al.

26 See for example Nancy Fraser, et al., Transnationalizing the Public Sphere, ed. Kate Nash (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2014).


30 Fraser, “Transnationalizing the Public Sphere,” 9.

31 Ibid., 14

32 Ibid., 33-34.

33 Ibid., 30.


35 See for example, Critical Theory in Critical Times: Transforming the Global Political and Economic Order, eds. Penelope Deutscher and Cristina Lafont (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). In this volume, Jürgen Habermas provides an account of transnationalization as a “process that aims to create a ‘supranational’ democracy, that is, one above the level of a state,” 3. An example may include the European Union.


37 McLaughlin, “Feminism and the Political Economy,” 165-166.

38 Ibid., 157.

39 Ibid., 172.


42 Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” Social Text no. 25/26 (1990): 63.
43 Asen and Brouwer, *Counterpublics and the State*, 6-7.
44 Calhoun, “Imagining Solidarity,” 162.
47 Squires claims that “Instead of ‘the’ black public sphere or counterpublic, one should speak of multiple Black public spheres constituted by groups that share a common racial makeup but perhaps do not share the same class, gender, ethnic, or ideological standpoints.” See Squires, “Rethinking the Black Public Sphere,” 452; see also *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book*, ed. The Black Public Sphere Collective (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
49 Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 68.
53 Ibid., 168.
54 Dow and Tonn, “‘Feminine Style’ and Political Judgment,” 300.
55 Ibid.
56 “World’s Congress of Representative Women, Chapter I.—The Introduction,” 3.
57 Ibid., 4.
59 “World’s Congress of Representative Women, Chapter I.—The Introduction,” 5.
60 Ibid., 7.
61 Ibid., 4.
62 May Wright Sewall, “World’s Congress of Representative Women, Chapter I.—The Introduction,” 44.


Corn, *Women Building History*, 5. The idea of a Woman’s Building at a world’s fair was almost unprecedented; the only other woman’s building erected at such a fair was the Women’s Pavilion at Philadelphia’s 1876 Centennial Exhibition. See Corn, 66; Behling, “Reification and Resistance,” 178; and Jane S. Sutton, “The Building—of the Future,” in *The House of My Sojourn: Rhetoric, Women, and the Question of Authority* (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2010), 93). The Woman’s Building in Chicago was designed by a female architect, Sophia Harden, and women chose artwork, such as murals and sculptures, that would decorate the building’s exterior and interior (Corn, 5). The building contained exhibits and an assembly hall for speeches and lectures (Corn, 66). Women could decide what was displayed and how (Sutton, 95-96). Sutton claims that since the building’s architecture mirrored the other neoclassical buildings and fit into the Exposition, it seemed to serve as a marker of equality between the sexes. However, she notes that it was smallest of the buildings and set away from the main Court of Honor (Sutton, 99-100). The building’s placement represented how women have “an evolving relationship with the house of rhetoric” that “gives them access but denies their authority” (Sutton, 101). Indeed, the building rested not in a central location, but between the main fairgrounds, the “White City,” and the Midway Plaisance, a more carnivalesque, flashy area that departed from the civilized and stately White City (Wood, “Managing the Lady Managers,” 294; Sutton, 102). The physical location of the Woman’s Building on the Exposition plans was such that it straddled line between civil and savage (Behling, 178). Wood interprets this to mean that the “Woman’s Building provided an opportunity to locate women within the narrative of civilization,” but adds that in this space, “minority voices become coopted to serve the interests of the dominant narrative” (Wood, 290). From May to October, the Board hosted daily congresses in the Woman’s Building Assembly Room on a range of subjects about women in higher education and women’s professions (nursing, teaching, and art, for example). See Jeanne Madeline Weimann, *The Fair Women* (Chicago, IL: Academy Chicago, 1981), 546, and Corn, 66 and 82. The assembly hall seated 1500 total and some lectures drew a capacity crowd, but an average of 600 people attended each day (Corn, 82).

Wood, “Managing the Lady Managers,” 293; Corn reports 117 and alternates in *Women Building History*, 69.


The Women’s Congress represented one congress in the Exposition-wide World’s Congress Auxiliary which featured 20 departments and 225 general divisions and held meetings through the duration of the Exposition. More than six thousand speeches and presentations were delivered in total. See David F. Burg, *Chicago’s White City of 1893* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1976), 238, and Christopher Robert Reed, “All the World is Here!”: *The Black Presence at White City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 121. Attendees came from “ninety-seven nations, provinces, or colonies, and the fifty states and territories of the United States. They listened to 3,817 speakers” (Burg, 238). A sampling of Congress names includes “Women’s Progress,” “Medicine and Surgery,” “Temperance,” “Moral and Social Reform,” “Science and Philosophy,” and “Religion” (Burg, 235). See also Young, “Announcement,” v. Only one other congress was larger: The World’s Parliament of Religions. The Parliament of Religions ran from September 11-27, according to Eric J. Ziolkowski, *A Museum of Faiths: Histories and Legacies of the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 5 and 8, and Burg, *Chicago’s White City of 1893*, 263. Notably, there was a Congress on Africa from August 14-21, which was perhaps the largest gathering of African Americans at a world’s fair ever, according to Reed, “All the World is Here!”, 179.

The audience asked to hear from Frederick Douglass immediately after Coppin’s remarks. The editor notes that he was the only man to speak in the Congress after the opening remarks. See Fannie Jackson Coppin, “Discussion Continued by Fannie Jackson Coppin of Pennsylvania,” 717.


This is to the best of my knowledge. *The Congress of Women: Held in the Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, U.S.A., 1893*, ed. Mary Kavanaugh Oldham Eagle (Chicago, Ill.: North American Publishing Co., 1894) is an official volume of Congress speeches published with the president’s remarks. This official volume is different from *The World’s Congress of Representative Women* volume that I cite throughout this dissertation. *The Congress of Women* volume features no African American women speakers or participants that I can tell (most speeches are accompanied by a biography and photograph). I have also not found any scholarship that identifies or reports on other African American women’s speeches delivered at the Woman’s Building or during the official week of the Women’s Congress.


Ibid., 177.


Ibid., 297.


Reed, “All the World is Here!”, 126.


Reed, “All the World is Here!”, 102 and 125.

Behling, “Reification and Resistance,” 181.


Behling, “Reification and Resistance,” 182.


“Programme of the World’s Congress of Representative Women,” 75-76.


Reed, “All the World is Here!”, 125; See also Logan, *With Pen and Voice*, 48.


“Programme of the World’s Congress of Representative Women,” The World’s Congress of Representative Women, 80. It is unclear whether Williams delivered an address as part of this session.


“Programme of the World’s Congress of Representative Women,” 80. See also Logan, We Are Coming, 103.

Reed, “All the World is Here!”, 126.

Logan, “We Are Coming,” 66


Logan, “Frances E. W. Harper, ‘Woman's Political Future,’” 46. See also Reed, “All the World is Here!”, 122, and Logan, With Pen and Voice, 35.

Guy-Sheftall, Words of Fire, 39.

Logan, “We Are Coming,” 18.


Logan, With Pen and Voice, xi.

Wilson, Negro Building, 9. Wilson cites Nancy Fraser and Rosalyn Deutsche (see notes 13 and 18, page 315 of Negro Building); Michael C. Dawson, “A Black Counterpublic? Economic Earthquakes, Racial Agenda(s) and Black Politics,” in The Black Public Sphere, ed. The Black Public Sphere Collective (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 199–227. Squires also uses the term “black counterpublic sphere” in “Rethinking the Black Public Sphere.”

The Black Public Sphere, 1.

Squires, ‘Rethinking the Black Public Sphere,” 454.

Wilson, Negro Building, 8-10.


Wilson, Negro Building, 51-52.

Scholars have alternatively used the terms “black public sphere” and “African American public sphere.” In keeping with the terminology used throughout this dissertation, I will use the term “African American public sphere.”


Stillion Southard, Militant Citizenship, 103.


Brown, “Discussion of the Same Subject,” 726.

Ibid.


Ibid., 702.


Brown, “Discussion of the Same Subject,” 725.


Stillion Southard, *Militant Citizenship*, 104

Brown, “Discussion of the Same Subject,” 727-728.

Ibid., 728.


In an analysis of Harriot Stanton Blatch’s discourse, Belinda A. Stillion Southard finds that rhetors can draw some women into a “shared world,” but to the exclusion of others who are considered “uncivilized.” See Belinda A. Stillion Southard, “A Rhetoric of Inclusion and the Expansion of Movement Constituencies: Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Classed Politics of Woman Suffrage,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (March-April 2014): 142. Stanton Blatch was a white suffragist and public figure contemporaneous to the Exposition. She drew working class women into the suffrage cause by making their work valuable. However, she still rejected women along nativist lines and if they were not working mothers.


Ibid.

Ibid., 27-28.


Bederman, Manliness & Civilization, 25.

Ibid., 23.

Logan, With Pen and Voice, 102. Logan uses Kenneth Burke’s theory of identification to explain how Williams “proclaimed unity with her auditors by pointing out ways in which they all were, after all, the same.” See Logan, “We Are Coming,” 99.


Campbell, “Gender and Genre,” 481.


Brown, “Discussion of the Same Subject,” 728.


Ibid., 704.

Ibid., 699.

Ibid., 700.

Ibid., 709.

Ibid., 707.

Ibid., 701.

Ibid., 702.

Cooper, “Discussion of the Same Topic,” 714-715.


Felski, Beyond Feminist Aesthetics, 167.

Corn, Women Building History, 75.


185 Cooper, “Discussion of the Same Topic,” 713.
187 Brown, “Discussion of the Same Subject,” 725-726.
188 Cooper, “Discussion of the Same Topic,” 714.
189 Brown, “Discussion of the Same Subject,” 726.
191 Ibid., 721.
192 Cooper, “Discussion of the Same Topic,” 713.
193 Ibid., 714.
195 Ibid., 490.
196 Ibid., 487-488. Relatedly, rhetorical scholars have also noted how women of this era turned to republicanism discourses in their public address to argue for increased women’s rights. Ryan has also noted how during this era, Elizabeth Cady Stanton often referenced “the Republican tradition” that demanded rights for women along with men. Stanton argued that women were part of the ‘government by the whole people’ who deserved equal rights according to the foundational principles of the nation. See Ryan, “Gender and Public Access,” 282-283. Maddux also argues that a segment of white women speakers at the Exposition expressed their citizenship value when they tapped into a discourse of republicanism that advanced civic duty, common good, and elevation of the public sphere for a more moral and virtuous society. See Maddux, “Without Touching Upon Suffrage,” 119.
200 Ibid., 226.
202 Stillion Southard, Militant Citizenship, 128.
203 Ibid.
204 Brown, “Discussion of the Same Subject,” 725.
205 Cooper, “Discussion of the Same Topic,” 711.
207 Ibid., 723.
209 Cooper, “Discussion of the Same Topic,” 715.
214 Ibid., 437.
216 Cooper, “Discussion of the Same Topic,” 714.
218 For example, see Squires, “Rethinking the Black Public Sphere.” Asen and Brouwer claim that “the task of scholars is to attend to the contingent, particular constructions of counter entered into by participants in the public sphere” in Counterpublics and the State, 10.
219 Zackodnik, Press, Platform, Pulpit, xxv.
222 Ibid.
223 Felski, Beyond Feminist Aesthetics, 168.
224 Giddings, When and Where I Enter, 99.
225 Gring-Pemble, “Writing Themselves into Consciousness,” 58.
226 Guy-Sheftall claims that Harper’s Exposition speech “heralded the beginning of an era of emancipated womanhood in which women’s intellectual and political power would be unleashed for a better world” (See Guy-Sheftall, Words of Fire, 39). According to Logan, Harper “modeled the black feminist version of the Ciceronian orator” (See Logan, “We Are Coming,” 48). Reed claims that Williams’s “presentation helped build what has become an intellectual tradition of black feminism/womanism.” (See Reed, “All the World is Here!” , 125).
227 Wilson, Negro Building, 76.
228 Guy-Sheftall, Words of Fire, 7.
229 Giddings, When and Where I Enter, 95.
230 Corn, Women Building History, 70; Burg, Chicago’s White City of 1893, 325.
CHAPTER FOUR:

ACTIVATING TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY NETWORKS: IDA B. WELLS
AND MAINSTREAMING ANTILYNCHING

Introduction

As stated throughout this dissertation, feminist, postcolonial, and communication studies scholars are increasingly concerned with the advent of globalization and the increased circulation of people, goods, and ideas across borders. Scholars employ the term transnational to describe this cross-cultural movement. A transnational focus directs attention to the international, national, and local “interarticulations” of people and ideas, rather than viewing people and ideas as strictly bounded within nation-states. Rhetorical studies scholars have embraced theories of transnationalism to analyze how rhetoric(s) track across physical and cultural borders. Many scholars observe that when rhetorics circulate transnationally, they work simultaneously to enable and exclude citizenship and emancipate or oppress populations.

Scholars are calling also for an increased focus on revisiting past rhetorical texts from a transnational perspective. This includes historic discourse that may have circulated transnationally, such as social movement discourses aimed at audiences of many nations. The nineteenth century featured a number of transnational reform movements, including the woman suffrage and abolitionist movements. Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink refer to these movements as transnational advocacy networks, which consist of “relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound
together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services. Through these global networks, activists travelled beyond the physical boundaries of nations to collaborate with reformers situated in different parts of the globe. They circulated ideas back and forth between communities to promote political action. They appealed to others through speeches, meetings, pamphlets, newspapers, and newsletters.

This chapter seeks to further account for transnational activist rhetoric by examining discourse from the transatlantic antilynching movement of the 1890s. This movement originated in the United States to protest lynching that occurred predominately in the US South. Lynching is an umbrella term for unlawful murder committed by mobs against an accused criminal who has not been granted a fair trial. Some lawmakers and citizens supported the practice openly despite its illegality. In response, African American rights activists agitated in the United States and abroad to eradicate unlawful lynching in the US South. The transatlantic antilynching network operated through some of the same channels and connections that once formed the nineteenth century abolitionist movement. US activists connected with their counterparts in Great Britain from countries including England, Scotland, and Wales. The movement against lynching was transnational because activists and their discourses circulated between multiple nations and communities.

Perhaps the most famous antilynching activist of this time was Ida B. Wells, who tirelessly campaigned throughout the 1890s and into the twentieth century. Wells completed two tours of Britain between 1893-1894, during which she engaged in almost ceaseless rhetorical action. She distributed pamphlets, spoke to reform groups and elite
Britons, and wrote columns for the *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, a primarily white newspaper.\(^{11}\) Wells sent eight “Ida B. Wells Abroad” dispatches to the *Inter-Ocean* from Britain throughout 1894. The dispatches appeared on the front page of the daily national newspaper, which was one of the top five largest in Chicago and had a circulation of 700,000 in the Midwest and beyond.\(^{12}\)

Many scholars argue that Wells played a crucial role in exerting pressure on Americans to eradicate lynching through her transatlantic campaign.\(^{13}\) However, they have not yet analyzed Wells’s rhetorical strategies as part of a transnational advocacy network. This chapter aims to address this gap through an analysis of the *Inter-Ocean* dispatches to understand how rhetors mainstream social movement campaigns through transnational advocacy networks. I examine how Wells mainstreamed antilynching for US and British audiences through classic rhetorical strategies such as reappropriation and recirculation. Her discourse mapped on to the local, national, and transnational currents of her time. The dispatches serve as representative cases of how discourse can move between and across borders through a transnational advocacy network as activists attempt to advance their cause. Moreover, Wells was an African American woman who gained audiences’ attention and respect in the male-dominated realms of journalism and activism in the 1890s. Her discourse provides clues for how linking to a transnational network offers liberating potential for less-credible rhetors to mainstream social justice issues worldwide.

My analysis first contextualizes Wells’s discourse within the transnational advocacy network of the antilynching movement. I summarize her activities during her second tour of Britain, during which she reported back to United States through her *Inter-*
Ocean dispatches. Then, an analysis illuminates how Wells engaged classic rhetorical strategies to transnationalize antilynching to US and British audiences. First, she established herself at a transnational figure qualified to speak on lynching’s global consequences through strategies of reappropriation and recirculation. Next, she refuted the widely-held myth that sexual violence was the reason for lynching and also worked to denaturalize lynching to discredit it as an acceptable form of justice. Last, Wells transnationalized lynching to warn of its global negative consequences. She recirculated her supporters’ words, which reinforced the link between the local American practice of lynching and worldwide political and economic outcomes.

The conclusion argues that, though Wells undoubtedly influenced both British and US opinions, strong ideological currents limited the effectiveness of her appeals in the southern United States. These barriers to Wells’s message demonstrate how rhetorics are transcoded, or taken up and interpreted differently, depending on the location and audience. Ultimately, this analysis identifies how classic rhetorical techniques are effective tools for rhetors to advance social justice issues through transnational advocacy networks; however, it finds that rhetors must attend to how their message is transcoded differently across contexts. This analysis also clarifies how nineteenth century rhetors engaged transitional advocacy networks to mainstream social justice issues to a transnational audience.

Antilynching Activism in the 1890s

The antilynching movement emerged in the late nineteenth century in response to a dramatic increase in the number of brutal lynchings and other mob violence in the United States. The year 1892 marked the highest number of lynchings in the United
States up to that time. Many of these crimes were ethnically and racially motivated. In the American South, economic, political, and social factors contributed to the erosion of conditions for African Americans following the Civil War. Economic conditions that fostered conflict included increasing competition between African Americans with whites over customers for small businesses. Politicians and community leaders who had dominated the southern political landscape prior to the Civil War were threatened by African Americans who were now able to vote and serve in office. Beverly Jones argues that “[b]y the end of the nineteenth century the comparative fluidity of race relations in the Reconstruction era dissipated into increasingly rigid discrimination—legally, physically, and culturally.” These tensions led to a surge of violence deemed the “era of lynching,” roughly from 1880-1930. Although people of many races were lynched at this time, African Americans comprised 85 percent of victims in the southern United States. Terence Finnegan describes lynching as “political terrorism” for its role in social and political control of African Americans in that region. Sarah L. Silkey claims that many outsiders understood lynching as a form of “frontier justice” that was part of US folk tradition. Lynching was believed to be necessary in smaller towns that had a limited legal system, so citizens could mete out justice themselves when they deemed it necessary.

As a journalist in Memphis, Tennessee, Wells was well-informed on unlawful lynching in the South. She experienced a pivotal moment in 1892, however, when her friend Thomas Moss and his business associates were brutally murdered before they had a trial to assess their guilt. Wells reported in her autobiography that Moss’s lynching “changed the whole course of my life.” Wells determined that the purpose of lynching
in the South was not to control crime, but to perpetuate the oppression of African Americans. Men, women, and children were lynched for “trivial offenses on suspicion and in many cases when known to be guiltless of any crime.” The outrages continued because many lynchers and their supporters were members of local government and law enforcement. African American men were accused of sexually assaulting white women, when in reality, Wells claimed, these acts were often consensual. Under these conditions, African Americans were too intimidated to vote or run for office, start businesses, or even move in public freely.

Wells was horrified by a popular myth used to justify lynchings: that African American men had an unnatural desire to rape white women. Wells called the myth a “false cry” made “to blast race character . . . [that] has proclaimed to the world that virtue and innocence are violated by Afro-Americans who must be killed like wild beasts to protect womanhood and childhood.” She charged that this myth had no factual support, but that it endured because it provided a convincing narrative to defend the necessity of lynching. In the same year as the Moss lynching, Wells embarked on a dedicated career of lecturing publicly against lynching and mob violence. By 1893, she planned to stem the tide of lynching with the help of British reformers so that “sentiment will be aroused and laws enacted which will put a stop to America’s disgrace.” Through her public address and writing, Wells sought to dismantle lynching as an accepted form of American justice.

Launching a Transnational Antilynching Campaign

Beginning in 1893, Wells advanced a two-year transnational campaign against lynching. She formed bonds with reformers at home and across the Atlantic Ocean,
allowing her to reach crowds in the United States, England, Scotland, and Wales, especially through public addresses and the press. The Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition, which officially opened in May of 1893, provided a platform for Wells to disseminate her message to people from around the world. The Exposition invited 27 million national and international attendees to view exhibits touting US progress. In this setting, Wells raised awareness through the eighty-one page pamphlet against lynching, *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition*. Wells, who coauthored the pamphlet with Frederick Douglass and others, distributed between 10,000 and 20,000 copies on the steps of the Haitian Pavilion. She described *The Reason Why* as “a clear, plain statement of facts concerning the oppression put upon colored people in this land of the free and home of the brave.” She also connected with American and British activists attending the Exposition. Her agitation caught the attention of a well-known Briton, Reverend Charles F. Aked. He was a Baptist minister and Christian Socialist who headed the largest Nonconformist congregation in England, except for London. He and other contacts who had heard Wells’s message at the Exposition would provide even more avenues to spread her message during her second tour.

Just before the official opening of the World’s Columbian Exposition, however, Wells embarked on her first transatlantic antilynching tour on April 5, 1893. She accepted an invitation to visit two reformers in England: Catherine Impey of England and Isabelle Mayo of Scotland. Wells reflected in her autobiography that the invitation “seemed like an open door in a stone wall.” She was aware that British reformers and religious leaders may be a more sympathetic audience because they did not directly
benefit from lynching. She also believed they could pressure political and economic elites in the United States.

Wells developed several goals for her campaign: to undermine American narratives of lynching as an acceptable practice; to place Americans and British subjects in conversation with one another to debate the morality of lynching; and to change public opinion to view mob violence as an outmoded, barbaric practice, and thereby decrease incidences of lynching. To this end, Wells traveled to numerous cities in Scotland and England, including Edinburgh, Newcastle, Birmingham, Manchester, and London. She visited with religious and social reformers and fundraised at invited speaking engagements. Meanwhile, numerous British newspapers reported on her antilynching activities, including London Society, Edinburgh Evening Gazette, Newcastle Leader, Birmingham Daily Post, Birmingham Daily Gazette, and the Manchester Guardian, among others. Wells’s ideas were well-received by the British. Her activities also generated both credibility and ire with American audiences as positive reports of her tour in the British press trickled back to American journalists. Though she had hoped to pressure Americans with the help of the British, she mostly made connections and raised awareness with Britons on this first tour. After two months of travel, Wells returned from Britain in June to attend the Columbian Exposition. She was ignited by the positive British reception and was convinced that she could leverage British support of her cause. Wells decided to return to Great Britain for a longer tour to visit more cities and speak to more audiences.
Reaching British Reformers

Wells returned to England in February of 1894 for a second lecture tour that spanned six months. She traveled to Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, London, and other smaller cities. During this much longer tour, she conducted more extensive outreach to both British reformers and British and American presses. Reverend Aked’s influence and reform network served as a launchpad for Wells’s campaign. She was invited to speak more than thirty-five times in London alone. In total, she delivered more than one hundred lectures and dined with members of Parliament at an honorary breakfast. Some audiences comprised more than 2,000 people. She also met with British political and social elites in their homes to rally their support. In the August 4, 1894, edition of the Inter-Ocean, Wells summarized the events of her trip and reported, “I spoke to all classes, from the highest to the lowest. Besides the meetings in churches and at social clubs, fashionable ladies sent cards of invitation for my afternoon lectures in their drawing rooms.” Wells also visited with religious leaders and delivered lectures to congregations. She met with a number of reform organizations, including the British Women’s Temperance Association, Quaker women, and the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. She hoped to persuade these organizations to pass resolutions that condemned lynching at their conventions. However, most groups were unwilling to take a committed, public stand against lynching. Her tour culminated in the formation of the British Anti-Lynching Committee, made up of members of Parliament and other powerful Britons and Americans. While the committee did not sponsor or affiliate directly with Wells’s campaign, it formed primarily because of her agitation and demonstrated that the antilynching movement was spreading in England.
In addition to public lectures and private gatherings, Wells’s disseminated her message through many of England’s religious and secular presses. Her arguments circulated in major religious newsletters and journals, ensuring that her message reached congregations around Britain. Wells befriended British newspaper editors and spoke with several reporters who published interviews with Wells in their newspapers. Stories about her appeared in British newspapers more than fifty times during her tour. When she could not voice her opinion in a publication, Wells implored her powerful British friends to champion antilynching on her behalf. Reverend Aked’s writing, for example, appeared in American journals such as the Economist and Spectator and the renowned British Contemporary Review. His words were taken up by other British monthlies, which circulated Wells’s message even further. Wells also sold copies of her pamphlet, United States Atrocities, to her British audiences. Wells’s extensive outreach and publicity on her second tour sparked a strong interest in the British public over the cause of antilynching.

Speaking Back to Americans

While touring England, Wells also garnered positive and negative attention from American audiences. Her ideas circulated back to the United States through British and American newspaper and journal coverage of her tour. The “Ida B. Wells Abroad” dispatches appeared on the front page of the Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean approximately every two weeks beginning on April 2, 1894. In these articles, Wells detailed her activities and how Britons reacted to them. Prominent African American weeklies with which Wells was affiliated, such as the Conservator (Chicago’s first African American weekly newspaper) and New York Age (which had substantial white readership), also
featured reports of Wells’s travel and some of her lengthy antilynching letters. The *New York Times* and other national newspapers mentioned her exploits in England occasionally, as well. Likewise, articles in American religious periodicals promoted Wells’s cause. For example, the editor of the Boston *Christian Register*, Samuel J. Barrows, expressed his support for Wells’s British friend Reverend Richard A. Armstrong. Armstrong denounced the American Christian community for its inaction against lynching. In his editorial, Barrows echoed Wells’s own words when he argued that it was crucial for “public sentiment to be awakened in the South” to stop lynching. Engaging in yet another rhetorical act, Wells mailed antilynching stories from the British press to powerful Americans. Her targets included editors of national newspapers, religious leaders, governors of every US state, and the president of the United States, Grover Cleveland.

Press reports of British antilynching sentiment drew the attention of powerful southerners, in particular, for political and economic reasons. Southern politicians and businessmen had many reasons to remain in good favor with the British. Southerners competed with northern states to attract British immigrants to join the southern labor force. Also, southerners were eager to maintain and increase access to global markets. For example, Atlanta businesses traded with Bristol, Birmingham, Liverpool, and London, all of which were cities where Wells targeted her advocacy. Finally, southern elites felt pressure due to ongoing economic decline from the Civil War and the nationwide Depression of 1893. As a result, southern politicians were caught in bind between white supremacists who wanted to maintain lynch law and British business partners who did not want to be associated with violent racial discrimination.
Despite many economic reasons to oppose lynching, Americans and Britons began to push back against Wells’s attacks in the press. She received intense criticism from some southern whites due to her agitation in Britain.\(^{81}\) The white supremacist rhetoric of the “lynching for rape narrative” redoubled as British moral opposition increased. Southerners felt they had to contain Wells’s activism abroad and defend themselves against her accusations.\(^{82}\) Some Americans claimed that American lynch law was not Britain’s business.\(^{83}\) The American press also attacked Wells’s character,\(^{84}\) but British libel laws made it difficult for the most scurrilous attacks to be heard in England.\(^{85}\) Publicly, Wells considered the negative attention to be positive because it raised awareness for her cause.\(^{86}\) Though Wells generated a fair number of detractors, she simultaneously raised awareness and garnered many allies and sympathizers. In July 1894, she returned to the United States with more British and African American support.\(^{87}\) Her supporters recognized that she had raised a new level of antilynching awareness across the Atlantic. Thus, the sum of Wells’s efforts during her second tour was to raise positive and negative attention for her transnational antilynching campaign.

**Mainstreaming Antilynching through a Transnational Advocacy Network**

Wells’s arguments reached audiences locally, nationally, and globally. As discourse about lynching flowed between Great Britain and America, antilynching pressure increased in the US South. I argue that Wells engaged classic rhetorical strategies to mainstream antilynching through an existing transnational advocacy network of reformers, and in the process, created new networks. In general, mainstreaming refers to the practice of bringing something into prominence or into the “prevailing current or direction of a movement or influence.”\(^{88}\) More specifically, in a transnational context,
mainstreaming refers to the practice of identifying how local and global political, social, and economic practices operate to oppress and liberate people. Attention to these practices allows citizens and leaders to enact steps toward more equitable conditions. Rebecca Dingo, for example, highlights the transnational practice of gender mainstreaming in development, which involves “developing policies, programs, and practices that do not simply respond to gender inequality but that actually encourage social, cultural, and political practices that positively impact women and their diverse needs.” This requires identifying structures, from the local to the global, that perpetuate inequalities. Then, communities can propose and implement changes, such as legal decisions, that attempt to address oppressive conditions.

In the nineteenth century, Wells called for audiences in the United States and Britain to note the global consequences of locally-situated actions. In this case, Wells drew attention to inequities that she believed could only be stopped through public protest. It was only until a groundswell of protest arose from multiple groups—everyday citizens, politicians, the church, and the press—that more equitable conditions could be fostered through practices such as establishing and reinforcing antilynching laws.

To better understand Wells’s transnational mainstreaming strategy, this chapter examines Well’s Inter-Ocean dispatches. The Inter-Ocean was one of the only major newspapers in the US that denounced lynching in the 1890s. Wells’s Inter-Ocean assignment was “unprecedented” because she was an African American woman writing for a predominately white newspaper. Wells reprinted eight of the Inter-Ocean letters in her autobiography because they offered “a bird’s-eye view of that memorable trip in 1894 and show how loyally one American newspaper stood by the cause and gave its readers a
detailed account of that campaign.” Featured in the *Inter-Ocean* between April 2 and July 7, 1894, the dispatches covered a range of subjects, from Wells’s speaking engagements, to descriptions of the towns she visited, to her conversations with supporters as well as skeptics, to the interviews she conducted with local press. Wells exposed American readers to the words of influential Britons and reported trends in the British press about her antilynching activities. Importantly, the dispatches offer a chronological view of the highlights of her campaign as she reported it, so we can examine the discourse with an eye for recurring arguments and strategies, as well as how these arguments tracked and changed over the course of her 1894 tour.

**Wells’s Transnational Rhetorical Strategies for Mainstreaming Antilynching**

Through her dispatches, Wells activated an existing transnational advocacy network to illuminate the local, national, and global consequences of lynching. More specifically, she engaged a strategy of mainstreaming to bring antilynching to transnational prominence in three specific ways: 1) She established herself as a legitimate transnational authority when she reappropriated criticism against her and recirculated others’ words; 2) she refuted popular understandings of lynching when she demystified and denaturalized what was considered a harmless practice; and 3) she rendered lynching a transnational problem when she recirculated British critiques of the United States to reveal lynching’s political and economic consequences on a global scale. The analysis concludes that while Wells’s use of recirculation, reappropriation, and refutation worked transnationally to sway extensive public opinion in Britain and the United States, her antilynching arguments could not be transcoded or taken up and repurposed productively.
by a local, southern, white American audience to stop lynching. The chapter concludes with implications and conclusions for future transnational rhetorical scholarship.

The “Negro Adventuress”: Mainstreaming a Transnational Identity and Agency

In order to mainstream her antilynching arguments, Wells first had to gain enough credibility and influence to be heard in front of diverse audiences. In effect, she had to mainstream herself. As an African American woman in the 1890s, Wells had a difficult task to gain respectability with audiences in Britain and the United States. Moreover, she spoke publicly about uncivilized and uncomfortable subjects: Lynching was a violent and unpleasant act, and the myth that justified lynching centered on rape and sexual violence. At a time when people considered miscegenation a terrible offense, Wells added fuel to the fire with her scandalous suggestion that white women and African American men might have consensual sexual relationships. And despite or perhaps because of these provocative topics, Wells spoke to thousands during her second tour of Britain. Many churches, reformers, and even the British parliament welcomed her.

Scholars argue that Wells was able to speak on these subjects in these settings, in part, because of her multifaceted identity, and particularly, as a transnational subject. According to Raka Shome, “national and cultural identities cannot be essentialized, [in] that they are protean, that they cross borders, and that they are transnational.” Wells was a transnational subject because she had many complex facets of identity that were situated in multiple nations, locations, and cultures. Wells encompassed many seemingly antithetical identities as a southern African American who disavowed the South and engaged with mostly white Britons; as a civilized woman who was outspoken about controversial topics; and as a woman journalist and an activist speaking openly in the
masculine public sphere. Carolyn Karcher claims that “Wells exemplifies the ‘insider-outside’ duality” of individuals of African descent who live in a different location, such as the United States. They possess a “‘Black Atlantic’ consciousness” and exist “between two worlds, belonging to neither the one nor the other.” In other words, Wells was both American and more than just American, which allowed her flexibility to disavow the United States in front of British audiences, but still identify as American. Patricia A. Schechter also notes other aspects of Wells’s dual identity: she was “doubly singled out and yet invisible” as an African American and a woman. She was an exile, neither here nor there, but she also possessed a unique identity with which to speak out against lynching. For example, Wells’s civility and womanliness helped her move fluidly among many elite Britons, who treated her with respect and found her to be credible. However, some of the same identities enabled critics to invoke derogatory names for “black,” “woman,” and “black woman.” In order to mainstream antilynching, Wells would first have to overcome negative perceptions that audiences had for her, at least to gain enough respectability to be heard and believed. In her dispatches, Wells established her role as a credible transnational messenger on antilynching in two ways: She reappropriated critiques against her to work in favor of her arguments, and she recirculated the words of more powerful public figures to boost her credibility so that she could mainstream her antilynching message.

First, Wells established herself as a transnational authority on lynching by reappropriating the words of her critics and refuting them. Reappropriation refers to the act of taking a term that has been used to insult or denigrate a person or group and adopting the term for subversive purposes. Wells reappropriated critiques against her that
had been published in the press when she reprinted the words with an accompanying refutation. In so doing, she reversed the logic of her critics in service of her cause. For example, Wells engaged in reappropriation when one of her harshest critics, the *Memphis Commercial*, accused her of acting as a “Negro adventuress.” She quoted their words in her first dispatch to the *Inter-Ocean* on May 28:

> I see the Memphis Daily Commercial pays me the compliment of calling me a ‘Negro adventuress’ and violently abuses the English people for listening to me. If I am [to] become an adventuress for stating facts when invited to do so, by what name must be characterized those who furnish these facts, and those who give the encouragement of their silence to them?

In this passage, Wells redirected her critics’ own words against them. She drew attention to the fact that it was wrong that she should be criticized and called names and not the people who fail to criticize lynchers. She implied that, instead, insults should be levelled against those who report on lynchers’ activities without condemning them (the press), or even those who consume media detailing the lynchers’ activities, and say nothing (newspaper readers). She implicated southern and northern presses and citizens for their silence on the issue. Secondly, in this passage, Wells reappropriated the term of a “Negro adventuress” to delegitimize the *Commercial’s* attack and to separate her noble efforts from her accusers’ unfounded vitriol. The *Commercial* editors implied that Wells sought personal gain through questionable and dishonest means, as a “sexual adventuress” might do. However, Wells played on the term’s polysemy and engaged its second meaning as someone who traveled far and wide to seek adventure. She interpreted the term to refer to someone who boldly adventured where others would not in the service of telling the truth.
and stating the facts. Wells crafted her own image as a pioneer and traveler to bolster her transnational identity. She contrasted her activities and those of the reporters even more starkly when, later in the same passage, she claimed that “if the same zeal to excuse and conceal the facts were exercised to put a stop to lynching, there would be no reason for me to relate, nor for the English people to give ear to these barbarities.” She charged that the energy of southern reporters should be redirected to stop lynching, and that northern press and citizens should stand for justice and not stand silent in the face of the South’s support of lynching. She ended the dispatch with the weight of her African American and British audience behind her: “Eight million of so-called free men and women await the answer, and England waits with them.” After levelling an attack that implicated both northern and southern Americans, Wells implied that African Americans and Britons alike stood in solidarity with her, which further boosted her credibility as a transnational figure.

Wells revisited the conflict with the *Memphis Daily Commercial* in another dispatch to reinterpret and reappropriate the critiques leveled against her. In so doing, she bolstered her own arguments and identity as an adventuresome, tireless activist. Her July 7 *Inter-Ocean* dispatch responded to an earlier article in the Memphis paper that had disparaged Wells:

> The Editors of the *Commercial* have flooded England with copies of that issue of their paper with more detriment to themselves than harm to me. The tone and style of that paper have shocked the English people far more than my own recital could do. It has given them an insight into the low moral tone of a community which supports a journal that outrages all sense of public decency,
that no words of mine could have done. That *Commercial* article has brought warmer friends and stronger supporters to the anti-lynching cause than it perhaps would have otherwise.105

As a self-defense, Wells circulated her own interpretation of the *Commercial*’s attack for her readers. She reappropriated their critique to show that it failed to make sense. Logically, the *Commercial* editors had done more harm than good for their own cause of delegitimizing her. In this way, she tracked and attempted to mitigate the effect of the *Commercial*’s criticism. Wells continued to craft an identity as a transnational activist and adventuress traveling from shore to shore to spread the truth. She would proudly take her critics’ abuse in order to reveal the southern press’s disreputable character to her British audiences.

Wells also mainstreamed her identity as a crusading “adventuress” by recirculating the words of her defenders. Her British supporters responded to the attacks by the southern press with indignation.106 Wells then recirculated negative British reactions back to her American audience through the *Inter-Ocean* dispatches. In the July 7 dispatch, Wells cited the *Liverpool Daily Post*, which had declared her the “champion of the colored race.”107 The *Post* condemned the *Commercial*’s attacks and claimed that no words that the American press printed would justify lynching.108 Wells then cited an array of other influential dailies that had defended her, including the *Liverpool Daily Post, the Christian Register, the London Daily News,* and the *London Daily Chronicle* (one of the most well-regarded in London at the time).109 Wells’s reports of southern antagonism made the British skeptical of her southern accusers. She concluded the July 7 dispatch with a quote from her dispatch two weeks earlier, in which she first adopted the
moniker “Negro adventuress.” She adopted the term readily to represent the people fighting for antilynching, rather than standing idly by and showing complicity through their failure to speak up about the issue. She referred to the label again in her autobiography years later, cheekily noting that at the time of her second British tour, she had sent pamphlets to the US president, US governors and ministers, and US newspapers so Americans were kept “fairly well informed of the ‘Negro Adventuress and her movements’” This reference suggests that, at the time and years later, Wells reappropriated the term to defend her transnational efforts to “state the facts,” and that she adopted the name proudly as she agitated across nations and communities.

Wells did not shy away from criticism but rather used it to further her cause. She understood that discrimination against African American women prevented her from having the credibility and respect granted to more privileged speakers. As such, she reappropriated critiques and recirculated the words of others who had more authority to boost her own credibility. This example reveals that reappropriation and recirculation are effective rhetorical strategies through which a rhetor can engage and exploit the movement of a transnational network of activists. With the backing of her British supporters and a handful of American presses, Wells could then focus on the task of dismantling the myths around lynching.

“You Can’t Change the Record”: Demystifying Lynching for a Global Audience

In an April 9 dispatch, Wells lamented that “the world believes that Negro men are despoilers of the virtue of white women.” However, she hoped to convince a transatlantic audience that lynching was justified on false grounds. To this end, she refuted the notion that lynching was a necessary and natural tradition and instead
characterized it as a barbaric practice based in a false myth. She expanded an earlier argument that had previously shocked southerners. In 1892, Wells wrote in her newspaper, the *Memphis Free Speech*, that lynching is justified by an “old threadbare lie” that “Negro men rape white women.” Wells continued, “If Southern white men are not careful they will overreach themselves, and public sentiment will have a reaction. A conclusion will then be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women.”*113* Wells implied that white women had consensual sex with African American men, incensing the Memphis community. The Memphis press threatened to kill Wells and her business partner J. L. Fleming. Eventually, mobs destroyed their printing press, causing them both to move away from Memphis for safety.*114* Two years later, Wells presented the same accusation of the “threadbare lie” of lynching to a much wider audience in her 1894 *Inter-Ocean* dispatches. She chose to foreground the “lynching-for-rape” argument in her column to mainstream it with audiences beyond the southern United States.

Wells sought to change how the public viewed lynching from a localized, traditional practice to a subject of international disgrace. To do so, Wells demystified lynching, or painted an unabashed picture of what lynching really entailed. She deconstructed the rape narrative to reveal its falsity. She also warned of the myth’s wide circulation across nations as Americans traveled abroad and spread it to others, including the British. Thus, to Wells, people around the world had been misinformed about the truth behind lynching. Specifically, Wells demystified lynching through the same strategies she used to mainstream herself: refutation and recirculation. First, she challenged the logic of the narrative that lynching was necessary to control sexual
violence perpetuated by African American men. She also characterized lynching as unnatural and uncivil by recirculating shocking examples of US mob violence to US and British audiences. Through these tactics, she deconstructed a powerful narrative that had served to minimize critiques against lynching. In so doing, she delegitimized a persuasive transnational narrative that travelled back and forth between the United States and Britain.

First, Wells demystified lynching through factual evidence in her dispatches that refuted the popular myth that lynchers sought to control the rapacious desire of African Americans. She introduced facts and statistics that undercut the myth that African Americans were lynched primarily for the crime of rape. Shirley Wilson Logan argues that, in public speeches from 1893 and 1894, Wells engaged in an “investigative reporting style” and crafted “a well-researched narrative supported with publications in the Southern white press.”

Logan agrees with Karlyn Kohrs Campbell when she states that Wells’s “persona of objectivity” aligned with a “traditionally ‘masculine’ style of speaking” that privileges factual, “irrefutable” evidence. Presumably, this masculine reporting style would have widely appealed to Wells’s transnational, but mostly Western, audience. Americans and Britons would be persuaded by objective and rational reporting over personal or narrative accounts. Through the Inter-Ocean dispatches, Wells again constructed a seemingly objective account of lynching with facts stated from other sources. She recirculated reports from the American and British press to construct her antilynching counter-narrative.

As she had done in public speeches and writings, Wells refuted popular understandings of lynching as a means to control violence in her Inter-Ocean dispatches.
She titled one dispatch “You Can’t Change the Record,” which implied that the facts on lynching demonstrated the true motives behind it. She did not cite a specific newspaper or independent report in some dispatches, but she reported the information about lynching so plainly, and repeated the statistics, as to suggest that they were the objective truth. In multiple dispatches, for example, Wells emphasized how not even one third of people lynched had been charged with rape or assault, which was contrary to popular belief that sexual violence was the primary crime associated with lynching. She concluded, logically, that these statistics proved that the lynching-for-rape claim was “a falsehood invented by the lynchers to justify acts of cruelty and outrage.” Instead, people were lynched for a range of crimes, often based on false charges and without the right to a fair trial. An African American man named Charles Martin, for example, simply “failed to stop when ordered to do so by a mob which was hunting another Negro, and was shot dead in his tracks,” according to Wells’s July 7 dispatch. To support her assessment further, she cited influential Britons who reported on the false rape myth. She quoted Reverend Aked, who had visited the United States himself and had “found that only forty of the 158 Negroes lynched last year were charged with outrages upon white women.” Wells noted that this fact was also published in The Chicago Tribune, and in other well-known US press outlets. If Wells was not to be believed, she had hard statistics confirmed by British and US authorities. Wells’s statistics made evident that few of the people lynched were even accused of the crime of rape. African Americans were lynched for much less serious offenses, which proved that there were other motives behind lynching. And many of her facts were verified independently of her own data, given that they came from other reputable sources.
To follow, Wells offered alternative reasons for why the “threadbare lie” served the interests of powerful southern white men. In her April 9 dispatch, Wells reported how regularly she encountered false myths about African Americans during her travels: “Here again I meet the terrible impression that the Negro race is such a terribly degraded one.” According to Wells, the mistaken belief endured because African Americans were unable to defend themselves against the pernicious lynching-for-rape myth: “The pages of current literature, when opened to a discussion of the negro question at all, are open only to the southern white man, who is given full license to defame the entire negro race as he chooses.” Moreover, non-Americans formed impressions of the race that were crafted entirely by the more privileged and powerful, including white Americans traveling abroad. Wells devoted several paragraphs of her April 9 dispatch to exposing the immorality of a common refrain. The excerpt read:

[The American traveler] draws a picture of the isolated district in the South where great hordes of ignorant and dangerous Negroes swarm; of the inadequacy and delay of the law; and then asks, “What would you do if your wife or daughter were so assaulted?” And the person for whose benefit this picture is drawn finds himself relenting in judgment and remaining silent when he meant to condemn hanging and burning alive.

Wells’s story implied that critics of lynching who listened to this reasoning could not argue with the notion that his or her own wife or daughter could be victimized if the “dangerous Negro swarm” was not controlled. Wells intended for this passage to seem like a convincing argument, initially. Then, she engaged a classic refutation strategy wherein she stated her own position and demonstrated how the pro-lynching argument
and evidence were flawed. Wells offered a three-pronged refutation, which revealed the true conditions in the South: 1) Lawmakers were criticized for slow action on solving crimes, but they should be called out for enabling the lynchers and their financial interests, instead; 2) scores of African Americans were lynched for unproven and insignificant crimes, while their extralegal murders went unpunished “because it is not considered a crime to kill a Negro”; and 3) white women and African American men consented to “adulteries,” meaning that accusations of assault were unfounded. With these claims, Wells refuted the common myth that lynchings protected communities from uncontrollable African American men. Instead, the true outrage was that white southerners got away with murder while African Americans were punished severely for crimes they may not have committed. Finally, Wells suggested that white women and African American men consented to sexual relationships. Lynchers were unable to cope with the reality that white women desired African American men, and so they punished the latter. Wells refuted common beliefs that perpetuated the myth and provided counter narratives for the myth’s popularity. Wells’s reasoning circled back to her overarching argument that lynching protected the interests of powerful southern men. She demystified lynching and reframed it as a practice for white men to exercise racial control.

Wells engaged a final strategy to demystify lynching when she portrayed lynching as unnatural and abnormal. Lynching was commonly believed to be a necessary practice that satisfied small communities’ need for justice when it had little resources. Instead, Wells emphasized the barbarity of the practice and the people who committed it. She reversed the role of the African American race as violent, uncivilized, and animalistic, and instead identified southern whites as the barbaric race. She completed this reversal
in her dispatches when she shared specific instances of gratuitous cruelty. She believed audiences would no longer consider lynching to be justified after hearing painful details. Also, these examples would have had broad appeal and would have resonated with audiences in England and in the United States, outside of those sympathetic to southern lynchers and the lynchers themselves. First, Wells unflinchingly provided raw examples of the ruthless murder of men, women, and children for senseless reasons. These killings violated the natural order of justice, in which the state punished people who were found guilty at trial. Instead, Wells claimed that lynching targeted the innocent and weak because “lynch law was against people who are largely defenseless,” who were “afflicted by disability and always under the fatal disadvantage of race prejudice.”

Her Newcastle audiences were “aghast that more than ten Negro women and children have been lynched during the past nine months.” Wells emphasized how lynching was exceptionally cruel and unnatural when she cited instances when vulnerable women and children were murdered.

Next, she warned that lynching was unnatural because it instilled bloodlust into young children who participated in the violence alongside adults. She described the responses she received when she circulated a photograph of a lynching to a shocked audience in Liverpool. The lynchers had taken the photograph themselves to keep as a trophy. The print depicted a number of boys, some as young as ten years old, who stood under a hanging man. Wells noted another instance when, following a lynching, “Half-grown boys dragged the half-charred trunk up the streets, and after playing a game of football with it, hanged it again.” She detailed other horrors performed by mere children: “A white youth under seventeen boast[ed] that he had assisted in “three ‘nigger”
lynchings and expected to take part in as many more.” While the “hanging, shooting, and burning alive of human beings” was brutal and inhumane, it was even more unfathomable that children could contribute to the carnage alongside adults. Wells’s focus on this particularly vulnerable population drove home the extent to which lynching was unnatural. Wells invoked a final example that accused the public at large for its inhumanity, in addition to the lynchers. The public failed to protest the horrific lynching of a thirteen-year-old boy, but simultaneously, many Americans marched on Washington to protest high unemployment. Surely, the natural order was disrupted when Americans cared more about their finances than the brutal murder of children.

Wells mainstreamed her argument about the unnaturalness of lynching when she gained the concurrence of major British supporters, who circulated her arguments in turn. Wells recirculated words from the Liverpool Weekly Review in her July 7 dispatch:

We have recounted the horrors and injustices common to the persecution of the blacks in their naked truth, gleaning them from other authorities than Miss Wells. They constituted a lamentable sickening list, at once a disgrace and degradation to 19th century sense and feeling. Whites of America may not think so, but British Christianity does and all the scurrility of the American press won’t alter the facts. Wells included this quotation to verify that she spoke the truth: others had checked her facts and concluded independently that lynching brought “disgrace and degradation.”

Moreover, lynching disturbed the British, who discredited one of Wells’s biggest critics, the American press. Wells quoted “the leading religious journal of the Kingdom,” The Christian World, which averred that “if the public reports be correct, [they] would
disgrace a nation of cannibals.” The reference to cannibals reinforced Wells’s argument that the lynchers were unnatural, sick, and barbaric, rather than the accused. Moreover, she reported how her stories had a visceral effect on her British audiences. She recirculated these reactions in her dispatches for rhetorical effect: her reports of British disgust toward Americans confirmed her argument that lynching was abhorrent and unjustifiable. She presented British responses as factual truth, just as she had plainly stated the facts of lynching. Wells reported, for example, that British audiences responded to the gruesome facts in her addresses with “horror, surprise, and indignation,” and Newcastle Reverend Walter Walsh, who led a congregation of 1,000 to which Wells spoke, was “ill with horror.” Throughout her dispatches, then, Wells provided evidence that British audiences were persuaded by the undeniable fact that lynching was unnatural, and they confirmed this fact with their affective responses. Her readers could not deny that the British reacted negatively to information about lynching. The barbarity claim shifted from a “horde” of “dangerous” African Americans onto American whites situated in the US South as audiences in Britain agreed that southerners’ behavior violated the natural order.

Wells’s strategies for demystifying lynching for British and American audiences served to mainstream how lynching-for-rape was a false myth that covered up more insidious motives to control African Americans. She demystified lynching when she refuted the popular lynching-for-rape narrative and instead provided evidence that lynching was about racial control. She further demystified lynching when drew attention to its unnaturalness. Importantly, Wells refuted a narrative that had tracked across borders with American travelers and, at minimum, had reached the British public. She
characterized lynching as an unnatural and inexcusable practice that led to the murder of the most vulnerable in any society and that encouraged children to join in the carnage. She generated credibility and built momentum when she recirculated quotes from major Liverpool newspapers that verified her claims. The British press picked up her ideas and circulated them locally, and Wells was able to pick them up again and send them back to her US audience with the Inter-Ocean dispatches. Therefore, she mainstreamed her critique to transnational audiences when she refuted a narrative that circulated from Americans to the British, and back. Again, strategies of refutation and recirculation operated successfully across borders and appealed to Americans and Britons. Wells’s efforts kicked out the legs from under southerners’ efforts to maintain control through lynching and began to stoke a fire under the United States to respond to her charges.

*Mainstreaming Antilynching from the Local to the Global*

After mainstreaming herself and the false myth of lynching with the British, Wells sought to mainstream antilynching so that it resonated in local, national, and global contexts. She mainstreamed antilynching through two strategies: She first emphasized the national impact of lynching and implicated all Americans in its continued practice. Then, she recirculated the words of her supporters to transnationalize lynching. She would prove that the “civilized world,” as represented by England, was monitoring the US response to the lynching problem and that US inaction could lead to harmful political and economic consequences. Ultimately, Wells mainstreamed antilynching as a cross-border, transnational issue as she recirculated British and American critiques of lynching. However, against a backdrop of deeply-instantiated racism and struggles for power, her
arguments and evidence did not resonate fully with her most important audience: Southern powerbrokers.

First, Wells mainstreamed the local practice of lynching to a national audience when she shamed all Americans for their failure to protest lynching, making them complicit with lynchers. Wells called lynching a “national evil,” our “national crime,” and “America’s disgrace.” “Lynching infamy” was no longer situated only in the South, but had reverberated around the entire nation. Wells appealed to all American citizens who had the ability to protest lynching but chose not to act. Belinda A. Stillion Southard argues that activists can nationalize their cause by drawing upon “shared values held by the national community.” Drawing upon shared values allows a political cause that is mired in regions or states to be unstuck and applied nationally. Wells identified this challenge with lynching, which was situated in pockets of many southern states and some northern states, and was not gaining traction with a national audience. It was easy for a majority of Americans to turn a blind eye to lynching. In order to nationalize lynching, then, Wells portrayed it as an act that threatened US rights to freedom and justice. In so doing, she linked antilynching to the greater national narrative of US values. Moreover, all US citizens were responsible for perpetuating injustice. In her dispatches, she directed her critiques to northerners and the southerners, as well as the US government, the press, and the church. She argued that organizations that purported to report the truth could not be relied upon because they protected the interests of lynchers. For example, Wells asserted in her May 28 dispatch that southern and northern newspapers rarely called for “an uncompromising stand for the exercise of law no matter what the crime charged. Where these papers had failed to [call for legal
intervention rather than lynching[,] it was an encouragement to mobs.” Churches were equally guilty, as “their very silence in the face of the hanging, shooting and burning which are of weekly occurrence is an encouragement.” In other words, the churches’ failure to condemn unlawful murders was akin to their own complicity in the acts. She implicated clergy and congregants further: “[O]ur American Christians are too busy saving the souls of white Christians from burning in hell-fire to save the lives of black ones from present burning fires kindled by white Christians.” Wells accused the press and pulpit equally, reinforcing how the entire nation was responsible for a national injustice. No one group could be singled out because all Americans were to blame.

Everyday citizens also perpetuated violence against African Americans through their inaction. Wells pointed to the irony of how inhumane lynchings continued throughout 1893 “whilst the Chicago Exposition was inviting the attention of the world to the products of American civilization.” Lynchers committed murder unabashedly during a highly-publicized celebration of American progress and superiority. Furthermore, white Americans revealed their racism at the event itself. Wells cited how even the great Frederick Douglass, the Exposition’s Haitian commissioner, was the only person in a commissioner role who was not invited to Exposition-related receptions and soirees held by the Board of Lady Managers. Wells charged that this was “especially absurd coming from America which has always boasted so loudly of her democracy.” Through these instances, Wells determined that the United States was a “country disgraced because of that fear to speak out” against racial prejudice and violence, and that American citizens were culpable together. To remain silent in the face of national atrocities was akin to committing the lynchings. As such, Wells intimated that the issue
of lynching was no longer situated in a remote part of the South, but reverberated nationally.

In addition to establishing lynching’s national consequences, Wells transnationalized antilynching by linking the cause to global and economic flows between the United States and other nations, primarily England. Throughout her dispatches, she highlighted how lynching’s consequences were no longer contained within US borders. Other nations began to take notice of the United States’s unjust treatment of its citizens. Wells appealed to Americans’ fear that British opinion would turn against them\textsuperscript{153} and warned that it was dangerous to be viewed negatively on the world stage. She admitted freely that she hoped to “appeal to English people to aid us in molding American public sentiment in favor of justice to everyone, and a fair trial for life and liberty.”\textsuperscript{154} She provided numerous examples of how British opinion of the United States was tarnished because of lynching. Specifically, Wells characterized lynching as a transnational issue by warning that a failure to stop lynching could result in negative political and economic consequences for the United States.

First, Wells aimed to exert political pressure on Americans by placing popular British press in conversation with the US press. She then recirculated these conversations to her Inter-Ocean audiences through her dispatches. She positioned well-known editors of British newspapers as sympathizers to her campaign who deeply disapproved of America’s failure to end lynching. On April 9, Wells quoted a recent edition of the Liverpool Daily Post, which featured editor Sir Edward Russell’s report of a recent antilynching lectured delivered by Wells to Hope Hall in Liverpool. Russell also spoke at the event and suggested to the crowd that a resolution should be passed during the
proceedings that declared, “any injustice founded upon prejudice against race should be
dismissed from the mind as beneath contempt, inconsistent with Christian character, and
even incompatible with civilization. (Applause.)”155 Russell reported further that
Reverend Aked, who was also present, had moved the audience to pass such a resolution
with the argument that the “perpetuation of such outrages, unchecked by the civil power,
must necessarily reflect upon the administration of justice in the United States and upon
the honor of its people. (Applause.)”156 Both men’s words confirmed that British press
and clergy were alarmed by US inaction against lynching. The audience’s applause and
the passage of the resolution suggested that the Hope Hall audience agreed with the
speakers’ collective condemnation of the United States. These representative voices
called into question the honor and civility of not only southern lynchers, but the United
States’ government and citizens as a whole. Wells’s supporters reinforced her claim that
the entire nation would be held accountable for lynching.

Wells cited other well-known newspapers in her dispatches to promote
antilynching as a transnational issue with wide-reaching political consequences. In a May
19 Inter-Ocean dispatch reporting from Newcastle, she reprinted new writings from
Russell that had appeared in the April 19 edition of the Liverpool Daily Post. Russell’s
words crystallized her argument that US lynching was drawing negative attention
internationally. Russell suggested that multiple nations had the responsibility to eradicate
lynching when he wrote, “It is an essential part of the business of great nations to shame
each other.”157 The British must act if Americans “are in the meanwhile horrifying the
whole of the civilized world by allowing the law to be ignored, justice to be disgraced
and humanity outraged by continuous exhibitions of reckless popular brutality.”158
Through Russell’s testimony, Wells argued that the British took notice of discrimination at the root of lynching and sought to discipline the United States in response. In her very last dispatch, sent from London and appearing in the *Inter-Ocean* on July 7, Wells quoted another *Post* article that shamed the *Memphis Daily Commercial*, and by extension, the United States as a whole. The *Commercial* had published articles that attacked Wells’s character and intentions. The *Post* claimed,

> A civilized community does not need lynch law, and it is perfectly obvious that a country in which lynch law is resorted to, with the approval of public opinion and the concurrence of respectable citizens, as the *Memphis Daily Commercial* alleges, is one in which any crimes committed by the black race could be effectually dealt with by legal process of law.\(^{159}\)

This final passage from the *Post* buttressed Wells’s argument that British influencers could only conclude that Americans were uncivil. Wells offered multiple instances in which the British disapproved of lynching vehemently and chastised the United States. More broadly, Wells demonstrated how British critiques of the South circulated from Liverpool, to Memphis, to Chicago. The British press engaged southern presses in their writing, which Wells then picked up and recirculated in her own dispatches. Moreover, the British threatened to alert other nations of US incivility and circulate Wells’s critiques further. Lynching was no longer a contained, national issue, but a transnational one, as the British committed to exerting pressure and engaging other nations, too.

If morally shaming the United States was not enough, however, Wells exerted pressure on Americans by connecting lynching to a global economy. Her dispatches warned her American audience of the financial consequences of failing to eradicate
lynching. Because maintaining southern white economic superiority was a key driver of racial discrimination, an appeal to economic growth would likely garner powerful southerners’ attention. Southern economics depended on a cordial relationship with the British. As such, Wells devoted ample space to describing renowned British manufacturing hubs, Liverpool and Manchester, in her dispatches. These cities had ties with the US southern cotton trade and were former slave trading posts. Wells reminded her readers that the British abolished slavery in 1807, well before the United States. Wells highlighted how, before abolition, half of African slaves sent to the West Indies and America were transported on ships built in Liverpool. Once in the Americas, traders replaced their human cargo on these ships with sugar and rum, which was subsequently transported to Liverpool to be sold in England. The slave ships then returned to Africa for the next transport. Wells noted that this triangle of trade had “brought enormous wealth” to Liverpool. She demonstrated how Liverpool’s success had been built on the backs of oppressed Africans. Wells inferred that pre-abolition conditions in Liverpool were akin to the current economic situation in the South, which benefitted from the ongoing oppression of African Americans.

Yet Liverpool had reinvented itself after slavery was abolished in England and had become one of the most successful cotton markets in the world. Importantly, this success no longer relied on racial oppression: “Liverpool has learned she can prosper without slave trade or slave labor” and “[h]er freedom-loving citizens not only subscribe to the doctrine that human beings regardless of color or condition are equal before the law, but they practice what they preach.” Wells suggested that cities can only truly prosper when they are free of discrimination. She compared present conditions of the
United States to pre-abolition Britain to highlight how economic motivations perpetuated lynching. Just as profits had discouraged Liverpool from abolishing slavery, economic interests made southerners reluctant to end lynching, which fueled a new form of slavery and oppression. The United States should follow Liverpool’s lead and eliminate oppression or else risk falling out of favor with key British trading partners. In this extended example, Wells reminded her audience of the important link between Liverpool, an economic power player, and the United States, whose own cotton trade was beholden to Liverpool. She linked the local issue of antilynching to a global market, rendering the issue transnational.

And yet, Wells did not advance the economic appeal as far as she could have to pressure southern audiences. She made clear the link between Liverpool’s thriving economy and their progressive stance, and the US South’s economy and its discriminatory practices. But, she could have given greater attention to the very thing about this link between nations that might get the attention of southerners: the transnational trade of goods. She implied that trade across borders may be disrupted if Britain disapproved of lynching; and yet, nowhere in her dispatches did she make this threat clear. She did not present tangible consequences, such as trade embargos, that could result from continued lynching. Wells’s British friends were also silent on this key aspect of US-British relations. They warned of the moral and political consequences of allowing lynching to continue, but downplayed the potential financial consequences that might have threatened the southern economy. Wells’s transnational message did not gain traction with the localized audiences that she hoped to reach most, including those in power who could pass antilynching laws and enforce them. Given that earlier she argued
that the economy was a driving motivation for lynching, curiously, she did not paint a complete picture of the financial consequences of a failure to eradicate lynching. Perhaps Wells depended so much on a recirculation strategy that, when her British supporters failed to make the economic argument, Wells did not think to make it either. Or, she may have opted not to make the economic argument, since she did not have her British supporters’ words to reinforce her claims.

Despite her limited appeal to transnational economics, Wells’s local to national and national to global arguments established the consequences of lynching across borders. She mainstreamed antilynching nationally and transnationally when she recirculated the words of her supporters and generated a moral and political debate between Britain and the United States. Wells recirculated British condemnation of lynching back to the United States through the Inter-Ocean and engaged local newspapers, like the Memphis Daily Commercial. The issue of lynching that had been situated previously in the US South now tracked to a transnational audience. Also, Wells emphasized the interconnections between the US economy and global politics, albeit mildly. Her Liverpool example, while having the persuasive capacity to pressure southern elites, did not reach its potential as a key motivator to eradicate lynching. And perhaps, even if Wells had strengthened this economic appeal, the racist and political forces in the South were too strong for Wells to advance antilynching immediately.

**Conclusion**

In one of her last Inter-Ocean dispatches, Wells reflected on her tour from London: “The seven weeks’ agitation in this city against lynch law has waked up the South.” While it is indisputable that Wells drew positive and negative attention for her
cause during her British tours, not all scholars are as sanguine about her efforts to stem the tide of lynching in the United States. This analysis has demonstrated the rhetorical strategies she engaged to mainstream antilynching, but also argues that ideological, economic, and political forces were stacked too strongly against Wells to persuade most southerners to raise a public sentiment against lynching.

From a transnational scholarship perspective, one reason for why antilynching did not mainstream with powerful southerners is that social, economic, and political forces driven by racism were too powerful for the antilynching argument to be transcoded, or be taken up by, the lynchers and their enablers. Rebecca Dingo defines transcoding as the process of engaging and stretching a rhetorical concept across different contexts. When a rhetorical concept like “antilynching” is transcoded by local audiences, it can take on slightly different meanings or can be taken up differently “depending on context, occasion, and audience” without the meaning changing at its core. Wells constructed antilynching rhetorically during her campaign so that the concept would be taken up widely. Indeed, antilynching resonated strongly with British audiences to the point that they embraced antilynching as a critical social issue and reported this in their press and public speeches. Their interpretation of antilynching mostly aligned with Wells’s core arguments that lynching was a barbaric, unnatural, and pressing global issue. However, Wells’s antilynching arguments could not transcode to a southern American audience, which rejected the idea that lynching was a transnational issue that required immediate resolution. In other words, Wells’s arguments were not taken up and adopted by her southern audience in the way that Wells intended. She had hoped that southern powerbrokers would adjust their behavior to avoid political and financial fallout. Instead
of adopting antilynching, however, southerners rejected Wells’s arguments. Dingo notes that “as rhetorics move, their meanings may shift to fit with various political agendas.” Shame and pressure from Wells and the British was not enough to sway them to incorporate antilynching into their political agenda. It is possible that a stronger appeal to economics would have helped to transcode antilynching among southern audiences more effectively, considering that protecting financial interests was a factor driving lynching. Had southerners felt a greater economic threat, they may have viewed antilynching as a crucial issue, as Wells and the British did. As such, they may have acted proactively to snuff out lynching and protect their political and economic interests. However, the intense racism against African Americans, and the vitriol directed toward Wells from many Southerners, were likely major factors that prevented her antilynching message from reaching all of her intended audiences.

This analysis helps explain how rhetorics change and are taken up differently by local constituencies as they travel transnationally. Arguments that are compelling to one audience can fail to reach another audience as they circulate across borders and communities. This reaffirms Dingo’s claim that “rhetorical meaning is not always stable. Rhetorics can shift and, thus, have drastically different material effects.” While Wells mainstreamed antilynching across national and transnational borders, her message did not persuade locally-situated audiences in the South that she most hoped to reach. This also begs the question, can a mainstreaming strategy operate in local, national, and global contexts at once? Rhetors can disseminate their message, but they cannot control how it is taken up by different constituencies. They must anticipate and attend to localized desires of all of their audiences in order to mainstream rhetorical concepts like
antilynching. And in some cases, ideological, political, and economic forces may be too strong for activist messages to engender an immediate response from all intended audiences.

Nonetheless, Wells played a crucial role in advancing antilynching through a transnational advocacy network. Scholars agree that Wells contributed to a transnational social shift in which her American and British audiences began to see lynching as a barbaric, immoral practice rather than an acceptable form of justice.\textsuperscript{167} She left a legacy that would encourage future activists to agitate in America and Britain into the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{168} For example, the British Anti-Lynching Committee that formed at the end of Wells’s second tour visited a number of southern states to investigate lynching in the fall of 1894. Their visit pressured some state governors to respond with public statements. However, the American press attacked the Committee, characterized them as international “meddlers,” and discredited them to the point that their antilynching efforts could not produce a positive southern response.\textsuperscript{169} Due in part to Wells’s efforts, some American states established antilynching legislation in the 1890s, though most laws were not enforced locally.\textsuperscript{170} Numerous states including Georgia, South Carolina, Kentucky, and Texas, passed laws that promised to punish law enforcement officers who failed to protect prisoners from mobs (in other words, who released the prisoners to be murdered). South Carolina, North Carolina, and Ohio ruled that victims’ families should receive reparations from lynch mobs.\textsuperscript{171} However, the degree to which these laws were enforced is unclear.

It is surprising to consider that the city of Memphis, home to some of Wells’s harshest critics, responded most strongly to antilynching pressure. However, in this case,
Wells drew the attention of the Memphis Chamber of Commerce when she mailed its members British press accounts that denounced southerners’ inaction against lynching. To minimize the chance that Memphis’s lucrative cotton trade would be disrupted, Memphis newspapers published antilynching articles for the first time and there was no known incidence of mob violence in Memphis for the next twenty years. Lynching continued in the United States into the 1900s, but the number of lynchings never reached the highest figures of the 1890s again. The drop in lynchings as well as the passage of more stringent legislation suggest that Wells’s campaign played a role in raising awareness and changing public opinion about lynching. Ultimately, however, her attempt to mainstream antilynching transnationally could not overcome the ideological forces of her time to persuade most southern elites and lawmakers to stop lynching immediately.

This analysis has also shed light on how rhetors can engage classic rhetorical strategies to mainstream social justice issues through an existing transnational advocacy network. While Wells moved through former abolition channels, she also forged new relationships as she spoke to audiences of thousands and met with prominent Britons in their homes. She expanded the transnational network further when she reported her efforts to the Inter-Ocean and personally sent press clippings to US presses, politicians, and clergy. In the process, Wells engaged in classic rhetorical strategies of reappropriation, recirculation, and refutation. From Wells’s example, these approaches seem to be highly fitting for transnational work because they are capable of persuading audiences across different nations. In her dispatches, Wells mainstreamed herself through reappropriating and recirculating the words of influential figures to establish her credibility. Wells’s example shows how rhetors can navigate difficult rhetorical situations
when they reappropriate criticism and recirculate positive discourse through their transnational advocacy networks. Wells framed herself as a brave adventurer and a respected advocate for her race in order to reverse her negative portrayal in the press and to boost her credibility. Wells also engaged her network to circulate the argument that lynching was based in a myth about rape and was unnatural, and thereby demystified lynching for her transnational audience. Thus, it was possible to demystify and refute powerful transnational narratives through a journalistic, fact-driven reporting style that appealed to a range of Western audiences. This suggests that facts and statistics can persuade audiences across borders. Local practices that are instantiated in a culture can be uprooted and rendered unnatural through transnational pressure. Finally, Wells nationalized and transnationalized a locally-situated issue by recirculating the words of her supporters, who linked lynching to valuable transnational political and economic relationships. Wells imparted to her US audience how other nations took notice of Americans’ apathy over lynching. She recirculated her supporters’ words, which corroborated her warning that a failure to eradicate lynching would tarnish the United States’s global image and threaten its political and economic opportunities. Wells undoubtedly sparked a transnational debate and exerted pressure on American audiences through recirculating British responses in her dispatches. In some cases, she inspired British press and reformers to pressure Americans to pass antilynching legislation. Her most lasting contribution, however, was to encourage a transnational shift in attitudes toward lynching. Crucially, Wells’s example demonstrates how rhetors can engage classic rhetorical strategies to mainstream social justice causes through an existing transnational network.
There is more to learn about how rhetors of the nineteenth century advanced their arguments transnationally to make change at the policy level. Rhetorical critics should consider the pitfalls and successes of attempting to mainstream issues through classic rhetorical strategies in transnational advocacy networks. Wells should be commended for drawing British attention to her cause, but ultimately, Wells’s and the reformers’ appeals to morality and justice could not overcome deeply-instantiated ideologies based in racism. Though some southern states passed antilynching legislation, the laws were often unenforced and lynchings continued. While Wells’s efforts did not immediately stem the tide of lynching, her strategies to mainstream her cause were successful in generating a debate across the Atlantic that would continue into the next century.

2 Hesford and Schell present transnationalism as an analytical lens to attend to how culture is shaped by global and local “interarticulations” of information, goods, and people (See “Configurations of Transnationality,” 461-70. See also Raka Shome, “Transnational Feminism and Communication Studies,” Communication Review 9, no. 4 (2006): 255-267.
4 Representative cases are examined in the following sources: Inderpal Grewal, Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Hesford and Schell, “Configurations of Transnationality”; Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998); Richards, Transnational Feminist Rhetorics and Gendered Leadership in Global Politics; Rachel C. Riedner, “Lives of In-Famous Women: Gender, Political Economy, Nation-State Power, and Persuasion in a Transnational Age,” JAC 33, no. 3-4 (2013): 645-669; and


6 Keck and Sikkink, Activists Beyond Borders, 10 and 168.


9 Ibid., 2.


11 Royster claims that because the Inter-Ocean was a white newspaper, it “provided Wells a vehicle for reaching a much larger audience,” in Southern Horrors and Other Writings, 37. According to Richard Junger, the Inter-Ocean was one of five daily morning newspapers in Chicago and by 1897, the newspaper had a circulation of 700,000. See Becoming the Second City: Chicago's Mass News Media, 1833-1898 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 148 and 186.

12 For example, see Silkey, Black Woman Reformer, and Teresa C. Zackodnik “The Platform, the Pamphlet, and the Press: Ida B. Wells’s Pedagogy of American Lynching,”
182


19 Tolnay and Beck, A Festival of Violence, 14-17.

20 Lynching in the New South, 8.


23 Wells-Barnett, Crusade for Justice, 64.

24 Ibid., 47.

25 Ibid., 137.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.


29 Ida B. Wells, “Lynch Law in all Its Phases,” para. 2. In Our Day: A Record and Review of Current Reform 11 (January-June 1893): 333-347. I accessed the online version of the speech provided by Shirley Wilson Logan, to which she added paragraph numbers. Logan notes, “The Reverend Joseph Cook was editor of the publication, Our Day: A Record and Review of Current Reform, which published the version of the speech included in this unit. As a founder of the Monday Lectureship, Cook invited Wells to speak as she noted in her biography, Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells, ed. Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 81. As the editor of Our Day and as the organizer of the event, Cook had direct access to Wells’
speech.” Logan’s version of the speech can be accessed electronically at http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/wells-lynch-law-speech-text.


31 Wells-Barnett, Crusade for Justice, 131.


34 In her autobiography, Wells reported that she distributed 10,000 copies (Wells-Barnett, Crusade for Justice, 117). However, there is some disagreement among scholars about the actual number. Royster reports that Wells printed and distributed up to 20,000 copies (Southern Horrors and Other Writings, 36-37). Other scholars, such as Barbara J. Ballard, report that Wells distributed 10,000 copies. See “A People without a Nation,” Chicago History 28, no. 1 (1999): 40.

35 Wells-Barnett, Crusade for Justice, 117.

36 Wells-Barnett, Crusade for Justice, 129.

37 Royster, Southern Horrors and Other Writings, 36.

38 Silkey, Black Woman Reformer, 61. See also Schechter, Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 92.

39 Wells, Crusade for Justice, 86.

40 Giddings, Ida: A Sword Among Lions, 260-261.

41 Silkey, Black Woman Reformer, 71.

42 Ibid., 3.

43 Wells, Crusade for Justice, 95, 103, and 107.

44 Ibid., 90-102.


46 Schechter, Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 93. See also Bay, To Tell the Truth Freely, 151, and Giddings, Ida: A Sword Among Lions, 268.

47 Wells, Crusade for Justice, 116. See also Giddings, Ida: Sword Among Lions, 268.

48 Giddings, Ida: A Sword Among Lions, 282. See also Bay, To Tell the Truth Freely, 145-6.

49 Wells, Crusade for Justice, 124-125.

50 Silkey, Black Woman Reformer, 95-6.

51 Wells, Crusade for Justice, 176.

54 Ibid., 307.
55 “Against Lynching: Ida B. Wells and Her Recent Mission in England,” *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, August 4, 1894. This article did not appear in Wells’s sequence of *Inter-Ocean* dispatches in her autobiography, which is why the primary source is cited.
58 Ibid., 105.
60 Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 189.
64 Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 183. See also Silkey, *Black Woman Reformer*, 103.
65 McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled*, 209.
71 Karcher, “Ida B. Wells and Her Allies against Lynching,” 143.
72 Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, 143.
74 McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled*, 209-10.


85 Silkey, *Black Woman Reformer*, 127

86 McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled*, 220-221. See also Silkey, “Redirecting the Tide of White Imperialism,” 118.


89 Dingo, *Networking Arguments*, 3.

90 Ibid.


92 Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 177. In *Crusade for Justice*, Wells notes that she was friends with William Penn Nixon, the editor of the *Inter-Ocean*, which led to her six-month assignment for the newspaper (125). The *Inter-Ocean* regularly reported on African Americans’ struggles for equality. It featured a weekly column written by Judge Albion W. Tourgee, a white man who was popularly known as “the Negro’s best friend” for his sympathy for African Americans and his outspokenness against their poor treatment. According to Wells, Tourgee “touched almost exclusively on the civil and political conditions of the Negroes in the South and other parts of the country” in his weekly column (119-120).


98 Karcher, “Ida B. Wells and Her Allies against Lynching,” 141.

99 Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform*, 82. Other scholars concur with Schechter. Nichols calls Wells a “hybrid” figure who enacted two identities: an “American negro lady” or “race woman,” and a “race man.” As an African American woman, she adopted a “discourse of etiquette” and “rhetoric of civilization” and embodied a civilized African American woman (bourgeois, respectable), which made her more palatable to audiences. According to Nichols, this identity allowed Wells to take on more masculine qualities as if she were an African American man, such as speaking for
(predominately male) members of her race and using “aggressive rhetoric in defense of herself” (See Nichols’ “The ‘Adventuress’ Becomes a ‘Lady,’” 57). Zackodnik argues also that Wells conformed to a discourse of civilization (“The Platform, the Pamphlet, and the Press,” 159) and Bederman claims Wells embodied womanliness (Manliness & Civilization, 63). Silkey confirms these assertions in Black Woman Reformer, “Chapter 3: The Struggle for Legitimacy,” 72-92.

100 Nichols claims that Wells’s “experience abroad loosened some of the strictures that normally constrained black women involved in race work” (“The ‘Adventuress’ Becomes a ‘Lady,’”” 53).


102 Ibid., 168-9.

103 Ibid., 169.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid., 182-3.

106 Bederman, Manliness & Civilization, 65.

107 Wells-Barnett, Crusade for Justice, 184.

108 Ibid., 183-4.


110 Wells-Barnett, Crusade for Justice, 186.

111 Ibid., 214.

112 Ibid., 136.


114 McMurray, To Keep the Waters Troubled, 147-148.


120 Ibid., 186.

121 Ibid., 165-166.

122 Ibid.


125 Ibid., 131.

126 Ibid., 136.

127 Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, “Introduction to Form and Genre,” in Methods of Rhetorical Criticism: A Twentieth-century Perspective, edited by

128 Wells-Barnett, Crusade for Justice, 137.
129 Bederman, Manliness & Civilization, 62.
130 Wells-Barnett, Crusade for Justice, 140-141.
131 Ibid., 168.
132 Ibid., 139.
133 Ibid., 187.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid., 178.
136 Ibid., 157. Wells’s daughter and autobiographer Alfreda M. Duster notes that Wells referred to protestors who marched in Washington, D.C. in 1894. They sought aid during a period of high unemployment.
137 Ibid., 185.
138 Ibid., 158.
139 Ibid., 168.
140 Ibid., 127.
141 Ibid., 146.
142 Ibid., 131.
143 Ibid., 137.
145 Stillion Southard, Militant Citizenship, 70.
146 Wells-Barnett, Crusade for Justice, 165.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid., 155.
149 Ibid., 150.
150 Ibid., 163-4
151 Ibid., 164.
152 Ibid., 155.
155 Ibid., 141.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid., 157.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid., 184.
160 Ibid., 133-4.
161 Ibid., 135.
162 Ibid., 181.

Ibid.

Ibid., 6.


Silkey, “Redirecting the Tide of White Imperialism,” 119.


CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION

Introduction

Douglass’s dedication speech at the Haitian Pavilion on January 2, 1893, touched off a robust series of African American activist discourses at the Columbian Exposition and beyond. He claimed that Haitians fought for “the cause of universal human liberty,” and in a sense, so did Douglass, the six Congress speakers, and Wells. All of these rhetors advanced arguments calling for the freedom of their race, albeit from different locations and through varying channels. This dissertation has investigated how the Exposition’s transnational setting and contemporaneous transnational advocacy networks provided resources for rhetorical invention. To synthesize and reflect upon these findings, this conclusion chapter begins with a summary of arguments and a review of the implications of each case study. Then, I reflect on broader implications for transnational rhetorical theory and public address.

Rhetorical Opportunities and Constraints in a Transnational Setting

In Chapter Two, I argued that Douglass harnessed the exigence of the nationalistic Exposition to join Haitians and African Americans in a transnational Pan-African community. Douglass repurposed American exceptionalist discourses through the jeremiadic form to confront the United States with its own failure to fulfill its exceptionalism. He celebrated heroic revolutions and reminded his American audience that they had a divine errand and a precious inheritance to protect. Next, I argued that
Douglass appropriated the Exposition’s goal of advancing political and economic progress to argue that the United States must embrace Haiti. More powerful Americans had to stop oppressing people of African descent as a precondition to achieving true civility in America and gaining other nations’ respect, which would continue the march toward Manifest Destiny. Finally, Douglass linked Haitians and African Americans in a larger transnational Pan-African community based in a proud racial heritage. Haitians had proved that they were vital nation builders and protectors, and since they were joined in a transnational community with all people of African descent, then African Americans were also capable citizens. Douglass concluded that the United States should welcome African Americans’ assimilation and increased rights in the nation.

This transnational analysis of Douglass’s speech texts attended to how rhetors may invoke multiple nations and peoples to repurpose and challenge nationalist discourses. He employed nationalist arguments to forge a transnational Pan-African community that carved space for African Americans in the United States. He also invoked this community to accuse fully-enfranchised Americans of failing African Americans. Yet, in so doing, Douglass upheld the idea that Haitians and African Americans were valuable for their economic and political contributions to the nation-state. His construction of a transnational community also placed limits on who could participate. Douglass’s citizen was presumed to be male, and except for rare exceptions such as Wells, most prominent civil rights leaders at the time and into the twentieth century were male. This imbalance speaks to how women speakers, and especially African American women, had to struggle for credibility in a masculine public sphere. Overall, Douglass’s speeches offer an example of how nineteenth century rhetors agitated
for increased rights through a transnational Pan-African community, in tandem with and in opposition to US nationalism.

Chapter Three revealed how six African American speakers—Williams, Cooper, Coppin, Early, Brown, and Harper—argued for their civil rights and recognition in the challenging rhetorical situation of the Women’s Congress. I argued that the speakers first unified women of their race into a feminist African American counterpublic through a rhetoric of sisterhood. Their counterpublic represented a discursive arena wherein African American women could articulate arguments that they would launch outward to other publics, including the transnational feminist counterpublic sphere of the Women’s Congress. The speakers appealed to the Congress’s driving goal of civility when they proved they were civil women and civic actors who had uplifted themselves through organization and education. The speakers then launched their concerns into the broader US public sphere when they tapped into the Exposition’s rhetoric of progress to pressure privileged Americans to help secure their equality. Through a rhetoric of objectivity and through patriotic oration, the speakers established African American women’s role as nation-state contributors. Then, they pointed to the irony of their exclusion in a progressive nation through references to their own experiences with discrimination, and to other oppressive regimes that were similar to the United States in how they had restricted citizens’ rights. The speakers argued for their greater inclusion and exerted pressure on the United States at an event meant to shore up US progress.

The six speakers moved their arguments within and outside of multiple spheres—a feminist African American counterpublic, a transnational feminist counterpublic of the Congress, and the US public sphere of the Exposition—to accomplish their aims. The
speakers also engaged a number of rhetorical strategies to appeal to audiences within these spheres, including a rhetoric of sisterhood, a rhetoric of objectivity, patriotic oration, and irony. And, they forwarded multiple appeals that engaged national and transnational examples. These findings suggest that rhetors can compare the evidence from their own experiences to the experiences of oppressed people in other nations simultaneously to assert their counterpublic aims in more exclusionary transnational feminist counterpublic spheres or dominant public spheres. This analysis also confirms that transnational public spheres are not strictly modern phenomena and adds to existing scholarly work that examines transnational counterpublic spheres (and many other public spheres) that operated in the nineteenth century. Moreover, this dissertation expands upon Fraser and McLaughlin’s contributions to transnational public sphere theory because it shows how transnational public spheres can serve counterpublic and feminist aims to help marginalized rhetors break into multiple and exclusionary public spheres. As in Douglass’s speeches, however, the six speakers appealed to existing value structures determined by the nation-state to make themselves intelligible to broader audiences. They had to navigate the line between agitation for greater rights and respectability in public address, and in the process, they did not to account for all African American women’s experiences. However, this may have been a strategic choice on the part of the rhetors, who recognized that their only course of action was to appeal to the same nation-state strictures that limited their civic participation. The speakers made an active choice to engage dominant interests for feminist ends. Thus, this analysis suggests, along with Bonnie J. Dow and Mari Boor Tonn, that speakers in binding rhetorical situations may actively choose to appeal to dominant, hegemonic interests for feminist and liberating
Considering the rhetorical strategies and arguments they advanced, the six speakers’ counterpublic agitation could very well have represented the pre-Genesis stage of a robust African American clubwoman movement—a movement in which African American women most likely engaged in more counterpublic activity to advance African American women’s issues into the next century.

Chapter Four investigated how Wells mainstreamed antilynching across the Atlantic through a transnational advocacy network. Wells reappropriated critiques against her and recirculated the words of her supporters to build her credibility as a transnational “Negro adventuress,” who was a brave advocate for her race’s equality. Wells also refuted the widely-circulated myth that undergirded lynching, which was that lynching controlled African American men’s sexual violence against white women. She demystified the myth through hard evidence that proved that southerners exercised lynching for racial discrimination and control, rather than to exact fair justice. Wells further denaturalized lynching with examples of how the practice targeted the innocent, including women and children, and encouraged children to participate in the brutality. Finally, Wells recirculated her supporters’ criticism of American southerners to warn that the local practice of lynching had worldwide political and economic consequences. I found that Wells’s appeals could not transcode with her target audience, who were not convinced enough by the possible threat to their economic and political supremacy to stop lynching. Though Wells could not gain an immediate response from her target audience, her dispatches reveal in part some of the transnational connections and strategies she employed that ultimately contributed to a sea-change in US attitudes toward lynching.
Wells’s case revealed how rhetorics change and are taken up differently by local, national, and global constituencies as they travel transnationally. While Wells mainstreamed antilynching across national borders, she did not persuade her most important audience because her argument could not transcode with southern powerbrokers in the manner she intended. This analysis suggests that a rhetorical concept like “antilynching,” despite having transnational traction, will be taken up differently by national and local audiences, and rhetors must attend to these differences carefully for effective persuasion to result. And, in some cases such as Wells’s, ideological forces such as racism may be too strong for rhetors to overcome singlehandedly, but activists can launch a movement that could eventually lead to the success of their cause. This analysis finds that rhetors can engage classic rhetorical strategies within transnational advocacy networks to mainstream social justice issues. Recirculating evidence from supporters in a transnational advocacy network, as well as refuting and reappropriating criticism, is effective for building rhetors’ credibility across borders. Objective evidence can uproot the foundations of a transnational myth and undermine a local tradition, as well. And, a rhetor can recirculate others’ words to warn of the transnational consequences of a local practice to exert pressure. However, activists’ arguments might not always transcode with local audiences in a way that aligns with their cause due to strong ideological currents. In sum, Wells’s case shows that classic rhetorical approaches can translate and persuade across national borders, and therefore, are fitting for transnational work.

Theoretical and Historical Implications

Taken together, these cases reveal transnational rhetorical settings, strategies, and discourses that marginalized rhetors engaged within the exclusionary Exposition arena.
The rhetors operated within the transnational and nationalistic Exposition setting to advance arguments for their greater inclusion in public life: for African Americans’ recognition as legitimate, equal nation-state actors, for increased rights for African American women, and for ending violent racial oppression. My analysis of these cases offers a number of considerations for transnational rhetorical theory and public address.

First, this dissertation has provided a more nuanced understanding of how transnational discourses, rhetors, and settings influence how rhetoric(s) circulate and how they are shaped by these elements as they circulate. Altogether, the three cases show that discourses “flow” outward and get taken up and disseminated across regional and national borders, and individual rhetors also contribute to the “interarticulation” of transnational rhetorical concepts (such as antilynching) as they move across spaces and settings. Rhetors engage these ideas to expand their own arguments, and in so doing, further shape those concepts to their audiences and beyond. For example, Douglass gave the transnational Pan-African community additional shape in a US context and weaved African Americans into this community even more. We cannot easily gauge the circulation of Douglass’s rhetoric beyond press coverage and a pamphlet released following the speeches. However, this analysis has provided a window into Douglass’s persuasive strategies for appealing to multiple audiences at the time of his addresses. By linking to the transnational Pan-African community, Douglass communicated that African Americans were part of something bigger, which offered them leverage to fight for greater assimilation and rights in their own nation. He provided them with a stronger foothold from which to agitate because they were backed by a transnational Pan-African community. Additionally, the six Congress speakers constructed arguments from both
their own experiences and outside nations to craft their messages in order to speak back to the nation-state. Thus, they wove together local and multinational ideas, which they then brought to bear on national conceptions of civility and progress. Public sphere theory also illuminated how multiple rhetors’ discourse can cohere around shared goals and experiences to move arguments between different publics. Multiple rhetors collectivized in an African American feminist counterpublic to launch more powerful arguments into the Congress’s transnational feminist counterpublic. Finally, Wells’s example provided evidence of how an individual rhetor can uptake, reshape, and recirculate transnational ideas in her discourse, and then mainstream these ideas across borders. Wells crafted arguments both with her own knowledge of lynching and by taking up and recirculating others’ discourse from multiple locations. She facilitated the movement of her antilynching advocate identity and the transnational concept of antilynching across national and regional borders. These three cases deepen our understanding of how individual rhetors and collectivities will craft arguments, both from their own experiences and through drawing upon transnational examples and discourses. And in the process, rhetoric(s) take shape through the rhetors that circulate them and through their movement across physical and cultural borders.

This analysis also demonstrates how rhetors craft and engage discursive communities that operate beyond the borders of a nation-state. The rhetors examined through this project leveraged transnational communities and ideas to exert pressure on the nation-state. Douglass’s transnational Pan-African community was based in racial heritage rather than national heritage. Thus, Haitians were linked with African Americans, despite geographic separation and different national affiliations. Douglass
highlighted their shared quality as valuable national actors to argue for African American assimilation into US civic life. The six Congress speakers crafted their own feminist African American counterpublic that was based in their shared experiences as women of African descent, rather than as strictly American women. Through this counterpublic, they finessed their arguments to challenge the Congress’s transnational feminist counterpublic and the broader US public to recognize them. In her dispatches, Wells also tapped into a transnational advocacy network that exceeded US boundaries, and then used this network to build her arguments against lynching in the United States.

And yet, rhetors who agitate through transnational spaces and resources can also reify the notion that the citizens’ political currency depends on whether they fulfill certain political and economic needs for the nation-state. In other words, rhetors may render subjects valuable to exclusionary publics through their contribution to the nation-state. Douglass pointed to the political and economic gifts that Haitians, and therefore African Americans, had to offer, while the six Congress speakers argued for their equality based on their contributions to US social and economic progress. African Americans, then, were intelligible as actors who had something to offer the nation-state. These findings echo arguments made by Felski and Sara McKinnon, among others, that subjects are always tied to the nation-state and related hegemonic interests that exert power over them. However, Wells’s case offers an exception because she appealed for equality differently. She prophesized the economic and political problems for the nation-state that would result if Americans did not act against lynching. With this argument, Wells avoided appeals that depended on African Americans’ value to the nation-state. But, it is notable that her appeals ultimately could not gain traction with her target
audience. As I suggested in Chapter Four, it is possible that Wells did not appeal enough to nation-state interests, and therefore, her appeals did not resonate as strongly as others. Thus, the question remains whether subversive discourse that aims for greater access to national rights and recognition can ever separate from the nation-state. However, we know that some rhetors of this era, despite having access to transnational settings and resources, could not extricate their arguments or themselves from making arguments that supported the powerful nation-state.

This dissertation has also contributed to public address scholarship, as it reveals how nineteenth-century rhetors engaged in traditional rhetorical strategies and discourses, but specifically within transnational settings and with transnational resources. In a transnational context, marginalized rhetors can repurpose and rework the rhetorical strategies of enfranchised rhetors to serve counterhegemonic ends. Douglass, for example, repurposed the jeremiadic form, previously used by US Puritans, and tapped into American exceptionalist discourses that white rhetors had used before him. He engaged traditional American discourses to confront the United States with the fiction of its own exceptionalism. Next, the six speakers appealed to the shared Progressive Era value of civility to make themselves intelligible to US audiences. As had been done in abolitionist rhetoric, the speakers engaged political oration to point to the irony of their exclusion in the United States. The speakers engaged these established strategies to move their arguments between a counterpublic of their own and other publics of the Exposition. Lastly, Wells’s discourse demonstrated how reappropriation, recirculation, and refutation can help mainstream rhetorical concepts like antilynching through transnational advocacy networks. In each case, the rhetors repurposed traditional rhetorical strategies to serve
their civil rights goals as their discourse crossed cultural, ideological, and physical borders.

Overall, transnational rhetorical analysis offers fruitful avenues for analyzing discourse and deepens our knowledge of transnational and public address theories. These cases demonstrate that rhetors agitating for change on a national level can invoke and further shape transnational resources—communities, publics, and networks—to challenge the US nationalism that limits their inclusion. This project focused beyond the national to disentangle some of the transnational and national threads that animated nineteenth-century activist discourse. National context is vitally important, but a transnational approach helps account for the local and cross-cultural exchanges that shape rhetorical concepts. Attention to these interconnectivities will help rhetorical scholars more fully understand a rhetor’s resources, motivations, and strategies. As people, nations, and discourses become ever more connected, we should increasingly attend to how rhetorics take shape as they move across borders, and how they are taken up by rhetors for liberating purposes. And with the ongoing effort to account for marginalized voices in rhetoric, which has been a goal of this dissertation, questions of transnational rhetorical movement, contexts, and strategies are more important than ever.

3 Nancy Fraser, “Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World,” in Nancy Fraser, et al.,
Transnationalizing the Public Sphere, ed. Kate Nash (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2014), 8-42.


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