

U.S. Women's Suffrage as a Strategy for Counterstory and Coalition: Creating Shared Rhetorical Space Through Library-Campus Partnerships

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Abstract: This essay explores coalition-building through campus-community partnerships guided by feminist rhetoric and pedagogy. Centered in a public library, this grant-sponsored community book club and discussion series on women's suffrage and the 19th Amendment was informed by and fostered intersections in the authors' dual feminist interventions in the dominant narratives shaping stories of library and activist work. The series invited participants not only to consider women's rhetorical roles as activists for women's suffrage, but also to understand broader coalition and sustained activism for voting rights through the counterstory (Martinez) of Black women's rhetorical activities. Through a multivocal and reflective conversation about what it can look like to actively listen for counterstories as an act of community-building and activism, the authors blend theory and practice, offering readers strategies for building similar campus-community partnerships that foster relational literacies for change.

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Keywords: activist coalitions, book discussions, campus-community partnerships, Counterstory, feminist pedagogy, feminist rhetorics, public libraries, relational literacies, women's suffrage

Growing out of an American Library Association (ALA) grant-sponsored community book club and discussion series on women's suffrage and the 19th Amendment's centennial anniversary, this essay explores the potential for coalition-building through campus-community partnerships grounded in and guided by feminist rhetoric and pedagogy. With funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the project arose from the ALA's Let's Talk About It initiative (LTAI), a program model based on book discussion and meant to spark conversations at public libraries around the country. Offering resources on more than thirty different topics including *Being Ethnic*; *Becoming American*; *Jewish Literature*; *Conversations on Death and Dying*; and *Muslim Journeys*, the LTAI program identifies an overarching theme, a selection of books on the topic chosen by a scholar, and support materials for the programs, including an essay, discussion guides for the books, marketing materials, and more. The idea is to work with a local scholar to host a series of programs on each book and have conversations about the theme through the lens of literature.

In early 2022, Meghan, the Adult Services Librarian at a local public library in Georgia, applied for the ALA grant with hopes that Bartow County Library System (BCLS) would be one of the twenty-five libraries selected across the country to receive funding and support materials for this series of programs on the women's suffrage movement. The program seemed like a gentle way to broach a difficult subject in the library's small, conservative town. When BCLS was selected as a grant recipient, Meghan invited Letizia, a professor of writing and rhetoric and gender and women's studies at a local university, to serve as the local scholar for the series. The program included five books focused on women's suffrage:

- *The Woman's Hour: The Great Fight to Win the Vote* by Elaine Weiss, a richly detailed look at the ratification of the 19th Amendment through the eyes of both the suffragists and the "Antis" and told in the form of an exciting story, was useful as the first book in the series, as it gave us a look at the event as a whole and set the stage with facts, figures, and dates.
- *Women Making History: The 19th Amendment Book*, a collection of thirteen essays compiled by the National Park Service and edited by Tamara Gaskell, covers important figures and historic sites commemorating the movement and illustrates how the movement worked in different areas of the country. This book helped to begin our conversation on the people and events less talked about in history books.
- *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* by Martha S. Jones begins to disrupt the dominant narrative on the women's suffrage movement, telling the story of Black women's often completely separate movement for rights fought through both racism and sexism.
- *Ida B. the Queen: The Extraordinary Life and Legacy of Ida B. Wells* by Michelle Dust-

er, an engaging and accessible biography written by the great-granddaughter of Ida B. Wells, speaks at length about Wells's life and activism and again touches on the role and lived experiences of Black women during the movement.

- *The Once and Future Witches* by Alix E. Harrow, the only fiction book of the group, tells the story of three sisters and their part in the women's suffrage movement of New Salem through the lens of fantasy and witchcraft.

Spanning ten weeks from June to August 2022, the series created space to engage storytelling within the context of the U.S. women's suffrage movement in multiple ways with a variety of rhetorical purposes. Most significantly, the series of five book discussions invited participants not only to consider women's rhetorical roles as activists for women's suffrage, but also to understand broader coalition and sustained activism for voting rights through the counterstory (Martinez, *Counterstory*) of Black women's rhetorical activities. Through the lens of feminist pedagogy, we recognized "that through the learning experience, learners come to understand the world and all of its inequities and injustices, and then see themselves as empowered agents of change who can transform these inequities and injustices" (Accardi). We used the entryway created by the book club to directly face some of these inequities and injustices by exploring race in relation to the women's suffrage movement, namely the exclusion of Black women and their lived experiences from the most often recorded and taught histories.

Guided by feminist pedagogical tenets, including collaborative meaning-making and consciousness-raising, the program created rhetorical space for exploring individual positionalities, lived experiences, and the connections between narrated histories and our current political realities. From the beginning, we agreed "that these relationships be deeply collaborative and voices co-equal [as] vital to feminist engagement" (Nickoson and Blair 50), and we committed to partnership with participants. Most significantly, we experienced elements of feminist consciousness-raising in sharing the personal and understanding the identification possible through shared experience, moments that can spark activism and sustain civic engagement. Furthermore, the program was guided by and fostered intersections in our dual feminist interventions in dominant narratives shaping stories of library and activist work. Through a multivocal and reflective conversation about what it can look like to actively listen for counterstories that push the boundaries of what we know as an act of community-building and activism, in the sections that follow, we blend theory and practice, offering readers strategies for building similar campus-community partnerships that foster relational literacies for change.

Feminist Pedagogies and Literacies for Change

Although our professional work at the start of our collaboration may have looked different on the surface—Meghan, the Adult Services Librarian at a public library, and Letizia, a professor

of writing and rhetoric and gender and women's studies at a local university—underscoring our partnership and our collaborative work was a commitment to feminist theories and pedagogies at the intersection of literacy practices. A significant body of work informs our engagement with feminist pedagogies and how these pedagogical theories and practices shaped our approach to our library-campus partnership. Feminist pedagogy, according to Robbin Crabtree, David Sapp, and Adela Licona “is an *ideology* of teaching inasmuch as it is a framework for developing particular *strategies* and *methods* of teaching in the service of particular *objectives* for learning outcomes and social change” (emphasis in original, 4). To that end, the authors explain, “feminist pedagogy seeks not only to enhance students’ conceptual learning, but to promote consciousness-raising, personal growth, and social responsibility” (Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona 9). Engagement, then, lies at the heart of feminist pedagogy, shaping the classroom into a space for reflective and collective learning, for supporting activism, and for fostering change (Shrewsbury 6).

With connections to the collective engagement of consciousness-raising groups of the women's movement, these liberatory, decentered, and activist tenets shape teaching and learning environments guided by feminist pedagogy into spaces where students and instructors each play active roles as co-teachers. Significantly, “feminist pedagogy emphasizes the epistemological validity of personal experience, often connected to notions of voice and authority. Through a critique of the ways traditional scientific and academic inquiry have ignored or negated the lived experiences of women, feminist pedagogy acknowledges personal, communal, and subjective ways of knowing as valid forms of inquiry and knowledge production” (Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona 7). Participants, then, engage reflectively with each other and with course content, identify opportunities to blend theory and practice, and apply feminist rhetorical strategies like intervention and interruption to highlight and amplify marginalized voices and perspectives (Blair and Nickoson; Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona; Chick and Hassell; Guglielmo, “Classroom”; hooks; Micciche; Reynolds; Rinehart; Ryan).

With similar reflections on the intersections of feminist pedagogy and librarianship, Maria T. Accardi explains, “feminist pedagogy is a kind of lens or filter through which we can approach and reenvision library work, even in settings that do not appear to have overt, literal classroom teaching moments.” Feminist pedagogy, Accardi claims “insists on the humanity of all participants in the learning experience, in the library, and this emphasis on care, compassion, and affirmation, and making visible the harms caused by inequity and oppression and undoing that harm, changes not just the lives of learners and librarian—it changes the world.” These outcomes also align with many of the core values of librarianship set forth by the American Library Association (ALA), including diversity, education and lifelong learning, the public good, and social responsibility (“B.1 Core Values”). This confluence of values allows librarians, through the practical application of feminist pedagogy, to better serve as stewards in the public library's modern role as a community center.

Recognizing that feminist theories and practices also challenge ways of “codifying and preserving knowledge,” including what counts and who can contribute (Pritchard), our collective approach to the women’s suffrage book club also allowed us to engage Adela Licona and Stephen Russell’s definition of “literacy work,” which they define “as work that is relational, informed by community concerns, considers community members as knowledgeable, treats community histories as meaningful, makes people and places knowable and understandable to one another across contexts, and is oriented toward social change” (2). Our goals, then, within the framework of the book club and our discussions, were to foster a space for what Licona and Karma Chávez describe as “relational literacies”:

Understood as practices, relational literacies imply the labor of making meaning, of shared knowledges, or of producing and developing new knowledges together. In other words, relational literacies are understandings and knowings in the world that are never produced singularly or in isolation but rather depend on interaction. This interdependency animates the coalitional possibilities inherent in relational literacies. (96)

Particularly significant within Licona and Chávez’s exploration of coalition is the connection they make to political expediency, explaining, “our understanding of coalition differs slightly from conventional definitions, which often situate coalition in the realm of the temporary and the politically expedient” (96). Furthermore, they explain, “much of the rhetorical scholarship on social movements neglect[s] attention to community organizing and coalition building, two key components to movement work” (Licona and Chávez 98). Given the focus of our library-campus partnership, coalition building became a topic we actively theorized throughout the process. Within the context of the women’s suffrage movement, we consistently explored white women’s suffrage activism and rhetoric grounded in racism and political expediency at the expense of coalition and how the counterstory of Black women’s activism deliberately disrupted that narrative, as we explore in later sections of this essay. Engagement with coalition building as a topic also allowed us to apply that learning to current activism regarding reproductive justice and other political realities. As Licona and Chávez explain, “Put concretely, relational literacies enable the space for new kinds of understanding, interaction, and politics” (97).

With these shared theoretical foundations underscoring our collaboration, we shift now to individual narratives for the next sections of this essay with a few goals. First, we aim to highlight how we each engaged with this work, both the individual roles we played in the process, in its planning and facilitation, and how that work was informed by our individual positionalities. We hope this sharing of logistics in our personal voices will invite readers to imagine possibilities for their own roles in similar library-campus partnerships, including those that might replicate in whole or in part the work that we share here. Second, guided by bell hooks, we believe strongly that “all efforts at self-transformation challenge us to engage in ongoing, critical self-examination and reflection about feminist practice, and about how we live in the world. This individual commitment,

when coupled with engagement in collective discussion, provides a space for critical feedback which strengthens our efforts to change and make ourselves anew” (24-25). We approach this process of narrative self-reflection with multiple aims:

First, narratives explain to ourselves and to others what events we are narrating. Second, narratives explain to ourselves and to others what we have learned about these narrated events. And third, narratives explain to ourselves and to others how we are constructing our own subjectivities (as points of view), the subjectivities of others (as characters in our own narratives), and the cultural spaces that we all share (as settings). (Ratcliffe 506)

As part of the meta-narrative of this library-campus partnership, including the conversations we are continuing with the book club participants, we invite readers to join us in this reflection.

Meghan: Exclusionary Realities of Public Librarianship & Challenging Oppressive Systems

My beginning goal when reaching out to Letizia, as it always was in the public library space, was to bring valuable educational resources to my patrons. Everything I did when working at BCLS was done with this goal in mind. When I found out about the LTAI: Women’s Suffrage initiative, I knew this would be a great way of creating dialogue in the community, and I also knew that I needed an expert to make that happen. The books chosen for the LTAI program, as well as the subject in general, lent themselves easily to approaching the topics of race and intersectional feminism. Though it was not the focus of the program, the parallels between women’s history and the history of the public library, particularly the recording of these histories, are undeniable in their exclusion of anything other than the dominant white voice. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2022 the librarian and media collections specialist field was 86% white and non-Hispanic, a fact which has not changed much over the past twenty years (“Household Data”). A study of the librarian population in 2006 by the ALA put that number at 89% based on census data from 2000 (“Librarian Ethnicity”). Earlier forms of the library were not the centers of diversity, equity, and neutrality that they claim to be today, a narrative that arose from “ahistorical and acultural revisions of library history that have severed institutions from their deep roots in early practices of social structural control and development” (Matthews 192). The reality of the skewed demographics of the LIS profession show just how important it is to challenge the utopian narrative of the public library.

Amber Matthews puts things in perspective for us: while the public library is typically looked at these days as a place “in which access is equitable, information is neutral, and diverse perspectives are found” (187) the reality is that “it is not coincidental or insignificant that white normativity

flourishes unabated in a field that lacks substantial resemblance to many of the communities that it serves” (188). Such falsely positive depictions of the library, in both modern and historical contexts, only “[serve] to perpetuate the seeming neutrality of the library system, [fail] to recognize how libraries are ideologically constituted by other social forces and how they have been engaged in historically-situated racial projects” (Honma 3). Todd Honma further describes the problem of libraries functioning in a “race-blind vacuum” in similar terms, explaining,

All too often the library is viewed as an egalitarian institution providing universal access to information for the general public. However, such idealized visions of a mythic benevolence tend to conveniently gloss over the library’s susceptibility in reproducing and perpetuating racist social structures found throughout the rest of society. (2)

This parallel between the subject of the program itself and one of the major flaws in the LIS world was an important part of why I wanted to host this program. How can we, as librarians and educators, challenge the white supremacy of both public libraries themselves and of the histories we share as purveyors of information?

With a significant number of the books chosen for the LTAI initiative focusing on the experience of Black women during the women’s suffrage movement, I knew this was a small way we could start to work towards that goal. Sarah Pritchard describes some of the core tenets of librarianship as “selecting, organizing, preserving and retrieving” knowledge and information, and she draws a distinction between this and feminist thought, which “calls into question the values and definitions underlying our very concepts of knowledge, thus questioning the institutions and services we build around those concepts.” Crucially, if done well, this would be a series of library programs centered in feminist thought that both upheld my duty to my patrons as a public librarian and created an opening for authentic conversations on race.

As hoped, Letizia’s thoughtful questions and the content of the books, particularly *Vanguard* by Martha S. Jones, sparked conversation on the often-neglected legacy of Black women in the women’s suffrage movement. Jones speaks to the differences in the suffrage movements of white and Black women: “But only a small number of Black women joined these new suffrage associations. The racism that persisted there often drove them out. And suffrage alone was too narrow a goal for Black women. They went on to seek the vote, but on their own terms and to reach cures for what ailed all humanity” (122). Passages like this lit a fire under our discussions and not only allowed us to talk openly about race and injustice in a historical context, but also opened conversations on modern politics, racial tensions of the past few years, and problematic race-blind narratives of women’s rights.

This opening of dialogue around neglected information is an important part of librarianship as a knowledge-sharing profession. Especially with a goal of active practice of feminist pedagogy-

gy in librarianship, conversations like these are not only important but fundamental. As Pritchard points out, this kind of feminist practice is inseparable from librarianship, since it “is informed by basic ethical and philosophical tenets also found in librarianship, for example, a concern for clarity in language; for access to services and information regardless of social or economic category, or topic of inquiry; and an awareness of the importance of context in understanding questions and organizations.” Only through feminist pedagogy and active anti-racism can librarians begin to work through the problems in the LIS field.

Meghan: Background and Getting Started

In the United States, the public library’s role and main goals have changed a lot over the years with so much information available at our fingertips through smartphones. In their article about the growing intersection of social work and public librarianship, Tracy M. Soska and Adria Navarro point out that modern public libraries are “reinventing themselves to better and more strategically address community needs, as well as to stay relevant and impactful to their patrons and community residents” (409). Public libraries have pivoted to meet the changing needs of their communities by becoming more like community centers. Soska and Navarro note that the library has taken on “a hub role in the community through partnerships with other institutions to connect people with services and assistance” (412). While still focused on education and reading, the public library is now also a place where patrons can find local aid and resources, take part in free activities, find companionship, and simply sit in a temperature-controlled environment. LTAI directly supported our goal of acting as a community center by bringing people together and helping to find a common thread among a group of unique patrons. The LTAI initiative joined two of our main focuses by offering free educational resources and creating shared space for developing relationships in the community.

After being selected to receive grant funding and confirming Letizia’s involvement in the program, the first step was getting the word out, so I set to work marketing and contacting local organizations. This included notifying the local elections office, reaching out to the local radio station for an interview, distributing signage and digital kiosk slides around the county, and creating interactive book displays and posters inside the library, in addition to the promise of tea and branded swag for participants. Perhaps the most successful marketing step was contacting our local chapter of the League of Women Voters (LWV) in hopes that they might offer in-library voter registration during each of the five programs in the series. They were happy to help, even spreading the word for us among their members, who ended up accounting for a large number of our attendees. I set up a table for them in the lobby before each program, and they decorated the table, answered community questions about voting, and registered people to vote. In our case, the efforts of the LWV brought patrons from across multiple counties who might not have otherwise visited BCLS. Through my own marketing efforts and this collaboration with the LWV, we were able to get new patrons inside our doors, while also tying in materials and displays inside the library to support the

goals of the program and show what the library has to offer. Once we had successfully begun to generate public interest, we shifted our attention to the content of the program.

Meghan: Community Engagement Through Public Library-Campus Coalition

As Letizia will discuss in further detail, the format of the program was as important as the content: if we wanted to create an environment that allowed for meaningful dialogue around the subject of women's history and rights, we needed our participants to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. Just as Licona and Chávez describe in their article on relational literacies, "Our goal in the dialogue was to generate ideas by encouraging one another to work with still-forming questions" (98). We started deep, meaningful conversations in a group of strangers who became much closer over the course of the program. We were able to create a learning environment that was friendly and open, not exclusionary or overly academic, so that the participants felt confident expressing themselves. The program and participants benefited from the collaborative meaning-making facilitated through relational literacies, which "enable[d] the space for new kinds of understanding, interaction, and politics" and opened the door to the possibility of coalition-building (Licona and Chávez 97).

The public library-campus coalition presents a unique opportunity to reach outside the traditional academic world and form lasting connections with the community. Pritchard speaks to this benefit in her discussion of feminist librarianship, noting that "the impact of women's studies is this redefinition of the universe of knowledge; it challenges the boundaries between disciplines, between 'scholarly' and more personal forms of knowledge, between the academy and the community." Here we give a voice to people who might not be involved in academic community or have gone to a university, but still have valuable life experiences and input on topics like these. Nickoson and Blair point to the "common occurrence of power inequities between members of the academy and members of their surrounding communities" as one important aspect of these collaborations (51). This partnership not only makes the topic more equitable and accessible to people who otherwise might not be included, it also improves the quality of the conversation by offering more varied experiences. Authentic and impactful community engaged work must

include the perspectives of students and community partners, narratives that chronicle the lived experiences of stakeholders from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds and material conditions that have mediated their access to democracy, empathy, and respect. This inclusion is vital if feminists are to move beyond the rhetoric of engagement to provide more authentic interventions that benefit the students and communities we serve and position this work as activist in both theory and practice. (Nickoson and Blair 51)

On the other side, this partnership also offered a unique opportunity for our library patrons to learn from and engage with a university professor, an opportunity they may or may not have

had in the past. Pritchard explains the delicate position of libraries, which “serve as gatekeepers of culture and learning. In selecting some items and ignoring others, in codifying and preserving knowledge, in actively assisting users or passively standing by, libraries control access to, and impose a relational value system on, all forms of information and communication.” I take this role very seriously, and I know that my own role is that of facilitator. I may not be able to lead the discussion on a topic, but I do know how to find an expert who can. The quality of Letizia’s content, the critical questions she asked, and her experience in encouraging active participation from attendees created a space for exchange of ideas and, by the end of the series, a sense of trust among returning attendees. As one of our participants shared with us, “The book club discussions elevated my sense of empowerment and purpose. It reminded me of how far women have come even since my mother’s time and how comments, and/or actions, can create long-lasting effects.”

Letizia: Engaging Feminist Rhetorics and Pedagogy Outside the Classroom

When Meghan reached out in October 2021 and invited me to serve as local scholar for the book series, I was delighted by the possibilities this collaboration would foster and energized by the opportunity to extend my teaching and scholarship beyond my own courses. The program focus—women’s suffrage—was closely connected to my teaching, including work on feminist rhetorics, and Jones’s *Vanguard* was already on my desk as a possible course text for the following fall semester. With a Carnegie classification as a community-engaged university, my institution maintains a university-wide commitment to community engagement in student and faculty work, and while I was interested in participating in community-campus partnerships, I didn’t know what those first steps might look like. I was excited about the potential conversations this program might help to facilitate and grateful for the timing of the invitation.

As a teacher-scholar whose work lies at the intersection of writing and rhetoric and gender and women’s studies, I was supported by a long history and strong foundation in theory and practice of activist work that actively bridges the classroom-community divide and imagines “community-based engagement as feminist intervention” (Blair and Nickoson 12; see also Costa and Leong; Orr; Naples and Bojar; Nickoson and Blair; Sheridan and Jacobi). Significant to this body of work, however, are also questions that Costa and Leong raise regarding “how women’s and gender studies practitioners may participate in the civic engagement movement in a manner that sustains feminist values, commitments, and solidarities” (171), a commitment that guided my own approach to the broader, less activist frame of community-engagement supported by my university. Aware that “feminist pedagogy values many of the same ideals put forth by scholars of civic engagement, including critical analysis, self-reflexivity, and active participation to accomplish the social good” (Costa and Leong 172), and “as a way to explore and illustrate the value of feminist learning” (Nickoson and Blair 50), I envisioned approaching the reading and discussion series with a foundation in feminist rhetoric and feminist pedagogy. With storytelling and coalition-building as broad frames for our reading and discussion, I invited participants not only to consider women’s

rhetorical roles as activists for women's suffrage, but also to understand broader coalition and sustained activism for voting rights through the counterstory of Black women's rhetorical activities. Invoking Aja Martinez's concept of "counterstory" and its potential "to expose, analyze, and challenge stock stories of racial privilege and . . . to strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" ("A Plea" 70), we also explored narrative and story as a strategy for complicating dominant narratives about the suffrage movement and for contemplating the role of personal narrative and lived experience in that process.

The selection of books by the ALA LTAI program already created an opportunity for foregrounding storytelling and the formation of dominant cultural narratives. Through *The Woman's Hour* and the collection of essays published by the National Park Services (Gaskell), we considered, for example, what we already knew or believed we understood about the women's suffrage movement in the United States—its history and timing, its primary goals, its most recognizable activists. With each text, however, we also were confronted with counterstories that required us to reshape that history—its tidy narrative arc, its intersection with cultural and political realities, and its silences and erasures, most notably those regarding the contributions and lived experiences of Black women. Guided by feminist pedagogical tenets, including collaborative meaning-making and consciousness-raising—pedagogical strategies that underscore my teaching and scholarship—I aimed to foster discussions that created rhetorical space for exploring individual positionalities, lived experiences, and the connections between narrated histories and our current political realities.

I opened our first meeting with this invitation and reinforced these pedagogical values during each book discussion: "At the start here, I want to reinforce that this is an informal and collaborative space and an opportunity for us to share ideas, to ask questions, and to have a conversation, so please feel free to jump in at any point, as there's no formal process for doing so. We'd like the majority of our time to be focused on discussion, so I'm looking forward to sharing space with all of you and learning from our conversation." During each session, we deliberately moved from the presentation area, with a podium, rows of chairs, and a screen for projecting presentation material, to a circle for discussion that Meghan had created in designing our program space within the library. This shift signaled not only a few minutes for participants to grab or refresh tea, take a break, and begin reflecting on the discussion questions projected on the screen as a place to begin our discussion, but also an invitation to contribute, to share, to "mak[e] meaning... and develo[p] new knowledges together" (Licona and Chávez 96). In each of the five discussions over ten weeks, we demonstrated collective meaning-making through validation of lived experience, repeating participants' comments, and making connections among comments. These moments of meaning-making included reflecting on what we did not know about the women's suffrage movement, including who were anti-suffragists and why and how coalitions for suffrage among women with diverse lived experiences developed outside the northeast and south, often the sites of dominant narratives of suffrage activism.

Letizia: Making Space for Relational Literacies

As a feminist rhetorician, my way into this work was, unsurprisingly, exploring its rhetorical significance: how we make compelling arguments in a variety of contexts, how we use narrative and storytelling as part of those arguments, whose stories or which versions of stories are told over and over again, and how counternarratives or counterstories can provide more complete and complex versions of those narratives. I framed this rhetorical approach to the book series and discussions with a set of questions that we returned to, reconsidered, and reframed for each text.

These questions focused on

1. Exploring the role of rhetorical choices and rhetorical appeals in the activism and lived experiences of the women whose stories we read, including how each text allowed us to find evidence of this process and helped us to understand what these choices looked like or required. We also considered how these rhetorical choices varied for different people in each version of the story. How they varied for women and men, Black women and white women, and for working class women for whom labor activism facilitated another intervention into the dominant narrative of the suffrage movement.
2. Becoming more conscious of the ways social and cultural norms shaped those choices and lived experiences, including the dominance of racist and gendered assumptions and the persistence of misogyny and white supremacy. We considered how social movements build upon each other and what examples and resources they provide us for ongoing work in a variety of areas of U.S. culture, helping us to see the length of struggle and progress and to prepare for the kinds of responses and objections we are likely to encounter in movements for change.
3. Identifying what is repeated and what is repurposed in the kinds of arguments advocates make, the objections that are raised, the dangers that activists face, and how this knowledge shapes our understanding of rights activism today.
4. Critically engaging with the choice for political expediency in white suffragists' activism and the counterstory of Black women's sustained coalition-building and broader voting rights activism. We considered the continued role of political expediency in rights activism today including who benefits and how these choices for expediency shape the morality of the cause and its advocates, especially when "centralizing white women's experience and repeating feminist activism's historic exclusions of women of color" (Daugherty).
5. Recognizing whose voice and perspective is heard, amplified, obscured, and silenced in these narrated histories and in the stories shared by each author in each text. We explored the significance of storytelling, including what it means to tell a new, expanded version of the story from a new perspective(s) and how this knowledge can shape how we understand stories we're currently hearing and the kinds of questions we can ask about those stories and storytellers. We asked, what other versions or pieces of this story might exist?
6. Uncovering (hidden) motivations of the suffrage movement's most visible participants, including motivations for advocating for and against suffrage for women and what they illustrate about politics, industry, and business interests, and who holds power.
7. Understanding what all of this means for us today, including what insights we glean about the political process and what persists and remains the same. What can we gain by studying this movement and extended moment in history?

I also invited participants to consider their own ways into this work: although my lens was rhetorical and focused on the process of re-collecting the narrative of women's suffrage (Guglielmo, "Introduction"), it was important for participants to explore the ways in which they identified with the texts and the moments of connection, surprise, and outrage that they were willing to share with the group. In our first discussion of Weiss' text, for example, one of our participants immediately made connections between white suffragists' racism and how, in her words, "we did the same thing in the 70s" as part of second wave feminism. And much of this "private speech in public discourse, intimate intervention, making another text" as bell hooks describes (17), created space for literacy acts that allowed us "to identify the spaces where we begin the process of revision" (15). Collectively, as part of our book discussions, the texts functioned as counternarratives, disrupting public conversations in varied and complex ways, resisting stock narratives about the suffrage movement and voting rights in the United States. In particular, the stories collected in Jones's *Vanguard* and Duster's biography of Ida B. Wells respond to Aja Martinez's call for a proliferation of counterstories, as narratives that "serve the purpose of exposing stereotypes, expressing arguments against injustice, and offering additional truths through narrating authors' lived experiences" ("A Plea" 51).

Rhetorics of Women's Suffrage as Counterstory

With our broader framing questions as a guide, we approached Jones's *Vanguard* as an intervention into the larger suffrage narrative and movement for women's suffrage in the U.S. Significantly, Jones identifies women's suffrage and the 19th Amendment as one small piece of a larger and longer narrative of Black women's activism before the 19th Amendment and extending after its ratification. Jones illustrates that this expanded narrative is made up of the story of individual Black women who have been excluded from or obscured in the more dominant narrative of women's suffrage. Learning that voting rights were not guaranteed by the 19th Amendment, we considered what it means to shift the narrative or story to one of voting rights and not simply one of suffrage, especially given rampant and persistent voter suppression long after the ratification of the 19th Amendment in the form of literacy tests, poll taxes, grandfather clauses, intimidation, and violence. Although our previous reading and discussions made clear the dangers women experienced in speaking publicly, and specifically, in speaking publicly about suffrage and women's rights, Jones brought into clear focus the additional dangers women of color faced when bringing public attention to topics challenging the status quo. And these dangers included not only *speaking* publicly but also *moving* publicly. Transportation and the harassment and violence that accompanied travel for Black women was an early and ongoing site of activism, especially for Ida B. Wells, and this was clear in the counterstories both Jones and Duster shared.

The multiple threads of individual women's stories in Jones's text also reveal additional social and cultural norms that attempted to limit women's activism. From our previous readings and discussions, we understood the extent to which Black women could participate in activist orga-

nizations but often as subordinates, a fact in suffrage groups largely organized by white women. Yet Jones also illustrates this subordination of Black women in their communities and churches. A number of the texts we read pointed to the role of political expediency in the suffrage movement, including what white women were willing to sacrifice to appease Southern states and to support their own interests. Duster, for example, reinforces Wells's refusal to walk at the back of the 1913 suffrage parade in D.C. at the request of white suffragist organizers to appease southern suffragists. Jones and Duster demonstrated the sustained commitment to coalition and to eliminating all inequality in Black women's activism. Jones writes, for example "But Black women never limited their work to a single issue. Winning the vote was a goal, but is a companion to securing civil rights, prison reform, juvenile justice and international human rights" (9). Reaffirming this ongoing work she closes the text, "The story of Vanguard is still being written" (268). This example became particularly significant in our meeting and discussion just after the Supreme Court decision overturning the federal constitutional right to abortion in June 2022. As we discussed abortion activism and participants shared their individual ways in, drawing from lived experience and making the personal political, we imagined how the framework of reproductive justice—created and sustained over many decades by women of color—could allow us to engage in allyship and intersectional coalition.

Most significant, however, were the many opportunities that Jones and Duster provided us to engage critically with Black women's rhetorical work. Jones opens the text with stories of her own family, illustrating that she is part of the story that she tells and allowing us to explore what it means to name the women who came before. We discussed this rhetorical strategy as one used by many of the women in the text—noting the activist work of the women who came before them—and revealing both their positionality and their shared ethos (Daniell and Guglielmo). As Jones described how the work that Black women were doing in their communities contributed to education, literacy, organizing, and community building, she illustrated how they built spaces to tell their own stories and defined women's rights in their own ways. We learned more about the roles of racism and sexism in limiting Black women's participation and their voices and the role of ethos and the body. Although Jones explained that Black women were used to their bodies being read (69), this detail created space for participants to consider what it means to spend additional time arguing for the right to be in the space or to speak on the subject. Consistently, Jones returns to the significance of Black women telling their own stories, prompting our discussions on what it means not to be able to tell your own story and what it can look like to write yourself into the story, as Black women did through the works they published and distributed (see Jones 41-42; 128).

And finally, we came to understand the significance of intervention and interruption in Jones's and Duster's work as an element of counterstory and as part of "the feminist tradition of engaging and disrupting dominant structural systems—to intervening in what is and to imagining what could and ultimately must be" (Blair and Nickoson 3). Jones, for example, expands the history of the women's suffrage movement collected by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton

in their six-volume publication that excluded Black women. Similarly, Duster prompted us to consider *who* is telling the story and how that shapes how we understand the details of women's lives and work. Jones and Duster engage in multiple acts of re-collecting (Guglielmo, "Introduction") this history: in the activism of individual women they profile, of the cultural memory of women's suffrage, of making whole the women's stories whose activism on voting rights may have been left out of previous narratives of their lives. Through their extensive archival research, Jones and Duster also prompted us to consider where we might look for the history and stories that have not been told, moments that created space for participants to recall and to recount activism of women in their own families, remembered in bits and pieces but not widely known or shared.

Conclusion

As we continue reflecting on this experience, we are reminded that "Feminist pedagogy also benefits the practitioner, the teaching librarian, because facilitating empowering experiences for library users is a rewarding, relationship-building experience" (Accardi). This certainly has been true for us as part of the library-campus partnership we share here. We invite readers to consider how programs like the ALA LTAI initiative offer opportunities for community-engaged partnerships that intersect with their own teaching and scholarship and their personal and professional goals, and to expand the narrative we have shared. Essential to the process of self-reflection on our experiences is "the critical need to listen: listen to the voices of our students, our community, to those who experience the world differently than ourselves... [as we] theorize [our] own experience of [our] educational, feminist, and activist roles in the academy and beyond" (Blair and Nickoson 14). As we look to next steps in the process of this multivocal narrative, recognizing that missing here are the voices of our participants, "we share a common commitment to making visible and also interrogating the relationships and voices among all participants in community-based teaching and research—teachers, researchers, students, and community partners" and we would add library professionals (Nickoson and Blair 50). Given our partnership with the local chapter of the League of Women Voters (LWV) and the large number of participants in the book club who were also members of LWV, we are especially interested in further exploring the element of coalition-building that occurred as part of that collaboration and the ways in which it helped to shape "the development of intergenerational coalitions and relational literacies" within the group (Licona and Chávez 102). Finally, with a continued "interes[t] in rhetorical processes within and for coalition building" (Licona and Chávez 104), we intend to create space for reflection with our participants on acts of consciousness-raising that may grow out of these rhetorical practices within the context of the library as a community center.

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