



# Agitation in Amsterdam: The International Dimension of Carrie Chapman Catt's Suffrage Rhetoric



Matthew G. Gerber, PhD  
Baylor University

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## Matthew G. Gerber, Ph.D. (Ohio University)



Dr. Matthew Gerber is the Glenn R. Capp Chair of Forensics and Director of Debate at Baylor University. He is also an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication. Dr. Gerber has been coaching debate for 20 years, and at Baylor since 2003. His areas of specialty include argumentation, rhetorical criticism, legal communication, and the rhetoric of American foreign policy. He holds the Ph.D. from the University of Kansas.

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*Keywords: Carrie Chapman Catt, suffrage, rhetoric, international, feminism*

In the late 1800s, the political, social, and cultural situation for women in the United States was limited in myriad ways. Often discouraged from even appearing in public, let alone actually speaking out on a social issue, many women often simply (and contentedly) filled the traditional roles of motherhood without participating in the public sphere. Of the many structural and attitudinal barriers facing women in the nineteenth century, “none was more formidable than the charge that it was improper for women to speak from the public platform” (Zaeske, 1995, p.191). Due to prevailing conservative notions about the proper role and place of women in society, the early leadership of the woman’s suffrage movement faced fundamental challenges “over the right to use the power of rhetoric—for the right to act in the public sphere by speaking, organizing, publishing newspapers, and lobbying” (Campbell, 1989, p.x).

As an outgrowth of these prevailing attitudes, opposition to the idea of woman’s suffrage was both strong and predictable. Nonetheless, the drive for suffrage gradually gained momentum, and a legitimate social movement began to take shape, one characterized by the emergence of strong leadership from progressive women who wanted to see enfranchisement for



females in the United States. Scholars in the fields of history, and more recently in communication studies, have undertaken the task of investigating and explicating the work of the most visible leaders of the suffrage movement; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Anna Howard Shaw, Jane Addams, Mary Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller, Angelina Grimke, Susan B. Anthony, Virginia and Francis Minor, and others (Campbell, 1989; Huxman, 1996; Ray & Richards, 2007; Wheeler, 1995). However, there is a noticeable dearth of scholarship regarding one of the key figures of the movement, one who spoke both publically and persuasively on the suffrage issue, and one who tirelessly organized and agitated behind the scenes: Carrie Chapman Catt.

The rhetoric of Carrie Chapman Catt has only recently begun to be studied and theorized across several disciplinary contexts (history, communication, feminist studies, etc.). In the field of communication and rhetorical criticism, previous studies have focused on either Catt's

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domestic addresses to her followers and to the U.S. Congress, or have identified Catt's international diplomacy as one of many motivating factors that spurred action toward suffrage by the American Congress (Campbell, 1989; Huxman, 2000; Amidon, 2007; Manolescu, 2007; Huxman, 2000).

Other research endeavors have focused on Catt's troping of arguments regarding the opposition to suffrage (Birdsell, 1993), on Catt's method of inventing and arranging arguments (Clevenger, 1955), and on Catt's hesitance to employ *radical* tactics like arson and property destruction as part of her suffrage advocacy (Kowal, 2000, p.246).

Through an examination and close-textual analysis of Catt's 1908 address to the Amsterdam Congress (a speech heretofore neglected by scholars), and of her 1923 address to the International Alliance of Women (IWA), it is my hope that this essay builds upon and enriches previous scholarship in this area of critical importance and also extends and amplifies the arguments put forth by Manolescu (2007) and others. What is missing in previous scholarly research on Catt's rhetoric is a more thorough treatment of the ways in which shame appeals, and/or attempts to use guilt or international embarrassment, function in terms of being a motivator for Congressional action. Manolescu's approach, while useful, and indeed the only article that approaches Catt's rhetoric from this methodological perspective, tends to focus more on the formal/proprietary aspects of shame appeals as an argumentative form. The focus of this essay, in an area of this sub-field that I hope to enrich and expand upon, is an attempt to analyze Catt's shame appeals from an audience-centered perspective and begin to make plausible arguments about the instrumental effect of those strategies.

Before delving much deeper into Catt's speeches, and because this essay also attempts to make some claim to Catt's intent as a rhetor, I will briefly outline Catt's role as a thinker and strategist for the movement. Following that section of the essay, and before engaging the text and intricacies of the 1908 Amsterdam speech, it is also necessary to set up a theoretical framework for the project, and thus, to outline the basic tenets of Manolescu's normative



pragmatic model for analyzing Catt's shame appeals. As part of that explanation, I offer a snapshot of the historical context in which Catt's arguments were made, a critical component in any type of historical/rhetorical analysis, and one essentially omitted in Manolescu's article. This essay concludes with textual analysis of Catt's 1908 Amsterdam address, as well as examination of Catt and NAWSA's discursive position on World War I, which I argue helped to bolster support for suffrage with the Congress

### **Carrie Chapman Catt as Advocate and Strategist**

Any thorough analysis of the rhetoric of Carrie Chapman Catt must take into account her central role in the woman's suffrage movement both as a key activist, and as a behind-the-scenes planner and strategist. Catt's service to the cause was tremendously important, and her work is often placed on the same level of such reformers as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Susan B. Anthony (Reynolds, 1991, p.94). Born in 1859 on a small farm in Ripon, Wisconsin, Carrie Lane was a bright child who had inherited her mother's love of reading and pensive study (Fowler, 1986, p.6). While a complete treatment of Catt's early life is not possible due to the length of this essay, it is necessary to note that she was well-educated, an exception for young women at that time, and a privilege only afforded to white females, though slavery had been abolished for over a decade. Catt thus occupied a privileged social position in relation to most of her female contemporaries. In 1877, Carrie Lane began her college studies at Iowa State University, one of six women in attendance! The fact that only six females were able to pursue higher education at Iowa State also speaks to the lower social status and lack of educational access that women faced in the late 1800s. In 1880, Carrie Lane graduated from Iowa State University and began a teaching career where she was paid the sum of forty dollars per month. Carrie married her first husband, Leo Chapman, in 1885, but he soon died of typhoid fever while in San Francisco. Carrie Chapman remained in California following Leo's death, where she became reacquainted with George Catt, an old friend from Iowa State whom she then married in 1890.

Shortly after her second marriage, Catt herself developed typhoid, and proceeded to publish no less than eight articles on suffrage from her sickbed. That same year marked her first appearance before the NAWSA organization, where her address helped to catalyze and secure her involvement in NAWSA over the coming years. In 1900, after Catt led the drive for suffrage in Colorado, she was elected president of the NAWSA. Catt's organizational skills and strategic choices provided the NAWSA with much needed leadership. Catt's election "marked a new era, an age of organization, and Catt was its prophet" (Fowler, 1986, p.18). Catt served as president until 1904, when Anna Howard Shaw assumed office. Shaw was perhaps the only orator of the movement more accomplished than Catt. Shaw's presidency, however, was marked by a decrease in organization and structure, and eventually Catt served another term as president beginning in 1915 (Reynolds, 1991, p.91).

In order to thoroughly interrogate Catt's strategy of linking internationalism with the domestic struggle, it is critical here to note Catt's abilities as a thinker and as a strategic planner.



Catt's single-minded idea of equality for women did not cloud her thinking as a strategist. In fact, throughout the drive for suffrage Catt adopted many diverse strategies, and made many controversial deals and compromises to reach the end goal. While many argue that Catt was too eager to sacrifice morals for political advantage, few can argue the point that Catt's choices were crucial in winning the vote. Fowler (1986) argued that "thinking strategically was natural to her", and that it was "integral to Catt's very being" (p.154).

### Problems with the Normative Pragmatic Approach to Catt's Shaming Strategies

This essay takes as its theoretical jumping-off point an article by Beth Innocenti Manolescu (2007) who correctly identified Catt's effective use of shame appeals as a critical component of her suffrage rhetoric. While shaming strategies were clearly foregrounded in Catt's rhetoric, and identified as such by Manolescu, I argue here that shame appeals offer only a partial explanation of how and why Catt's appeals were persuasive with her audience, and that shame, in and of itself, probably doesn't alone account for the change in mindset required for the ultimate passage of the suffrage amendment. Manolescu's article also fails to consider Catt's address to the Amsterdam Congress, one of the most illustrative exemplars of the use of shame appeals in Catt's overall corpus of discourse. According to Manolescu, a "normative pragmatic account of shame appeals in argumentation" functions to "explain how discourse strategies pressure addressees to do something" (2007, p.380). Catt's rhetoric was both normative and pragmatic. It sought to create new legislative norms, codified in the law, that ensured and protected women's voting rights.

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It was also pragmatic (in the expedient sense of the word), in that Catt made compromises and engaged in "horse-trading" with politicians to help secure the right to vote.

However, the rationalistic angle espoused in Manolescu's theory lacks explanatory power when applied to the audience of Catt's rhetoric. Around the turn of the century, politicians, and the general public, held decidedly *irrational* views about the enfranchisement of women. Women were thought to be unable to cope with weighty political issues, easily corrupted, prone to irrational and *hysterical* outbursts, and generally ill-equipped to make rational political decisions based upon logic and evidence (Stein, 2005). In the late 1800s and early 1900s, woman's suffrage was "still unthinkable to anyone but radical abolitionists" (Stansell, 2010). Opponents of suffrage offered multiple reasons to keep women out of the public sphere, however most were based on pervasive conceptions of the "proper" role of women as "creatures of the home, under the care and authority of men" (Stansell, 2010). Why then, would that Congressional and public audience be expected to suddenly be persuaded by shame appeals regarding woman's suffrage or lack thereof? Why would shame appeals, an appeal to the emotions, be sufficient to reverse strongly held beliefs about women's role in the public sphere? Why would members of Congress suddenly be amenable to pressure based on the risk of being



criticized “for lack of moral judgement” (Manolescu, 2007, p.389)? At least part of the answer lies in the fact that in conjunction with these irrational (or at least provincial) views of the role and nature of women, the American public, and by extension, the Congress, was obsessed with the promotion abroad of the ideals of democratic government. After the conclusion of World War I, “the United States emerged as a great power” and “its influence accordingly grew more ubiquitous and often more direct” (Muravchik, 1992, p.88). Indeed, “America championed the cause of national independence for the colonial world, and its example as well as more direct forms of influence made a mark on the new nations” (Muravchik, 1992, p.88).

I argue that Manolescu’s essay, while important and on-point in terms of its explication of the shaming strategy, fails to adequately explore the *pragmatic* angles of the normative pragmatic model. In other words, I argue that the Congress would not have been prone to vote for suffrage because of a newly discovered sense of guilt and shame over their treatment of women in the political sphere. Rational arguments were unlikely to be persuasive with an audience whose beliefs and values on this particular issue were *irrational*. Rather, a model with more explanatory power would elevate the pragmatic aspects of the audiences approach to decision-making. In other words, Congress felt pressured to vote for suffrage not because it felt shamed for mistreatment of women, but because it believed that support for women’s right to vote would result in political advantages in other areas.

The legislature supported suffrage not because it felt shamed by Catt’s rhetoric, or because it feared it would “look badly to historians” but because Catt outlined the ways in which lack of support for the movement could result in harming U.S. prestige and its ability to export democracy globally (Manolescu, 2007, p.392). The critical missing piece in Manolescu’s essay is an even cursory analysis of the audience and historical context in which these arguments took place. I argue that the most important issue in the minds of Congressional leaders at the time, particularly as the storm clouds of World War I were brewing, was the sustainable exporting of democracy and American ideals to other nations. It was at least in part due to the overwhelming concerns about the loss of American prestige and the potential impact on the ability of the U.S. to secure its empire that caused Congress to finally consider passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. As the next section reveals, appeals to exactly that sort of reasoning were evident in Catt’s 1908 address in Amsterdam, and in her 1923 address to the IWA.

### **Textual Analysis of Catt’s 1908 Amsterdam Address: The Attack on U.S. Global Prestige**

Catt campaigned for suffrage vigorously in several states, although her unstated mission all along was passage of the full federal amendment. This determination for federal recognition of the rights of women probably drove her decisions regarding the rhetorical linking of international events and the domestic struggle. While there is a notable dearth of rhetorical scholarship surrounding the international dimension of Catt’s rhetoric, some have argued that her voice not only helped the cause of suffrage, but helped to shape American foreign policy discourse before, during, and after World War I (Namikas, 1999, p.843; Shepler, 1999, p.151). While Catt’s most famous speech, titled “The Crisis” has been widely analyzed and cited, little





scholarly attention has been paid to the arguments she employed in addresses to international audiences, particularly while she was president of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (Croy, 1998, p.49-50; Campbell, 1989, p.461-502).

Catt delivered an address to the Congress of Amsterdam on June 15, 1908 (Keller, 2006, p.66). The Congress was at the fourth annual meeting of the IWSA, of which Catt was president. There were two primary audiences for this speech, those in attendance, and secondarily, members of the U.S. Congress and government. For the immediate audience in attendance, Catt had to construct the speech especially for this event. She did so by noting that the day of the speech, June 15, also marked the anniversary of the signing of England's Magna Carta; a document which guaranteed certain statutory protections of rights. She argued that this document also helped other nations of the world to progress by sending a strong signal that it was no longer acceptable for governments to violate the rights of its people. Another interesting way of reading this argument is that Catt used the Magna Carta as a symbol; perhaps she was really referring implicitly to the U.S. constitution and its protections. At the very minimum, her reference to the Magna Carta helped to foreshadow the signaling argument that she used later in the speech to indict U.S. policy.

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The second audience of Catt's address was the U.S. government, and specifically, those in Congress with the power to legislate change. Catt spent over half the speech directly discussing the shortfalls of U.S. policy. Catt's apparent intent was to indict the U.S. ban on women voting in front of an international audience as a means to generate external pressure on Washington to change its laws:

in her Amsterdam speech she devoted the major portion of the speech to detailed accounts of what each nation was doing to promote woman suffrage and from these experiences she drew inferences to be applied to plans for the future (Clevenger, 1955, p.100).

Catt used this opportunity to lambaste U.S. policy and attack the image of the U.S. as an example of a healthy democracy. Catt used three primary rhetorical devices to indict U.S. policy. First, Catt spent much of the speech listing and repeating advances and accomplishments that other countries had made toward suffrage. In these arguments Catt wasn't explicitly attacking U.S. policy, but was instead implicitly comparing the status of women in other countries to the situation in America. Catt proclaimed victories for woman suffrage in no less than fifteen countries (Catt, 1908, p.1-4). The countries in question, Norway, Great Britain, Denmark, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Russia, Finland, Iceland, and Sweden, were all European. Catt's implicit argument here seemed to be that the so-called "civilized" nations of Europe were ahead of the United States in the particular area. She also made the persuasive argument that "even in far away South Africa, Cape Colony, and Natal have each effected an organization, and are seeking the suffrage from their respective parliaments" (Catt, 1908, p.4). In a final attack on American recalcitrance to suffrage, Catt argued that the



movement had become global, indicating that not only was the U.S. lagging behind, but that global suffrage was inevitable.

Catt's second main rhetorical device in the speech was to directly attack U.S. policy by discussing the situation in America. Her first strategy was to indict the image of America as the shining example of democracy and human rights. She argued that because of the serial failures to grant women the vote, other countries would no longer look to America as the "chief example of democracy", and that far from being a beacon of freedom to other nations, the situation for women in the U.S. was dismal:

for some decades in the nineteenth century it was the chief example of democracy, and the advocates of popular government in other lands looked to the United States of America for proof of its advantage. For the past 30 years, however, reports have been largely current declaring universal male suffrage to be a signal failure there. The picture, as painted by these reports and embellished by many, a starting detail, is dark and forbidding, and without doubt, has had a powerful restraining influence upon the growth of the movement for government by the people (Catt, 1908, p.7).

Here, Catt effectively illustrated the use of the "signal" argument. Congressional reluctance to grant woman's suffrage had dampened U.S. efforts to lead by example in the crusade against fascism. That statement from Catt was probably aimed at shaming U.S. policymakers for

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diminishing U.S. prestige in the eyes of the world. Catt's second strategy here was to remind her audience that the process by which woman suffrage could be attained was a process controlled solely by men. It would be years before any females would be elected to the U.S. Congress, and Catt minced no words when she argued that "the

additional fact that woman suffrage must come through a referendum to the votes of all men, has postponed its establishment" (Catt, 1908, p.7). Another clear attack on the U.S. Congress and electorate came when Catt specifically argued that it was a drain on American prestige and pride that the women who had started this global movement were not able to lead it. Catt argued, "naturally, it would have flattered the pride and patriotism of American women, could their country have continued to lead the movement which there had its organized beginning" (Catt, 1908, p.8). She then sarcastically added that it didn't matter where the victories for women happened earliest, as long as victory was achieved in the long run. Catt seemed almost resigned to the fact that although American women had so earnestly started this global movement, they were doomed to watch the women of other countries achieve their dreams of suffrage.

A final strategy employed by Catt in the speech was a plea for transcendence of national politics and identity by women all over the world. She argued that "within our alliance we must try to develop a lofty sense of internationalism" and that the repudiation of "national





antagonisms” would forge a stronger, more powerful alliance for suffrage (Catt, 1908, p.8). Again, Catt seemed to argue that despite setbacks in the U.S., the movement would ultimately succeed. She was also arguing, however, that victories abroad did not compensate for the electoral isolation of women in America. Interestingly, Catt also used these arguments later in her career, as she was traveling abroad. Upon return from a trip to China, Catt employed the prestige argument again when she remarked at the New Jersey State Suffrage Convention in 1913, “I used to be a regular jingo but that was before I visited other countries. I had thought America had a monopoly on all that stands for progress, but I had a sad awakening (Catt, 1913, p.371).

It is difficult to determine the precise effects of these arguments on U.S. policy, or upon the opinions of policymakers. Because it was so long ago, it is difficult to surmise whether or not Catt’s message reached this secondary audience in the way it was probably intended. That said, as scholars we can still strive to make historical arguments based in plausibility. While we obviously cannot travel back in time and interview the audiences involved in critical speech-making situations throughout history, we can, based on thorough review of the historical context in which that speech was delivered, determine if an outcome (in this case legislative action to grant women the right to vote) could plausibly be linked to a discourse strategy. While there is a shortage of direct evidence to speak to that point, as Henige (2005) intimated, “for the ancient historian plausibility was *part of the evidence*” (p.167). In other words, in the absence of falsifiable historical data (as is the case with most academic historical endeavors), scholars should be trusted to surmise plausible cause and effect relationships based on thorough and detailed analysis of the situation and context.

It is reasonable and plausible to argue that given the international political context, and in the years leading up to World War I, Catt’s repudiation of America as a responsible, accountable democracy almost certainly had an impact on the political audience in Washington. In fact, the ways in which nations often respond to national embarrassment or a sudden loss in perceived prestige, seem to support this conclusion. As Conti (2011) argued, “while generally underexamined in international relations, sociologists of emotion have argued that shame and its avoidance play a prominent role in shaping social action” (p.93). For Conti, “shame and embarrassment are the inverse of the reputational pressures for nations to behave as good international citizens” (2001, p.93). That said, the rhetorical force of Catt’s shame appeal would have been nullified if not for the surrounding rhetorical situation. The impact of Catt’s argument went beyond shaming and embarrassing the audience; it was not simply an appeal to the conscience of the Congress, but an implicit pragmatic appeal that called into question the ability of the U.S. to continue its export democratic ideals should the Congress fail to grant women the right to vote. Congress wasn’t concerned with being able to take the moral high ground unless the by-product of that decision (voting for suffrage) was to enable the U.S. to seize the *literal* high ground, territory, through a credible exporting of democracy to foreign countries. While scholars can only plausibly speculate about such conclusions, an excerpt from a California



newspaper, picked up from an unidentified Washington D.C. article in July of 1908, and covering the Amsterdam Conference, helps to solidify the argument:

Two of the notable women attending- the Women's International Congress at Amsterdam are Carrie Chapman Catt and Ida Husted Harper. Mrs. Catt is the presiding officer. This international congress assembles every two years. It met last in Copenhagen, it began its sessions this year at Amsterdam, and will end them at Rotterdam and The Hague. The congress is the guest of the National Suffragist society of Holland. It meets in the Concert Geboun, a large music hall. There are present delegates from every country of Europe, from Great Britain, and the United States. The first session was opened with the singing of a cantata, followed by a speech of welcome by the president of the Netherlands Suffrage association. Among the delegates from the United States are Mrs. Oliver W. Stewart of the Illinois Suffrage association, Mrs. Rachel Foster Avery Mrs. Coonley Ward of Chicago, Miss Lucy Anthony of Philadelphia, Mrs. Marie J. Howe of Cleveland, and Miss Janet E. Richards of Washington. On the Sunday prior to the beginning of the congress the Reverend Anna Shaw of the United States held services in the Walloon church of Amsterdam—the first time a woman has ever officiated in the pulpit in Holland. Altogether the United States has been a controlling figure in the congress, and its representatives have brought great credit to their country (Sacramento Union, July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1908, p.9).

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This piece of evidence helps to make a stronger case for the conclusion that the U.S. Congress was feeling pressured by Catt's arguments. First, it proves without a doubt that Catt's agitation in Amsterdam was at least perceived, and known of, by a Washington-based audience. Secondly, the exhortation of Catt and Shaw's good work at the end of the excerpt, wherein they "brought great credit to their country" sounds like damage control. Given the nature of Catt's scathing indictment of U.S. policy in the speech, the news excerpt seems like someone in Washington was trying to put a positive spin on what could otherwise be seen as a direct attack on U.S. democratic prestige and preeminence.

From a rhetorical perspective, it is critical to highlight the importance of Catt's choices here. What seems on the surface to be a "state of the movement" speech is actually replete with persuasive devices aimed at securing suffrage for women in the United States. Of course, Catt was pleased that gains were being made in other countries, but the point of this speech was not simply to celebrate those modest advances. Catt, always the strategist, chose her language and arguments carefully, likely for the reasons I have outlined here. This is not to say that Catt's work on the international scene was cynical or insincere, in fact, quite the contrary; but it does seem obvious that Catt was using descriptions of the external, foreign situation to justify a change in policy at home.



### Catt, NAWSA, and World War I

International events again forced Catt to make strategic decisions about how to frame the movement when it began to appear that the U.S. would not be able to avoid intervention in World War I. Catt, a well-known pacifist, remained silent about the war to avoid offending Jane Addams and her followers, also pacifists, and vocally opposed the war. However, in February of 1915, Catt broke her allegiance with Addams and issued a public statement announcing that NAWSA would support President Woodrow Wilson's war initiatives. This move by Catt was widely criticized and "to this day historically minded pacifists talk of her treachery in selling out to the war machine" (VanVoriss, 1987, p.138). The pressure on Catt at this point must have been tremendous, and the entire movement teetered on the brink of collapse around the controversy. However, Catt's two-part justification for this move was a rhetorically powerful tactic that both silenced her critics and ultimately contributed in the securing of the right for women to vote.

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Catt was able to again use the external situation to help bolster the drive for suffrage in the United States. Catt justified NAWSA support for the war in two ways; first, she argued that NAWSA must support the war effort to deflect even harsher criticism being leveled upon the pacifists, namely Jane Addams and her followers. Wheeler (1995) argued that although Addams was "dismayed" by Catt's reversal, the decision "saved Catt and the NAWSA from the extreme hostility and loss of influence that Addams and other peace advocates endured during the war" (p.295). Catt probably recognized the need to distance NAWSA from what was perceived by the public as radical anti-war activities. The backlash that Catt endured for this decision was miniscule compared to the hostility directed at the peace advocates. Catt was also able to effectively link war service and suffrage. The service of NAWSA helped to convince a skeptical public that women could be trusted to work for the good of the country if given the power to vote. Catt accomplished this linkage by constantly arguing that "we ask woman suffrage as a war measure as the emancipation of the slaves was a war measure" (VanVoriss, 1987, p.143). Some have argued that during this time suffrage played a secondary role as NAWSA focused on the war effort, however, it was clearly the opposite; NAWSA support for the war effort obviously paid high dividends in terms of political capital for the organization and the movement itself, and also provided Catt with an ideal rhetorical situation in which she could explicitly ask for suffrage in return for the hard work of women before and during the war (Lunardini, 1986, p.113).

Finally, NAWSA's participation in the war effort also provided benefits in terms of publicity, which Catt was happy to exploit. As the mobilization for war began, women began taking over the jobs that men had previously performed, and Catt let it be known that "the National Woman Suffrage Association allowed no Congressman or legislator to remain in ignorance of these facts" (Catt, 1969, p.249). Here, Catt had continued to employ the shaming strategies she had since the drive for suffrage began, albeit in a different rhetorical context. Catt's second rhetorical justification for NAWSA's support of the war effort involved the framing of the war as a woman's issue, a global issue that concerned the women of the world.



Despite her apparent shift away from pacifism, Catt didn't support World War I in principle. She would later argue that she supported the war because it was the politically expedient thing to do. At the same time she was calling for NAWSA to contribute to the war effort, she was also arguing that women, if enfranchised, possessed the power to end all wars. This strategy helped set the stage for Catt's rabid internationalism at the close of the war; in the words of Catt biographer Mary Gray Peck (1976), "Mrs. Catt was the first international leader of the political phase of the feminist movement" and "she considered the emancipation of women essential to the establishment of a peaceful world order" (1976, p.6). Even in later speeches, Catt retained and rhetorically employed the argument that the domestic and international struggle were inextricably linked.

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In her 1923 address to the International Alliance of Women (IWA), "Catt declared that women of all nations, races, and religions are united together in the demand for individual freedom" (Sandell, 2015, p.1). Here again, Catt employed at least a more opaque version of shame appeals; she reminded Congress that America was lagging behind the rest of the world on the women's rights issue.

### Conclusions and Implications

This essay has highlighted and examined the international and foreign policy dimension in the suffrage rhetoric of one of the movement's most critical but oft-overlooked advocates, Carrie Chapman Catt. Specifically, I have argued that Catt effectively employed the global, international dimension of the struggle for women's rights. Catt used the external situation (outside the United States) in the early 1900s to help bolster her arguments about why suffrage should be granted to American women. Catt employed two primary strategies that helped to rhetorically link internationalism and the domestic situation for women in America. First, in numerous speeches and writings, Catt drew on her experience traveling abroad to make the argument that conditions for women in the so-called "uncivilized" countries were in fact better than in the United States. She explicitly made the argument that the U.S. has been left behind, and could no longer claim to be the most progressive, democratic country in the world. Catt hoped that these arguments would shame and embarrass the American Congress enough to add momentum to the suffrage cause; she believed that if suffrage could be framed as an issue directly related to U.S. international prestige, it would have a better chance of eventually being granted. Given the historical context in which these arguments were made, one which was characterized by an intense Congressional and public desire to establish and maintain American military primacy through democratization of foreign countries, I argue that scholars can plausibly surmise that Catt's rhetorical strategy of shaming played at least some instrumental role in the passage of woman's suffrage.



Catt's second use of events on the global stage to boost the persuasive power of her crusade at home involved the beginning of World War I. To the dismay of many feminist pacifists, including the influential suffrage advocate and the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress Jeanette Rankin, Catt pledged NAWSA's full support of President Woodrow Wilson's war initiatives (Zeinart, 2001, p.28). In what turned out to be a major success for the cause, Catt was able to justify to her many detractors that the war was about women everywhere, and that if NAWSA did its part to end this war, perhaps women could end all wars with power of the ballot. While there were many proximate causes and contributions to the ultimate realization of the cause, Catt's effective framing of the domestic struggle for suffrage as an international issue with global implications certainly helped to spur ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment.

It is my hope that this essay has helped to deepen our scholarly understanding of the ways in which shame appeals function. Catt's shame appeals were only transformative with the

*Catt's shame appeals were only transformative with the Congressional audience because of the external situation; Congress sought a pragmatic reward (in the form of enhanced ability to export American democratic ideals) in exchange for making an unpopular decision.*

Congressional audience because of the external situation; Congress sought a pragmatic reward (in the form of enhanced ability to export American democratic ideals) in exchange for making an unpopular decision. I have also argued that a more explanatory version of the normative pragmatic model espoused by

Manolescu (2007) would benefit from more emphasis on the *pragmatic* side, and less reliance on manifest rationality. Simply put, rational arguments often fail to convince audiences who hold irrational beliefs about an issue; in this case, woman's suffrage. It was only when suffrage became politically and geopolitically beneficial to those already in power (men) that Catt's shame appeals began to resonate. This essay has also helped to enrich our understanding of how historical arguments can function, and how rhetorical scholars can approach historical texts without substituting "evidence in favor of interpretation" (Henige, 2006, p.17). While it is clearly impossible to re-create historical context and to gauge the response of audiences to a speech after such a passage of time, as scholars we should do our best to conduct thorough and rigorous historical analysis so as to reach well-supported, justifiable, plausible conclusions about the import of particular text.







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