subject as an unproblematic departure?” (99). But he does not answer it. Yet, this is the very question at the heart of theorizing writing, a question that he argues previous theories have not tackled. I would that this very short book (exactly one hundred pages, not including Notes and Works Cited) had been a hundred pages longer, and that he had tackled that question. I might not have agreed with his conclusions. But I suspect I would have found them intriguing—and worthy of more debate.

Edinburg, TX

WORKS CITED


Reviewed by Barbara E. L’Eplattenier, University of Arkansas—Little Rock

Although the push for female suffrage is often seen as the highpoint of 20th century women’s activism, women’s enfranchisement did not result in masses of women voting at the polls. Instead, the dreaded “women’s vote” failed to materialize, and women’s voices and concerns remained muted within the political sphere. This was due in great part to the fact that women didn’t have significant access and clout to participate in the established political system. Wendy Sharer’s new book Vote and Voice: Women’s Organization and Political Literacy, 1915-1930 examines how two women’s groups—the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and the League of Women Voters (LWV)—worked to challenge the structures of political discourse in the decades after the 19th Amendment passed. Sharer’s book is a carefully researched, well-documented, comprehensive analysis of the “larger processes of persuasions” in order to “provide a broad view of the types of literate practices the organizations used to influence the worlds around them” (10). Grounded
in primary research, this volume presents a previously untold, vital piece of the history of women’s rhetorical contributions in the United States.

In chapter 1, Sharer describes pre-suffrage sites of women’s political activity—such as settlement houses, abolitionist groups, suffrage and temperance organization—and the rhetorical tactics used by these groups. (Many of the women active in the WILPF and LWV had previously worked with these types of organizations.) This activism not only informed the work done by WILPF and LWV, but also laid the ground work for future activism. They helped create the social climate in which the WILPF and the LWV functioned.

The first half of the book presents the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. Using a wide variety of diverse primary sources, Sharer describes the formation, organization, and rhetorical positioning of this organization. Basing their ethos in motherhood, the organization worked to change methods of international diplomacy and promote peace. As mothers, they argued, women saw war in terms of loss of human life and harm, rather than in the masculine terms of economic results and conquering. A feminine perspective—and the accompanying moral superiority—needed to be included within traditional diplomatic structures in order to “fix” international diplomacy. The WILPF’s goals included more women in diplomatic spheres, the restructuring of diplomatic bodies, revised methods of negotiation, and a transformed role of the press. In order to make change, the WILPF drew on those strategies that had been successful in the suffrage movement: mass mailings; petitions; educational publications and publicity; artistic measures such as plays, murals, vaudeville, songs, and movies; rejection of government sanctioned (and developed) “war” curriculum; use of a “peace curriculum”; and rhetorical training for members. Sharer also notes the difficulties and limitations of these activities against a nation primed for war and an exceptionally hostile press. Despite the public’s response, the WILPF worked hard to create an environment in which discussions about pacifism and reform in international relations could take place.

The second half of the book takes up a similar discussion of the League of Women Voters. Carrie Chapman Catt knew the difficulties faced by women after they got the vote. Political parties were so resistant to women that one activist complained that “partisan attitudes toward women had actually declined since the passage of the 19th Amendment.” (94). Political issues became more narrowly defined to exclude “women’s issues,” women were appointed as “alternative” delegates to conventions, and men held ultimate rejection power over any appointment (whether voted on or appointed by another official).

Faced with these problems and the need to educate women about politics, Catt created a successor organization to the National American Woman
The issue of non-partisanship became the basis of their ethos as a political player. The LWV believed that a non-partisan group could create change, present issues of importance, and make waves because they did not have to worry about procuring votes or funding from the political parties. Only in this way could controversial changes be made. They saw their work as twofold: to develop educated voters and to increase the number of women in office. To develop educated voters, the LWV used skits, newspaper, pamphlets, league publications and newsletters to present information about issues and political parties. All of these rhetorical activities aimed at changing partisanship from blind allegiance to a political party into informed, careful, decision-making about issues of the day.

The second plank of the LWV’s work involved training women in the techniques of political influence. To help women become active participants in the democratic process, the LWV set up citizenship schools and institutes of government and politics, offered out various types of higher education, and held educational experiences in alternative classrooms such as stores and churches, issue-based plays as well as political literacy textbooks. The trained women were then expected to use their new knowledge to increase the political position of women within the US. This training had an effect. According to Sharer, by 1925, some “426-LWV supported laws had passed, and sixty-four LWV opposed laws had failed to pass” (155). Women’s presence in the legislative branches and political parties also increased. As with the WILPF, the LWV faced a number of challenges: the difficulties and limitations of being non-partisan, a hostile political climate, and challenges from other women’s organizations.

In her concluding chapter, Sharer considers what contemporary scholars and teachers can learn from the struggles of the WILPF and the LWV. In the composition and/or service-learning classroom, the work done by the WILPF and the LWV’s offers us ways to re-imagine our composition courses, both in terms of the writing done in the classroom and our relationship with the surrounding community. The composition course, Sharer argues, should do more than produce “individual, competitive, academic writers.” Instead, the “practices of active citizenship” should be a significant objective of the composition course; the work of the WILPF and the LWV offer models for such citizenship. Our students would benefit from learning the many different rhetorical strategies used by these women in so many situations and genres.

However, I found Sharer’s argument regarding them as a means of understanding the present most compelling. As Sharer notes, examining and understanding how politically disadvantaged groups organized and empower is significant in today’s political climate. These women are important for us—as
women, as activists, as historians, as rhetors—because they were politically disenfranchised, because they were disadvantaged, because they struggled to make their voices heard. We should learn from their successes and failures. Ultimately, both groups lacked enough political clout to make significant differences. Neither the WILPF and the LWV had enough political representation to force their issues onto the national debate floor or impact significant, lasting change. Although members recognized their lack of representation, they were unable—or unwilling—to change this aspect of their organizations.

As someone who works with HIV positive women, formerly incarcerated women, and women on welfare, I draw this lesson from Sharer’s book. We must never forget that we are addressing a larger audience. We must develop more effective ways of getting that audience to listen to us. We must get access in order to change the system. Otherwise, we simply end up talking to ourselves.

Little Rock, AR

Reviewed by Amy E. Robillard, Illinois State University

I have struggled for years with the institutionalized binary separating the academic from the personal, and I struggled for days with first few lines of this review. I wanted to begin with a personal anecdote, as I have begun so many of my academic essays. I wanted to begin with an anecdote that would demonstrate that personal evidence can function rhetorically in academic discourse. But because I was trying so hard to find just the right piece of experiential evidence, the enterprise was perhaps doomed from the start. I could narrate a story from the first-year writing course that I’d framed around this very binary between the academic and the personal in 2003. I could tell the story of my being asked by a member of the profession to open an essay with something a bit more concrete, perhaps a personal anecdote, and my initial shock at the request—I’d always thought of my writing as so concrete, yet here I was being asked to be a bit less theoretical. While each of these experiential anecdotes concretizes the binary between the academic and the personal, none quite captured the point I wanted to open this review with: that the primary significance of Candace Spigelman’s new book is its insistence on separating the category of personal writing “from its status as an epistemological category” and reframing our disciplinary understanding of personal writing as “a rhetorically forceful construct” (30).

This is an important move because, as anybody with an interest in personal writing in composition knows intimately, the disciplinary discussions of personal writing have become rather stagnant, mired in challenges to the autonomous, stable self. Spigelman provides an excellent review of the history of the debates in composition, the persistence of binaries such as objectivity/subjectivity, personal/social, narrative/argument, and mind/body in chapters 1 and 2. In chapter 1, “What Is Personal Academic Writing?” Spigelman introduces us to Michelle, a first-year student whose writing will frame this and the remaining chapters. Michelle’s writing comes to represent what Spigelman believes is a forcefully rhetorical use of experience as evidence in her writing. Particularly insightful in this first chapter is Spigelman’s observation that personal writing in writing classrooms remains controversial in large part “because those on either side of the debate aren’t answering each other’s questions but are instead passionately speaking past each other” (3). Spigelman sets herself the task of putting advocates and opponents of personal writing into conversation with one another. She understands her audience to include not just proponents of personal writing but groups on both sides of the